

## AFTERWORD

---

### Marcuse as Activist Reminiscences on his Theory and Practice<sup>1</sup>

*George Katsiaficas*

Herbert Marcuse was not a famous man nor was his writing well known until late in his life. When it became his fate to be blessed (or cursed) with public attention, fame quickly turned into notoriety, and he became more well known than many people might now recall. In 1968, students and young radicals the world over read and discussed the three M's: Marx, Mao and Marcuse. Wherever he went, he was attacked by both the Left and the Right – at least in terms of the Communist Left. In Germany, he was blamed for the wave of guerrilla attacks which has only recently subsided. In the United States, then-Governor Ronald Reagan denounced him for complicity in campus violence, and after a concerted campaign against him, one replete

<sup>1</sup> The afterword by George Katsiaficas, then titled "Marcuse's Cognitive Interest: A Personal View," was published in *New Political Science*, 36–37 (Summer–Fall 1996) pp. 159–70. Katsiaficas's richly textured study provides an excellent memoir of Marcuse as a teacher and community political activist and a probing summary of his importance for radical politics. George Katsiaficas teaches at Wentworth Institute of Technology in Boston and is author of *The Imagination of the New Left: A Global Analysis of 1968* (Boston, Mass: South End Press, 1987) and *The Subversion of Politics: European Autonomous Social Movements and the Decolonization of Everyday Life* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1997).

with pounds of hate mail, death threats, vilification in the media, and an offer by the American Legion to buy his contract from the university, he was retired unceremoniously and denied the opportunity to continue teaching courses. In his own words, he was "lucky to still have a mailbox" at the University of California, San Diego.

On at least three continents, he was taken to task for subversion of the young – the same charge leveled against Socrates. He was denounced by Pope Paul VI for "theory that opens the way to license cloaked as liberty, and the aberration of instinct called liberation." He was attacked perhaps most vehemently by Soviet Marxists, who considered him a representative of the "reactionary petty bourgeoisie." The British Left's interpretation of Marcuse's life is very similar to the Soviet analysis, at least in Perry Anderson's opinion. Anderson mistakenly characterized Marcuse as living a bourgeois lifestyle in La Jolla, far removed from the exigencies of struggle and the poverty of the lower class.

A lesser man would have been seduced (or broken) by his worldwide notoriety, yet through it all, Marcuse's inner sense of self prevailed. His confidence in his convictions remained unswerving, and although he was denied scheduled classes, he participated in a series of activist study groups, accepted as many of the constant speaking invitations as his time allowed, and, to my good fortune, worked individually (in my case on a regular basis) with selected students who sought him out. Behind closed doors, he was an active participant on campus and in community groups. Not only was he a public spokesperson for us, twice drawing over a thousand people at Socialist Forum lectures, conducting a seminar of sorts with 35 community activists on the need for utopian vision at the Left Bank (an alternative bookstore/craft center), hosting a fundraiser with Fred Jameson there, and debating Kate Millet at Stanford, he also involved himself in our struggles and dilemmas – or perhaps I should say that he let us drag him into some of our less than refreshing personal acrimony, recriminations, and crises. He did live in La Jolla near U.C.S.D., so near that he could walk to work, a necessity because he rarely – if ever – drove a car at that point in his life. He never told me why, but I heard that the entire Frankfurt School nearly perished in an automobile accident when a bee flew into a car full of them while Adorno was driving.

Despite extensive tributes to (and critiques of) Herbert Marcuse, there has been little written concerning the relevance of his work for future social movements, nor has his activist involvement been widely understood. What I seek to do in the following pages is provide an image of Marcuse based upon seven years of friendship and political collaboration, experiences which refute some assessments of him and provide insight into the character and interest of his theoretical work.

For many of us, Herbert was more than a respected philosopher or well-known academic. He was someone whose experiences and insights provided a living link with the practice of twentieth-century revolutionary movements

and the theory of radical critique which has developed since the beginning of history. For his friends, he affirmed that nexus between biography and history which C. Wright Mills dubbed "the sociological imagination." Reacting calmly and with humor in my own moments of dire personal crisis, Herbert was able to situate my concrete dilemmas in a larger historical-psychological context, thereby helping me transcend the painful insecurity of self-doubt by affirming the necessity of living "the examined life." More than once, an evening of Scotch and home cooking during which I vented my frustrations at the absurdities of academic life kept me from dropping out of graduate school.

What I recall most vividly from these early days of our friendship was Herbert's quiet insistence on the necessity of theory and the omnipresent nature of modern anti-intellectualism. When we first met, I was driving a cab at night and active in the antiwar movement and counterinstitutions in Ocean Beach, one of the last havens of the radical counterculture. To my present embarrassment, although I had heard of him, I had read none of his books nor heard him speak publicly. I was surprised at his immediate delight when I invited him to visit me at Red House, a well-known political commune and police/F.B.I. target.

We immediately developed an affinity for each other – from my side because I liked his sardonic wit, his amusement at the uncomfortable personal acrimony which accompanies political activism in the United States, but most importantly because he was able to formulate radical statements in the most unlikely situations. We once found ourselves arguing the merits of monogamy and the appropriateness of his wearing a tie to work (a practice he later all but abandoned) when Herbert quietly announced that the more straight one's attire, the more possible it was to speak one's nonconformist political viewpoints – a hypothesis I have since tested many times and found to be true. On another occasion, I found myself asserting the need to preserve our ancient cultural heritages, particularly our philosophical tradition but also ethnic customs and identities, until Herbert put an end to my prattle with a wave of his hand: "Human beings are capable of creating cultures far superior to those based on Judeo-Christian values. There are enough people working to preserve the past. What about the future?"

A story I like to relate about Marcuse occurred in 1976 when we were demonstrating against C.I.A. involvement at the University of California. I enrolled there in 1974 to work more closely with Herbert. With the help of friendly secretaries, activists had uncovered several C.I.A. projects: dolphins in Point Loma at an institute affiliated with U.C.S.D. were being trained to attack underwater divers and blow up ships below the water line; a weather modification project was being studied that was supposed to seed clouds over Cuba during the harvest season, thereby destroying the ripe sugarcane; an economics professor had set up a private research institute using C.I.A. money in Sorrento Valley behind the university. For months, we met, held teach-ins and published proof of the C.I.A.'s presence on campus. A wide

debate ensued, and in response to a proposal by Herbert, the faculty voted to condemn C.I.A. involvement. Nonetheless, the administration remained impassive, choosing to ignore the many voices of protest as though we were less than worthy of response. In complete disregard of our existence, several administrators traveled to Langley to attend a C.I.A. conference on affirmative action, and they scheduled David Saxon, president of the eight-campus U.C. system, to speak at a public forum on the same topic at U.C.S.D.

As we debated what course of action to take – the militants argued for tomatoes, while the moderates favored a silent vigil – I consulted Herbert, and together we discussed plans for a militant but non-violent protest. A wide array of campus groups – Chicanos, black students and the anti-C.I.A. coalition – drew together to confront Saxon. Marcuse was looking forward to the demonstration and we agreed to meet there. I remember distinctly that as David Saxon was being introduced, Herbert came over to my side. As Saxon went on about the role of the university in society, we began a chant picked up by the hundreds of assembled students: "Bull-Shit! Bull-Shit!" Saxon ended up not finishing his prepared speech, and as he tried to he walk off, he was surrounded and followed by the throng who pressed him on the C.I.A.'s presence at the university. The campus police moved in, shoving some of us aside. We shoved back, without anyone being arrested. We had not really planned any of this, but we all felt very positive about the determination of so many to press the issue. As we did plan, our actions at U.C.S.D., one of the campuses at the largest university in the world when it is considered as one entity including U.C.L.A., Santa Barbara, Berkeley, etc., were widely covered, making the front page of *Excelsior* in Mexico and many dailies in the United States. Anti-C.I.A. protests soon occurred all over the country.

Our next step was to call a conference in San Diego for public discussion of the direction the movement would take. Although Herbert assented to being one of our main presenters, he didn't want it to be announced that he was going to speak to activists who were coming because, as he pointed out, many other people would come just to hear him speak. For several hours, he was the center of the conference. In his talk, he affirmed the importance of what students were doing, of trying to organize in the universities. It should be remembered that at this point in time the movement (not only on the West coast) was dominated by sectarian workerists who insisted that students were 'petty bourgeois' and of no political importance. Some of the existing Marxist-Leninist groups were actually opposed to our protests on the campuses – saying that we diverted attention from the "real" issues – and one wrote and circulated a booklet exposing us as agents of the C.I.A. because we had invited Marcuse, a well-known "counter-revolutionary agent-guru" who had worked for the O.S.S. (which later became the C.I.A.).<sup>2</sup>

2 During World War II, Marcuse did work for the Office of Strategic Services, the

I remember being offended and angered when I found a copy of this booklet one morning on the Red House steps. I showed it to Herbert, and he seemed to enjoy listening to me read it aloud, amused by the absurdity of its language and content. When he came to my initials and his name in the text, he laughed aloud. "Oh! How these people love us!" At that moment, I couldn't quite understand the ease with which he handled insult, but in looking back, I can now appreciate a skill all of us in the movement have had to cultivate.

It would be wrong to infer that Herbert was always able to handle attacks on him without feeling hurt. It depressed him when he was painted as someone who was against democracy, who thought there should be less democracy, as when his essay on repressive tolerance was misconstrued. He seemed taken aback when his book on aesthetics was given abominable reviews in major German newspapers. And he never forgot the rude reception given him by Maoists in Berlin in 1968. Somehow, however, when he was attacked by the Left, he derived some satisfaction from it. Perhaps it had to do with his understanding of who the real enemies of freedom were, with the numerous threats made against his life, threats so real that student groups voluntarily established a sort of watch over him to insure his safety.

Less than a year after it was founded, the Anti-C.I.A. Coalition was dissolved by a majority vote of its members. Internal differences and mistrust had compounded our problems. Around the same time, a coup was accomplished within *Natty Dread*, the campus newspaper which had been the movement's voice (Marcuse never liked the name), and the new editors refused to print any part of an article I wrote (with Herbert's help) summing up the legacy of the year's political struggles. Needless to say, I was crushed. Once again, it was Herbert's insight and wit which helped me get through a difficult time. "What's become of your article?" he asked with a sheepish grin on his face and a copy of the *New Indicator*, as the paper was renamed, in his hand. "That newspaper is the organ of one fraction of the movement," I replied, "if indeed we can still speak of a movement." Disgusted and depressed, I went on: "What's the point of putting all this energy into creating organizations when they don't last?" In one of those rare moments when Herbert answered me directly rather than asking another question, he said quite plainly: "Marx never created a lasting organization. Besides, organizations which last seldom remain revolutionary. Political experience

---

forerunner to the C.I.A., eloquent testimony to his understanding of the relation of theory and practice. His job was to analyze Nazi propaganda and to give the American authorities an understanding of what the internal dynamics of the Nazi party might be. As he told me, the group that assembled in that office was one of the finest bunch of intellectuals that he has ever worked with, very dedicated people, and every one of them became a full professor or a writer of note. He also said that most of their research found its way into file cabinets and not into policy-making circles.

and education are cumulative, and with enough time, their quantity produces qualitative leaps."

However struck I was by his logic, I remained unconvinced. "What of us?" I demanded. "Without a unifying organization, how do we help each other move ahead personally and politically?" I reminded him of the animosity one of our most active members faced from her family because, in their eyes, her political involvement had hurt her education and career. I questioned whether or not her political involvement had been a positive force in her life. Neither of us spoke. Finally, Herbert relit his cigar, and as he puffed on it, we let our minds wander. Some questions apparently have no answers, some concerns are not easily put to rest, although I am happy to report twenty years later that the person we discussed is teaching and writing in the field of mass communications at a major university.

As the above experiences testify, Marcuse's life after 1968 was extraordinarily tied to radical politics. Despite his fame, his modesty forbade him from believing the prominence given him by the media. He was exceptionally receptive to visitors, and about once a week, when someone from a distant part of the planet would show up and want to meet with him, he would make time for them. He always disavowed the role of guru or father-figure in our activist circles, and he did his best to subvert our daily routines, questioning our motives and direction while raising theoretical issues designed to create another reality for us. While he was working on his book on aesthetics, we had a small group which engaged some of the issues with which he was involved. I recall now that the majority were Mexican artists - all in the United States illegally. As we read Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Herbert, more than any of us, was able to keep straight the names of the characters. One of his last lectures was in Mexicali, a small border town across the border from Calexico in the eastern part of southern California. One of the members of the aesthetics group accompanied him, serving as translator and companion in a trip few Norteños of any age would have made.

Like many of us, Marcuse was transformed by the global movement of 1968, but his political experience began much earlier. When World War I was ending, he was elected to a soldiers' council in Germany by his fellow enlisted men. He told me of standing with a rifle in Alexander Platz and pondering the fate of the revolution. He noticed that it was increasingly officers who were getting elected to representative positions and came to the conclusion that the revolution had been lost within the councils themselves because the class structure was being replicated.

This was not the first time his prognosis would be correct. He was able to read historical events with an uncanny accuracy. When *Counterrevolution and Revolt* was published in 1972 (which I regard as Marcuse's best political book and which Perry Anderson confirmed to me in 1981 that he had not read even though he had published a major study of Marcuse), many of us were running around with thoughts of radical change, revolution,

international uprising, and declining U.S. military power in our heads. Marcuse contradicted all that, stating clearly that what was occurring was not radical change, but a preventative counterrevolution in response to an already defeated revolt. In our discussions in the late 1970s, he questioned whether it was revolution or fascism which was transpiring in the Third World, and he repeatedly asked who would be militarily mightier than the United States.

Another example of his predictive capacity is contained in *Soviet Marxism* (published in 1958). In 1956, in response to the Twentieth Party Congress of the Soviet Union, uprisings in Poland and Hungary had been suppressed, and there was a great deal of speculation that Khrushchev would have to roll back his program of de-Stalinization and crack down further. Marcuse differed: "The Eastern European events were likely to slow down and perhaps even reverse de-Stalinization in some fields; particularly in international strategy, a considerable 'hardening' has become apparent. However, if our analysis is correct, the fundamental trend will continue and reassert itself throughout such reversals. With respect to internal Soviet developments, this means at present continuation of 'collective leadership,' decline in the power of the secret police, decentralization, legal reforms, relaxation in censorship, liberalization in cultural life." If one rereads *Soviet Marxism* in light of perestroika and glasnost, it was a powerful analysis of the Soviet Union, one that understood the fundamental direction of Soviet communism. Long before anyone else, Marcuse perceived that the structural conditions of Soviet society, unlike the advanced capitalist ones, indicated that it would not be necessary to use violence to transform it.

As his health deteriorated, we had several discussions about religion and death. At the time, there was something of a revival of Judaism and religion in general among many people who previously had been content with secular utopianism as their metaphysical orientation. Ricky Sherover was active in one of the Jewish groups which met regularly, and we often arranged for Herbert and me to spend that evening together. As Ricky left one night, Herbert challenged me to explain the interest so many of our friends had developed in their religious background. My first response was that anti-Semitism and the insecurity of Israel were probably behind it, but that did not suit him. He asked when Israel had lost a war, and if I could name one incident of anti-Semitism in our circles which came close to any of the cases of racism which were common knowledge. I fell back to a position asserting that whites needed an identity as oppressed rather than oppressors, to which he countered with two other questions: Why had such an identity not been necessary in the 1960s? How could I explain the conversion of Eldridge Cleaver? In his own way, Herbert was helping me realize that the movement's ascendancy (along with that sense of common purpose and solidarity) was long past – a simple fact which I stubbornly resisted (and sometimes still refuse to accept fully).

On more than one occasion, Marcuse said to me that he really did not

care what happened to him after he died. During this period of time, Tito fought death for weeks – was it months? – even while unconscious, and we agreed that way of dying was not one we would choose – if we could help it. I asked him what he thought would become of our movement. He looked me squarely in the eyes. "The revolution will not come in your lifetime," he said, "unless you live to be a very old man like me, which I expect you to do."

Herbert was always after me to have him help me secure a real job – as he referred to a tenure-line academic position (which he liked to remind me were getting harder to find). I resisted his pressure for many reasons, among them that I sensed it would mean I had finished being his student. As I tired of San Diego, I finally gave in to his wishes that I make a move by convincing him that what I really should do was go to Europe for a year, during which time I could think about my future. I applied to go to Madrid for a year, and when notified of my acceptance, I rushed over to his office. "Madrid?" he asked. "What are you going to do *there*? You'll be bored in no time." Somewhat flustered, I asked where he thought I should be going. "Why Germany, of course, to Berlin. There's a lot going on there." I protested that my German was not at the level of my Spanish and that U.C.S.D. had no programs in Germany. Herbert assured me both these issues would easily be taken care of, and then and there, he began to acquaint me with the recent history of German social movements.

It is difficult to understand why in the United States there has been very little interest in his works since his death. The same is not the case in Germany. There a popular movement continued to develop after the mid-1970s and Marcuse is still considered to be important reading. His final German book has never been published in English. To refer to *Time Messages* as a book is not entirely accurate because it is three essays and an interview with Hans Enzensberger. The essays include "Marxism and Feminism,"<sup>3</sup> "Theory and Practice" and "Failure of the New Left?"<sup>4</sup> The interview with Enzensberger deals with the question of revolutionary organization in the United States. While some argue that his books are academic, not political, my understanding is different. In 1978, after I had read all his books, I surmised that his life's project had been to prepare the theory for future revolutionary movements. I called my interpretation to Herbert's attention. He seemed quite pleased. "Yes," he said, "you could say that."

3 Originally published in the *New Indicator*, "Marxism and Feminism" was reprinted in *City Lights Anthology*, ed. Lawrence Ferlinghetti (San Francisco, Calif.: City Lights Books, 1974).

4 A talk he gave for the Socialist Forum, "Failure of the New Left?" was translated from the German version and printed in *New German Critique*, 18 (Fall 1979) pp. 3–11.

## MARCUSE'S THEORY AND PRACTICAL ACTION

Despite his relative obscurity in the United States, Marcuse's theories remain quite relevant, particularly for those concerned with social transformation. Several of the concepts he developed have been extraordinarily helpful to me, and I discuss them below to indicate further his orientation to political change, not only in his everyday life but also in his writing. Central to Marcuse's writings throughout his life is the concern that liberation is not abstract (as in Sartre) but depends on sensuous human beings. Rationality has a soul to it, a body that goes along with it. His dialectical thought united mind and body, finding unity in seeming opposites. What seems to be greater individual freedom in modern society may simultaneously be greater enslavement, since it is now the individual who must enslave (or free) him/herself.

Even in moments of revolution, Marcuse argued, our own personalities limit our possibilities, a reality he discussed with me through the concept of psychic Thermidor. (Thermidor was the month of the French revolutionary calendar during which reaction set in.) Psychic Thermidor refers to an internally conditioned reaction which revolutions suffer, a syndrome Marcuse accounted for in the changed material conditions of advanced capitalism: "The economic and political incorporation of the individuals into the hierarchical system of labor is accompanied by an instinctual process in which the human objects of domination reproduce their own repression . . . The revolt against the primal father eliminated an individual person who could be (and was) replaced by other persons; but when the dominion of the father has expanded into the dominion of society, no such replacement seems possible and the guilt becomes fatal."<sup>5</sup>

For Marcuse, the key to unlocking the nascent revolt might not be in the ripening of objective conditions, but in a radical restructuring of our psychology. He tried to locate the kind of psychic structure that would characterize a free society and found it in societies in which the Pleasure Principle is the principle that organizes society, not the Performance Principle. Surplus repression was the concept he developed to explain the mechanism by which the emergence of the Pleasure Principle is internally diminished.

In *Civilization and its Discontents*, Freud made the case that each of us must internalize mechanisms to repress our instinctive desires and needs and that the superego develops methods of repression which allow city life. Marcuse went further, arguing that the superego has become so great a constraint on the ego in mass society (in which the father is replaced by institutions as the domineering force) that this new personality structure imposes far more repression on people (i.e. people impose far more

<sup>5</sup> *Eros and Civilization* (Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 1966), p. 91.

repression on themselves) than is actually needed for civilization to exist, for the war of all against all to be avoided.

Marcuse's emphasis on human beings as the center of the universe, not just as the subjects but simultaneously the objects of liberation, led him to ask whether there is a biological basis for freedom. Do human beings have an instinctual need for freedom? His answer was affirmative. For hundreds of years, Western progressive thinking posited the irrational as opposed to freedom. The Enlightenment, the French and American revolutions took as their goals increasing rationality and limiting irrationality – at least to the extent that we generally think of the irrational as meaning something evil and uncontrollable. By locating the movement for freedom in the instinctual structure, Marcuse was able to anticipate the coming of the green movement, long before people began to talk about nature as our ally. When he talked about inner nature as a reservoir of revolutionary impulse, making a point subsequently taken up by the German Greens, he differed from Habermas, who regards the psychic as "inner foreign territory."

Moreover, in response to a feminist study group in which he took part, he extended his discussion to deal with feminism, which he called the movement's most radical potential: feminist socialism. He said that the radical subversion of values can never be the mere by-products of new social institutions. "It must have its roots in the men and women who build the new institutions . . . Socialism, as a qualitatively different way of life would not only use the productive forces for the reduction of alienated labor and labor time, but also for making life an end in itself, for the development of the senses and the intellect, for pacification of aggressiveness, the enjoyment of being, for the emancipation of the senses and of the intellect from the rationality of domination: creative receptivity vs. repressive productivity. In this context, the liberation of women would indeed appear as the antithesis to the Performance Principle, would indeed appear as the revolutionary function of the female in the reconstruction of society."<sup>6</sup>

He had long written on sexuality, developing the concept of repressive desublimation in his synthesis of Marx and Freud in what he thought of as his best book, *Eros and Civilization*. The problem he was trying to understand is this: How can a society in which sexual restrictions are so low still exhibit the characteristics of a sexually repressed society? His answer is that the quantity of sexual activity does not necessarily alter the quality of connections between individuals (sexual or otherwise). This is particularly the case when sexuality has been transformed into a mechanistic act, into a commodity, into part of an entire cultural infrastructure based on the fetishization of commodities. Marcuse argued that the psychic structure of society has remained very similar despite the change in its outward appearance. The Hegelian/Platonic differentiation between essence and

<sup>6</sup> "Marxism and Feminism," op. cit.

appearance is applied here but with a Freudian/Marxist twist, one which understands cooptation as the mechanism assuring the smooth functioning of the social order.

Like repressive desublimation, repressive tolerance requires understanding the difference between essence and appearance, between quality and quantity. Developed out of his understanding of art, particularly how the Dada/Surrealist revolt against modern scientific society was integrated into that society to become a means of entertaining it, repressive tolerance asks: How can a government maintain order and at the same time appear to allow the free expression of opinion? How can there be so little genuine political opposition in the United States when in fact we do appear to have freedom of expression? Marcuse's answer has two dimensions. In the first place, he called attention to the problem that revolution (in his view, a necessity for the realization of freedom) is illegal. If we dispense with the assumption that fundamental change in the social structure can evolve within the normal course of events, then it is important to question the ways in which tolerance – adherence to the rules of normal discourse – makes revolutionary change impossible.<sup>7</sup>

Second, Marcuse asked whether we are free because we think we are free. Is there a level on which our psychic structure and our intellectual assumptions are anesthetized and standardized by the institutions of mass society? As he put it: "the democratic argument implies a necessary condition, namely, that the people must be capable of deliberating and choosing on the basis of knowledge, that they must have access to authentic information, and that, on this basis, their evaluation must be the result of autonomous thought."<sup>8</sup> Just because people are granted the right of freedom of expression does not mean that information and thought are true.<sup>9</sup>

7 Under a system of constitutionally guaranteed and (generally and without too many and too glaring exceptions) practiced civil rights and liberties, opposition and dissent are tolerated unless they issue in violence and/or exhortation to and organization of violent subversion. The underlining assumption is that the established society is free, and that any improvement, even a change in the social structure and social values, would come about in the course of normal events, prepared, defined, and tested in free and equal discussion, on the open marketplace of ideas and goods.

(Robert Paul Wolff, Barrington Moore, Jr., and Herbert Marcuse, *A Critique of Pure Tolerance* (Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 1965), pp. 92–3

8 Ibid., pp. 94–5.

9 The concept of repressive tolerance caused Marcuse immense problems in Germany, particularly since the authorities used it to lump him with guerrillas. Despite their opinions, Marcuse was in no way a believer in such tactics, as I found on many occasions when we discussed this issue at length.

At the same moment, however, he did not believe in extending the right of free speech to Nazis or the Klan, since in his mind the distance between thought and deed was so short. In today's Germany, however, there are many who argue that even fascist demonstrations openly goose-stepping in front of residence houses for

His argument was construed as elitist and antidemocratic, but a different interpretation is also possible, namely that education and truth are vital preconditions for freedom. And who, he never tired of asking, will educate the educators? For many people, it is very difficult to read Marcuse simply because his prose is an obstacle. He wrote small books, yet their ideas are immense – in stark contrast to books today that are huge and contain so much pulp in their content.

The demise of the thinking individual as opposed to the mass-mediated individual able to deal with vast quantities of information is characteristic of our age. Marcuse couldn't deal with information overload. If we were having a conversation, he would ask politely for the music to be turned off. Either we listened to the music or had a conversation, but not both simultaneously. My generation loves to have the music on, with the television turned down, and have something else going on as well. Yet we are unable to read Marcuse. "Debilitating comfort" was Marcuse's poetic way of talking about how consumer society actually is harmful to human beings. The increase in the quantity of material goods is not necessarily linked to an increase in the quality of our lives. If we agree that the concepts with which he concerned himself (the nature of freedom, the character of thought) lie in a domain beyond the satisfaction of "material needs" (the dominant discourse of consumer society), then it would be surprising if his discussion were facily accessed by people conditioned to buy and consume rather than ponder and transcend.

In preparing this article, I've spent time with Herbert in my dreams and realized how much I miss him – as a friend and as a progressive human being. He had an inner sense of himself in relationship to history that put me at ease. He was somehow at peace as few people are, a very rare quality, particularly in an individual whose intellect was so keen. His passing in 1979 is the passing of an entire generation in which the synthesis of the sacred and profane was possible.

foreigners should be allowed free expression. In Germany, of all places, they argue, every political party, in particular ones like the Republicans that have won seats in elections, must have the right to demonstrate in public. Even when antifascist protestors assemble to prevent neo-Nazis from gathering, many on the left oppose them.