

Adorno's Marxism — theory-practice

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Gillian Rose's "Hegelian" critique of Marxism

Gillian Rose's *magnum opus* was her second book, *Hegel Contra Sociology* (1981).¹ Preceding this was *The Melancholy Science: An Introduction to the Thought of Theodor W. Adorno* (1978), a work which charted Rose's approach to the relation of Marxism to Hegel in *Hegel Contra Sociology*.² Alongside her monograph on Adorno, Rose published two incisively critical reviews of the reception of Adorno's work.³ Rose thus established herself early on as an important interrogator of Adorno's thought and Frankfurt School Critical Theory more generally, and of their problematic reception.

In her review of *Negative Dialectics*, Rose noted, "Anyone who is involved in the possibility of Marxism as a mode of cognition *sui generis* . . . must read Adorno's book."⁴ As she wrote in her review of contemporaneous studies on the Frankfurt School,

Both the books reviewed here indict the Frankfurt School for betraying a Marxist canon; yet they neither make any case for the importance of the School nor do they acknowledge the question central to that body of work: the possibility and desirability of defining such a canon. As a result both

1. Gillian Rose, *Hegel Contra Sociology* (London: Verso, 2009). Originally published by Athlone Press, London in 1981.

2. Rose, *The Melancholy Science* (London: Macmillan, 1978).

3. See Rose's review of the English translation of Adorno's *Negative Dialectics* (1973) in *The American Political Science Review* 70.2 (June, 1976), 598–599; and of Susan Buck-Morss's *The Origin of Negative Dialectics: Theodor W. Adorno, Walter Benjamin and the Frankfurt Institute* (1977) and Zoltán Tar's *The Frankfurt School: The Critical Theories of Horkheimer and Adorno* (1977) in *History and Theory* 18.1 (February, 1979), 126–135.

4. Rose, Review of *Negative Dialectics*, 599.

books overlook the relation of the Frankfurt School to Marx for which they are searching. . . . They have taken the writings [of Horkheimer, Benjamin and Adorno] literally but not seriously enough. The more general consequences of this approach are also considerable: it obscures instead of illuminating the large and significant differences within Marxism.⁵

Rose's critique can be said of virtually all the reception of Frankfurt School Critical Theory.

Rose followed her work on Adorno with *Hegel Contra Sociology*.⁶ As Rose put it in *The Melancholy Science*, Adorno and other thinkers in Frankfurt School Critical Theory sought to answer for their generation the question Marx posed (in the 1844 *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*), "How do we now stand as regards the Hegelian dialectic?"⁷ For Rose, this question remained a standing one. Hence, Rose's work on the problem of "Hegelian Marxism" comprised an important critique of the Left of her time that has only increased in resonance since then.

Rose sought to recover Hegel from readings informed by 20th century neo-Kantian influences, and from what she saw as the failure to fully grasp Hegel's critique of Kant. Where Kant could be seen as the bourgeois philosopher *par excellence*, Rose took

5. Rose, Review of *The Origin of Negative Dialectics* and *The Frankfurt School*, 126, 135.

6. The book's original dust jacket featured a blurb by Anthony Giddens, Rose's mentor and the *doyen* of sociology, who called it "*a very unusual piece of work . . . whose significance will take some time to sink in.*"

7. Rose, *The Melancholy Science*, 2.

Hegel to be his most important and unsurpassed critic. Hegel provided Rose with the standard for critical thinking on social modernity, whose threshold she found nearly all others to fall below, including thinkers she otherwise respected such as Adorno and Marx.

Rose read Marx as an important disciple of Hegel who, to her mind, nevertheless, misapprehended key aspects of Hegel's thought. According to Rose, this left Marxism at the mercy of prevailing Kantian preoccupations. As she put it, "When Marx is not self-conscious about his relation to Hegel's philosophy . . . [he] captures what Hegel means by actuality or spirit. But when Marx desires to dissociate himself from Hegel's actuality . . . he relies on and affirms abstract dichotomies between being and consciousness, theory and practice, etc." (230–231). In offering this Hegelian critique of Marx and Marxism, however, Rose actually fulfilled an important desideratum of Adorno's Marxist critical theory, which was to attend to what was "not yet subsumed," or, how a regression of Marxism could be met by a critique from the standpoint of what "remained" from Hegel.

In his deliberate recovery of what Rose characterized as Marx's "capturing" of Hegel's "actuality or spirit," Adorno was preceded by the "Hegelian Marxists" Georg Lukács and Karl Korsch. The "regressive" reading proposed by Adorno⁸ that could answer Rose would involve reading Adorno as presupposing Lukács and Korsch, who presupposed the revolutionary Marxism of Lenin and Luxemburg, who presupposed

8. See, for instance, Adorno, "Progress" (1962), and "Critique" (1969), in *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*, trans. Henry W. Pickford (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 143–160 and 281–288.

Marx, who presupposed Hegel. Similarly, Adorno characterized Hegel as “Kant come into his own.”⁹ From Adorno’s perspective, the Marxists did not need to rewrite Marx, nor did Marx need to rewrite Hegel. For Adorno the recovery of Marx by the Marxists — and of Hegel by Marx — was a matter of further specification and not simple “progress.” This involved problematization, perhaps, but not overcoming in the sense of leaving behind.¹⁰ Marx did not seek to overcome Hegel, but rather was tasked to advance and fulfill his concerns. This comports well with Rose’s approach to Hegel, which she in fact took over, however unconsciously, from her prior study of Adorno, failing to follow what Adorno assumed about Marxism in this regard.

Two parts of *Hegel Contra Sociology* frame its overall discussion of the challenge Hegel’s thought presents to the critical theory of society: a section in the introductory chapter on what Rose calls the “Neo-Kantian Marxism” of Lukács and Adorno and the

9. Adorno, “Aspects of Hegel’s Philosophy,” in *Hegel: Three Studies*, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994), 6.

10. See Georg Lukács, Preface (1922), *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics* (1923), trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1971):

The author of these pages . . . believes that today it is of practical importance to return in this respect to the traditions of Marx-interpretation founded by Engels (who regarded the “German workers’ movement” as the “heir to classical German philosophy”), and by Plekhanov. He believes that all good Marxists should form, in Lenin’s words “a kind of society of the materialist friends of the Hegelian dialectic.”

But Hegel’s position today is the reverse of Marx’s own. The problem with Marx is precisely to take his method and his system *as we find them* and to demonstrate that they *form a coherent unity that must be preserved*. The opposite is true of Hegel. The task he imposes is to separate out from the complex web of ideas with its sometimes glaring contradictions all the *seminal elements* of his thought and rescue them as a *vital intellectual force for the present*. (xlv)

concluding section on “The Culture and Fate of Marxism.” The arguments condensed in these two sections of Rose’s book comprise one of the most interesting and challenging critiques of Marxism. However, Rose’s misunderstanding of Marxism limits the direction and reach of the rousing call with which she concluded her book: “This critique of Marxism itself yields the project of a critical Marxism. . . . [P]resentation of the contradictory relations between Capital and culture is the only way to link the analysis of the economy to comprehension of the conditions for revolutionary practice” (235). Yet Rose’s critique of Marxism, especially of Lukács and Adorno, and of Marx himself, misses its mark.

One problem regarding Rose’s critique of Marxism is precisely her focus on Marxism as a specifically “philosophical” problem, as a problem more of thought than of action. As Lukács’s contemporary Karl Korsch pointed out in “Marxism and Philosophy” (1923), by the late 19th century historians such as Dilthey had observed that “ideas contained in a philosophy can live on not only in philosophies, but equally well in positive sciences and social practice, and that this process precisely began on a large scale with Hegel’s philosophy.”¹¹ For Korsch, this meant that “philosophical” problems in the Hegelian sense were not matters of theory but practice. From a Marxian perspective, however, it is precisely at the level of practice that the problem of capitalist society is posed. Korsch went on to argue that “what appears as the purely ‘ideal’ development of philosophy in the 19th century can in fact only be fully and essentially grasped by relating it to the concrete historical development of bourgeois society as a

11. Karl Korsch, “Marxism and Philosophy” (1923), in *Marxism and Philosophy* trans. Fred Halliday (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1970 and 2008), 39.

whole.”¹² Korsch’s great insight, shared by Lukács, took this perspective from Luxemburg and Lenin, who grasped how the history of Marxism was a key part, indeed the crucial aspect, of this development, at the time of their writing in the first years of the 20th century.¹³

The most commented-upon essay of Lukács’s collection *History and Class Consciousness* (1923) is “Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat,” written specifically as the centerpiece of the book, but drawing upon arguments made in the book’s other essays. Like many readers of Lukács, Rose focused her critique in particular on Lukács’s argument in the second part of his “Reification” essay, “The Antinomies of Bourgeois Thought,” neglecting that its “epistemological” investigation of philosophy is only one moment in a greater argument, which culminates in the most

12. Korsch, “Marxism and Philosophy,” 40.

13. See, for instance: Rosa Luxemburg, *Reform or Revolution?* (1900), in which Luxemburg pointed out that all reforms aimed at ameliorating the crisis of capital actually exacerbated it; Vladimir Lenin, *What is to be Done?* (1902), in which Lenin supposed that overcoming reformist “revisionism” in international (Marxist) social democracy would amount to and be the express means for overcoming capitalism; and Leon Trotsky, *Results and Prospects* (1906), in which Trotsky pointed out that the various “prerequisites of socialism” not only developed historically independently but also, significantly, antagonistically. In *The State and Revolution* (1917), Lenin, following Marx, critiqued anarchism for calling for the “abolition” of the state and not recognizing that the necessity of the state could only “wither away” as a function of the gradual overcoming of “bourgeois right” whose prevalence would persist in the revolutionary socialist “workers’ state” long after the overthrow of the bourgeoisie: the state would continue as a symptom of capitalist social relations without capitalists *per se*. In *Literature and Revolution* (1924), Trotsky pointed out that, as symptomatic products of present society, the cultural and even political expressions of the revolution could not themselves embody the principles of an emancipated society but could, at best, only open the way to them. For Lukács and Korsch (and Benjamin and Adorno following them — see Benjamin’s 1934 essay on “The Author as Producer,” in *Reflections*, trans. Edmund Jephcott [New York: Schocken, 1986], 220–238), such arguments demonstrated a dialectical approach to Marxism itself on the part of its most thoughtful actors.

lengthy and difficult third part of Lukács's essay, "The Standpoint of the Proletariat." But it is in this part of the essay that Lukács addressed how the Marxist social-democratic workers' movement was an intrinsic part of what Korsch had called the "concrete historical development of bourgeois society as a whole," in which its "philosophical" problem lived. The "philosophical" problem Korsch and Lukács sought to address was the "dialectic" of the political practice of the working class, how it actually produced and did not merely respond to the contradictions and potentially revolutionary crisis of capitalist society. It is because of Rose's failure to grasp this point that her criticism of Marx, Lukács, and Adorno amounts to nothing more than an unwitting recapitulation of Lukács's own critique of what he called "vulgar Marxism," and what Adorno called "positivism" or "identity thinking." Lukács and Adorno, following Lenin and Luxemburg, attempted to effect a return to what Korsch called "Marx's Marxism."

In examining Rose's critique of Lukács, Adorno, and Marx, and in responding to Rose's Hegelian interrogation of their supposed deficits, it becomes possible to recover what is important about and unifies their thought. Rose's questions about Marxism are those that any Marxian approach must answer to demonstrate its necessity — its "improved version," as Lukács put it, of the "Hegelian original" dialectic.¹⁴

14. Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, xlvi. Citing Lukács in her review of Buck-Morss and Tar on the Frankfurt School, Rose posed the problem of Marxism this way:

The reception of the Frankfurt School in the English-speaking world to date displays a paradox. Frequently, the Frankfurt School inspires dogmatic historiography although it represents a tradition which is attractive and important precisely because of its rejection of dogmatic or "orthodox" Marxism. This tradition in German Marxism has its origin in Lukács's most un-Hegelian injunction to take Marxism as a "method" — a method which would remain valid even if "every one of Marx's individual theses" were proved wrong. One can indeed speculate whether

The problem of Marxism as Hegelian “science”

In the final section of *Hegel Contra Sociology*, in the conclusion of the chapter “With What Must the Science End?” titled “The Culture and Fate of Marxism,” Rose addresses Marx directly. Here, Rose states that,

Marx did not appreciate the politics of Hegel's presentation, the politics of a phenomenology [logic of appearance] which aims to re-form consciousness . . . [and] acknowledges the actuality which determines the formation of consciousness. . . . Marx's notion of political education was less systematic than [Hegel's]. (232–233)

One issue of great import for Rose's critique of Marxism is the status of Hegel's philosophy as “speculative.” As Rose wrote,

Marx's reading of Hegel overlooks the discourse or logic of the speculative proposition. He refuses to see the lack of identity in Hegel's thought, and therefore tries to establish his own discourse of lack of

philosophers like Bloch, Benjamin, Horkheimer, and Adorno would have become Marxists if Lukács had not pronounced thus. For other Marxists this position spells scientific “suicide.” (Rose, Review of *The Origin of Negative Dialectics* and *The Frankfurt School*, 126.)

Nevertheless, Rose used a passage from Lukács's 1924 book in eulogy, *Lenin: A Study on the Unity of His Thought* as the epigraph for her essay: “[T]he dialectic is not a finished theory to be applied mechanically to all the phenomena of life *but only exists as theory in and through this application*” (126). Critically, Rose asked only that Lukács's own work — and that of other “Hegelian” Marxists — remain true to this observation.

identity using the ordinary proposition. But instead of producing a logic or discourse of lack of identity he produced an ambiguous dichotomy of activity/nature which relies on a natural beginning and an utopian end.

(231)

Rose explicated this “lack of identity in Hegel’s thought” as follows:

Hegel knew that his thought would be misunderstood if it were read as [a] series of ordinary propositions which affirm an identity between a fixed subject and contingent accidents, but he also knew that, like any thinker, he had to present his thought in propositional form. He thus proposed . . . a “speculative proposition.” . . . To read a proposition “speculatively” means that the identity which is affirmed between subject and predicate is seen equally to affirm a lack of identity between subject and predicate. . . . From this perspective the “subject” is not fixed: . . . Only when the lack of identity between subject and predicate has been experienced, can their identity be grasped. . . . Thus it cannot be said, as Marx, for example, said [in his *Critique of Hegel's "Philosophy of Right"* (1843)], that the speculative proposition turns the predicate into the subject and therefore hypostatizes predicates, just like the ordinary proposition hypostatizes the subject. . . . [Hegel's] speculative proposition is fundamentally opposed to [this] kind of formal identity. (51–53)

Rose may be correct about Marx's 1843 critique of Hegel. She severely critiqued Marx's 1845 "Theses on Feuerbach" on the same score (230). What this overlooks is Marx's understanding of the historical difference between his time and Hegel's. Consequently, it neglects Marx's differing conception of "alienation" as a function of the Industrial Revolution, in which the meaning of the categories of bourgeois society, of the commodity form of labor, had become reversed.

Rose's failure to register the change in meaning of "alienation" for Marx compromised her reading of Lukács:

[M]aking a distinction between underlying process and resultant objectifications[,] Lukács was able to avoid the conventional Marxist treatment of capitalist social forms as mere "superstructure" or "epiphenomena;" legal, bureaucratic and cultural forms have the same status as the commodity form. Lukács made it clear that "reification" is the specific capitalist form of objectification. It determines the structure of all the capitalist social forms. . . . [T]he process-like essence (the mode of production) attains a validity from the standpoint of the totality. . . . [Lukács's approach] turned . . . away from a logic of identity in the direction of a theory of historical mediation. The advantage of this approach was that Lukács opened new areas of social life to Marxist analysis and critique. . . . The disadvantage was that Lukács omitted many details of Marx's theory of value. . . . As a result "reification" and "mediation" become a kind of shorthand instead of a sustained theory. A

further disadvantage is that the sociology of reification can only be completed by a speculative sociology of the proletariat as the subject-object of history. (30–31)

However, for Lukács the proletariat is not a Hegelian subject-object of history but a Marxian one.¹⁵ Lukács did not affirm history as the given situation of the possibility of freedom in the way Hegel did. Rather, following Marx, Lukács treated historical structure as a problem to be overcome. History was not to be grasped as necessary, as Hegel affirmed against his contemporaries' Romantic despair at modernity. Rose mistakenly took Lukács's critique of capital to be Romantic, subject to the *aporiae* Hegel had characterized in the "unhappy consciousness." Rose therefore misinterpreted Lukács's revolutionism as a matter of "will."¹⁶

15. See Lukács, "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat," 171–175:

The *class meaning* of [the thoroughgoing capitalist rationalization of society] lies precisely in the fact that the bourgeoisie regularly transforms each new qualitative gain back onto the quantitative level of yet another rational calculation. Whereas for the proletariat, the "same" development has a different class meaning: it means the *abolition of the isolated individual*, it means that the workers can become conscious of the social character of labor, it means that the abstract, universal form of the societal principle as it is manifested can be increasingly concretized and overcome. . . . For the proletariat however, this ability to go beyond the immediate in search for the "remoter" factors means the *transformation of the objective nature of the objects of action*.

The "objective nature of the objects of action" includes that of the working class itself.

16. Such misapprehension of revolutionary Marxism as voluntarism has been commonplace. Rosa Luxemburg's biographer, the political scientist J. P. Nettl, in the essay "The German Social Democratic Party 1890–1914 as Political Model" (in *Past and Present* 30 [April 1965], 65–95), addressed this issue as follows:

Rosa Luxemburg was emphatically not an anarchist and went out of her way to distinguish between "revolutionary gymnastic," which was

“conjured out of the air at will,” and her own policy (see her 1906 pamphlet on *The Mass Strike, the Political Party and the Trade Unions*). . . . [Later Communist historians have burdened her] with the concept of spontaneity. . . . [But her’s] was a dynamic, dialectic doctrine; organization and action revived each other and made each other grow. . . . It may well be that there were underlying similarities to anarchism, insofar as any doctrine of action resembles any other. A wind of action and movement was blowing strongly around the edges of European culture at the time, both in art and literature as well as in the more political context of Sorel and the Italian Futurists. . . . [But] most important of all, Rosa Luxemburg specifically drew on a Russian experience [of the 1905 Revolution] which differed sharply from the intellectual individualism of Bakunin, [Domela-]Nieuwenhuis and contemporary anarchism. She always emphasized self-discipline as an adjunct to action — the opposite of the doctrine of self-liberation which the Anarchists shared with other European action philosophies. (88–89)

The German Left evolved a special theory of action. . . . Where the German Left emphasized action against organization, Lenin preached organization as a means to action. But action was common to both — and it was this emphasis on action which finally brought the German Left and the Russian Bolsheviks into the same camp in spite of so many serious disagreements. In her review of the Bolshevik revolution, written in September 1918, Rosa Luxemburg singled out this commitment to action for particular praise. Here she saw a strong sympathetic echo to her own ideas, and analyzed it precisely in her own terms:

“With . . . the seizure of power and *the carrying forward* of the revolution the Bolsheviks have solved the famous question of a ‘popular majority’ which has so long oppressed the German Social Democrats . . . not through a majority to a revolutionary tactic, but through a revolutionary tactic to a majority” (*The Russian Revolution*)

With action as the cause and not the consequence of mass support, she saw the Bolsheviks applying her ideas in practice — and incidentally provides us with clear evidence as to what she meant when she spoke of majority and masses. In spite of other severe criticisms of Bolshevik policy, it was this solution of the problem by the Bolsheviks which definitely ensured them the support of the German Left. (91–92)

The possibilities adumbrated by modern sociology have not yet been adequately exploited in the study of political organizations, dynamics, relationships. Especially the dynamics; most pictures of change are “moving pictures,” which means that they are no more than “a composition of immobilities . . . a position, then a new position, etc., *ad*

Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness* is an attempt to give [Marx's] *Capital* a phenomenological form: to read Marx's analysis of capital as the potential consciousness of a universal class. But Lukács's emphasis on change in consciousness as *per se* revolutionary, separate from the analysis of change in capitalism, gives his appeal to the proletariat or the party the status of an appeal to a . . . will. (233)

Nonetheless, Rose found aspects of Lukács's understanding of Marx compelling, in a "Hegelian" sense:

The question of the relation between *Capital* and politics is thus not an abstract question about the relation between theory and practice, but a phenomenological question about the relationship between acknowledgement of actuality and the possibility of change. This is why the theory of commodity fetishism, the presentation of a contradiction between substance and subject, remains more impressive than any abstract statements about the relation between theory and practice or between capitalist crisis and the formation of revolutionary consciousness. It acknowledges actuality and its misrepresentation as consciousness. (233)

infinitum" (Henri Bergson). The problem troubled Talcott Parsons among others, just as it long ago troubled Rosa Luxemburg. (95)

This was what Lukács, following Lenin and Luxemburg, meant by the problem of "reification."

What is missing from Rose's critique of Lukács, however, is how he offered a dialectical argument, precisely through forms of misrecognition ("misrepresentation").¹⁷

17. As Lukács put it in the Preface (1922) to *History and Class Consciousness*,

I should perhaps point out to the reader unfamiliar with dialectics one difficulty inherent in the nature of dialectical method relating to the definition of concepts and terminology. It is of the essence of dialectical method that concepts which are false in their abstract one-sidedness are later transcended (*zur Aufhebung gelangen*). The process of transcendence makes it inevitable that we should operate with these one-sided, abstract and false concepts. These concepts acquire their true meaning less by definition than by their function as aspects that are then transcended in the totality. Moreover, it is even more difficult to establish fixed meanings for concepts in Marx's improved version of the dialectic than in the Hegelian original. For if concepts are only the intellectual forms of historical realities then these forms, one-sided, abstract and false as they are, belong to the true unity as genuine aspects of it. Hegel's statements about this problem of terminology in the preface to the *Phenomenology* are thus even more true than Hegel himself realized when he said: "Just as the expressions 'unity of subject and object', of 'finite and infinite', of 'being and thought', etc., have the drawback that 'object' and 'subject' bear the same meaning as when *they exist outside that unity*, so that within the unity they mean something other than is implied by their expression: so, too, falsehood is not, *qua* false, any longer a moment of truth." In the pure historicization of the dialectic this statement receives yet another twist: in so far as the "false" is an aspect of the "true" it is both "false" and "non-false." When the professional demolishers of Marx criticize his "lack of conceptual rigor" and his use of "image" rather than "definitions," etc., they cut as sorry a figure as did Schopenhauer when he tried to expose Hegel's "logical howlers" in his Hegel critique. All that is proved is their total inability to grasp even the ABC of the dialectical method. The logical conclusion for the dialectician to draw from this failure is not that he is faced with a conflict between different scientific methods, but that he is in the presence of a *social phenomenon* and that by conceiving it as a socio-historical phenomenon he can at once refute it and transcend it dialectically. (xlvi–xlvii)

For Lukács, the self-contradictory nature of the workers' movement was itself a "socio-historical phenomenon" that had brought forth a revolutionary crisis at the time of Lukács's writing: from a Marxian perspective, the working class and its politics were the most important phenomena and objects of critique to be overcome in capitalist society.

This is why the theory of commodity fetishism has become central to the neo-Marxist theory of domination, aesthetics, and ideology. The theory of commodity fetishism is the most speculative moment in Marx's exposition of capital. It comes nearest to demonstrating in the historically specific case of commodity producing society how substance is ((mis-)represented as) subject, how necessary illusion arises out of productive activity. (232)

However, the contradiction of capital is not merely between “substance and subject,” but rather a self-contradictory social substance, value, which gives rise to a self-contradictory subject.¹⁸

Rose's critique of the “sociological” Marxism of Lukács and Adorno

Rose's misconstrual of the status of proletarian social revolution in the self-understanding of Marxism led her to regard Lukács and Adorno's work as “theoretical” in the restricted sense of mere analysis. Rose denied the dialectical status of Lukács and Adorno's thought by neglecting the question of how a Marxian approach, from Lukács and Adorno's perspective, considered the workers' movement for emancipation as itself symptomatic of capital. Following Marx, Lukács and Adorno regarded Marxism as the organized historical self-consciousness of the social politics of the working class that

18. See Moishe Postone, *Time, Labor and Social Domination: A Reinterpretation of Marx's Critical Theory* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

potentially points beyond capital.¹⁹ Rose limited Lukács and Adorno's concerns regarding "misrecognition," characterizing their work as "sociological:"

19. See Adorno, "Reflections on Class Theory" (1942), in *Can One Live After Auschwitz? A Philosophical Reader*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 93–110:

According to [Marxian] theory, history is the history of class struggles. But the concept of class is bound up with the emergence of the proletariat. . . . By extending the concept of class to prehistory, theory denounces not just the bourgeois . . . [but] turns against prehistory itself. . . . By exposing the historical necessity that had brought capitalism into being, [the critique of] political economy became the critique of history as a whole. . . . All history is the history of class struggles because it was always the same thing, namely, prehistory. (93–94)

This means, however, that the dehumanization is also its opposite. . . . Only when the victims completely assume the features of the ruling civilization will they be capable of wresting them from the dominant power. (110)

This follows from Lukács's conception of proletarian socialism as the "completion" of reification ("Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat," in *History and Class Consciousness*):

The danger to which the proletariat has been exposed since its appearance on the historical stage was that it might remain imprisoned in its immediacy together with the bourgeoisie. With the growth of social democracy this threat acquired a real political organisation which artificially cancels out the mediations so laboriously won and forces the proletariat back into its immediate existence where it is merely a component of capitalist society and not *at the same time* the motor that drives it to its doom and destruction. (196)

[E]ven the objects in the very centre of the dialectical process [i.e., the political forms of the workers' movement itself] can only slough off their reified form after a laborious process. A process in which the seizure of power by the proletariat and even the organisation of the state and the economy on socialist lines are only stages. They are, of course, extremely important stages, but they do not mean that the ultimate objective has been achieved. And it even appears as if the decisive crisis-period of capitalism may be characterized by the tendency to intensify reification, to bring it to a head. (208)

The thought of Lukács and Adorno represent two of the most original and important attempts . . . [at] an Hegelian Marxism, but it constitutes a neo-Kantian Marxism. . . . They turned the neo-Kantian paradigm into a Marxist sociology of cultural forms . . . with a selective generalization of Marx's theory of commodity fetishism. (29)

But, according to Rose, this “sociological” analysis of the commodity form remained outside its object:

In the essay “Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat” in *History and Class Consciousness*, Lukács generalizes Marx's theory of commodity fetishism by making a distinction between the total process of production, “real life-processes,” and the resultant objectifications of social forms. This notion of “objectification” has more in common with the neo-Kantian notion of the objectification of specific object-domains than with an “Hegelian” conflating of objectification, human praxis in general, with alienation, its form in capitalist society. (30)

Rose thought that Lukács thus undermined his own account of potential transformation: “Lukács's very success in demonstrating the prevalence of reification . . . meant that he could only appeal to the proletariat to overcome reification by apostrophes to the unity of theory and practice, or by introducing the party as *deus ex machina*” (31). In this respect, Rose failed to note how Lukács, and Adorno following him, had deeply internalized the Hegelian problematic of Marxism, how Marxism was not the (mis)application but the

reconstruction of the Hegelian dialectic under the changed social-historical conditions of capital. For Rose, Lukács's concept of "reification" was too negative regarding the "totality" of capital, which she thought threatened to render capital non-dialectical, and its emancipatory transformation inconceivable. But Rose's perspective remains that of Hegel — pre-industrial capital.²⁰

20. Just before she died in 1995, Rose wrote a new Preface for a reprint of *Hegel Contra Sociology*, which states that,

The speculative exposition of Hegel in this book still provides the basis for a unique engagement with post-Hegelian thought, especially postmodernity, with its roots in Heideggerianism. . . . [T]he experience of negativity, the existential drama, is discovered at the heart of Hegelian rationalism. . . . Instead of working with the general question of the dominance of Western metaphysics, the dilemma of addressing modern ethics and politics without arrogating the authority under question is seen as the ineluctable difficulty in Hegel. . . . This book, therefore, remains the core of the project to demonstrate a nonfoundational and radical Hegel, which overcomes the opposition between nihilism and rationalism. It provides the possibility for renewal of critical thought in the intellectual difficulty of our time. (viii)

Since the time of Rose's book, with the passage of Marxist politics into history, the "intellectual difficulty" in renewing critical thought has only gotten worse. "Postmodernity" has not meant the eclipse or end, but rather the unproblematic triumph, of "Western metaphysics" — in the exhaustion of "postmodernism." Consideration of the problem Rose addressed in terms of the Hegelian roots of Marxism, the immanent critique of capitalist modernity, remains the "possibility" if not the "actuality" of our time. Only by facing it squarely can we avoid sharing in Marxism's "fate" as a "culture." For this "fate," the devolution into "culture," or what Rose called "pre-bourgeois society" (234), threatens not merely a form of politics on the Left, but humanity: it represents the failure to attain let alone transcend the threshold of Hegelian modernity, whose concern Rose recovered.

Rose's term for the post-1960s "New Left" historical situation is "Heideggerian postmodernity." Robert Pippin, as a fellow "Hegelian," in his brief response to the *Critical Inquiry* journal's symposium on "The Future of Criticism," titled "*Critical Inquiry* and Critical Theory: A Short History of Nonbeing" (*Critical Inquiry* Vol. 30, No. 2 [Winter 2004], 424–428), has characterized this similarly, as follows:

[T]he level of discussion and awareness of this issue, in its historical dimensions (with respect both to the history of critical theory and the history of modernization) has regressed. . . . [T]he problem with

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The origins of Adorno's Marxism

The Bolshevik Revolution of October 1917 was the formative event of the 20th century. The emancipatory moment of the Russian Revolution was the lodestar not only for all subsequent Marxism but specifically for the critical theory of the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research, including the works of Max Horkheimer, Walter Benjamin, Herbert Marcuse, and Theodor W. Adorno, as it was indeed the orienting phenomenon for all thinkers on the Left — and the Right. The trajectory of the Russian Revolution and subsequent Soviet history, and the manifold phenomena of post-1917 international Communism and reaction against it formed the axial core for the social and political

contemporary critical theory is that it has become insufficiently critical. . . . [T]here is also a historical cost for the neglect or underattention or lack of resolution of this core critical problem: repetition. . . . It may seem extreme to claim — well, to claim at all that such repetition exists (that postmodernism, say, is an instance of such repetition) — and also to claim that it is tied somehow to the dim understanding we have of the post-Kantian situation. . . . [T]hat is what I wanted to suggest. I'm not sure it will get us anywhere. Philosophy rarely does. Perhaps it exists to remind us that we haven't gotten anywhere. (427–428)

Heidegger himself anticipated this result in his “Overcoming Metaphysics” (1936–46), in *The End of Philosophy*, ed. and trans. Joan Stambaugh (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003): “The still hidden truth of Being is withheld from metaphysical humanity. The laboring animal is left to the giddy whirl of its products so that it may tear itself to pieces and annihilate itself in empty nothingness” (87). Elsewhere, in “The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking” (1964), in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), Heidegger acknowledged Marx's place in this process: “With the reversal of metaphysics which was already accomplished by Karl Marx, the most extreme possibility of philosophy is attained” (433).

theory and practice of the 20th century. From a decade after 1917, Horkheimer, in his aphoristic writings from 1926–31 published in 1934 under the title *Dämmerung* (“Twilight;” translatable as either “Dusk” or “Dawn”), after the Nazi seizure of power and demise of the Weimar Republic, wrote that,

The moral character of a person can be infallibly inferred from his response to certain questions. . . . In 1930 the attitude toward Russia casts light on people's thinking. It is extremely difficult to say what conditions are like there. I do not claim to know where the country is going; there is undoubtedly much misery. . . . The senseless injustice of the imperialist world can certainly not be explained by technological inadequacy. Anyone who has the eyes to see will view events in Russia as the continuing painful attempt to overcome this terrible social injustice. At the very least, he will ask with a throbbing heart whether it is still under way. If appearances were to be against it, he will cling to this hope like the cancer patient to the questionable report that a cure for his illness may have been found.

When Kant received the first news of the French Revolution [of 1789], he is said to have changed the direction of his customary stroll from then on.²¹

21. Max Horkheimer, “Indications,” in *Dawn and Decline, Notes 1926-31 and 1950-69*, trans. Michael Shaw (New York: Seabury/Continuum, 1978), 72–73.

In 1919 Horkheimer had been in Munich during the short-lived Munich Workers' Council/Soviet Republic that was inspired by the Bolshevik Revolution, and he had to flee from the violence of its counterrevolutionary suppression.²² The trajectory of revolution, counterrevolution and reaction, of world war and civil war, formed the substance of the concerns of Marxism in the 20th century, including that of the Frankfurt School.

At the time of the October Revolution, Adorno (born in 1903) was 14 years old. At the close of the potentially revolutionary crisis in Germany that came at the end of the war, during the revolt, civil war and counterrevolutionary violence that was precipitated, Adorno was only 15. He had been too young for military service and therefore did not experience directly the radicalization that the German defeat in the war brought in 1918–19, as had, for instance, Horkheimer and Marcuse. (Marcuse participated in the workers' and soldiers' councils that sprung up at the time of the Kaiser's abdication at the end of 1918, and in the Spartacist uprising of the terminal, radical phase of the crisis in early 1919, during which time the most famous radical Marxists in Germany, the leaders of the Spartacus League and founders of the German Communist Party, Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, were murdered by Social-Democratic government-mandated *Freikorps* counterrevolutionary death squads.) By contrast, during this time the teenage Adorno was still living in his relatively quiescent hometown of Frankfurt, being tutored in philosophy by his family's friend Siegfried Kracauer, with whom he discussed Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. However, Adorno was the thinker in Frankfurt School Critical

22. Rolf Wiggershaus, *The Frankfurt School* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995), 44.

Theory whose work most consistently incorporates the concerns and critically reflects upon the legacy of the emancipatory potential expressed by the moment of 1917–19.

The Bolshevik Revolution and the radicalism of its historical moment had prompted a “return to Marx” in the early 1920s whose most brilliant expositions were made by Georg Lukács in *History and Class Consciousness* (1923) and Karl Korsch in “Marxism and Philosophy” (1923). Both these sought to recover the critical intent and purchase of Marx’s theory and politics in the aftermath of the collapse of international Social Democracy and the failure of global anticapitalist revolution in 1917–19. Their work, inspired by and picking up from the radical Left of pre-war international Social Democracy that informed the Bolshevik Revolution, the politics of both Lenin’s Russian Bolsheviks and Rosa Luxemburg’s German Spartacists, provides the departure for subsequent, Frankfurt School Critical Theory. The ultimate failure of the anticapitalist revolution that had opened most fully in Russia, but also manifested significantly elsewhere, in Germany, Hungary, Italy and beyond, prompted critical reflection on the social-emancipatory content of Marxist politics, in hope of its further development. However, because of the contrast of such radically searching work with the stifling political repression of Stalinist reaction in Russia and the international Communist movement under the rubric of “orthodoxy” after 1924, this critical Marxism came to be known by the misnomer of “Western” Marxism, which developed under conditions of relative intellectual freedom outside the official “Communist” world. Beginning in the 1920s–30s, Adorno’s work sought to sustain this critical “return to Marx” in the period of triumphant counterrevolution that characterized the 20th century.

For in this period, Marxism itself became an affirmative ideology of reactionary, “advanced” capitalism, for its emancipatory content — and hence its profoundest critique of modern society — was lost. Marx had tried to develop a self-reflexive and critical-emancipatory approach to overcoming capitalism immanently. Just as Marx’s thought originated in the attempt at critique, from within, of the Left of the 19th century, the socialist workers movement (of Proudhon, et al.), Adorno’s thought, his sustained engagement with the critical theory of 20th century capitalism, necessarily pursued the immanent critique of Marxism. Hence, Adorno’s work is an attempt to “recover” Marx under more “advanced” conditions, and thus bring to conscious expression what had become, by the mid-20th century, the esoteric content of Marxist politics. However, because of the compromised nature of the ostensibly “Marxist” but manifestly Stalinized politics of his time, the evacuation of the social-emancipatory content of Marxism, Adorno’s work took the form of “critical theory,” the attempt to register the disparity between theory and practice, indicating this by provoking the critical recognition not only of how Marxism had failed, but how it might yet point beyond itself.

Attempting to steer clear of the vulgarized and Stalinized Marxism in the aftermath of the failed revolutions of 1917–19, the recognition of the importance of critical consciousness had been formative for the thought of Frankfurt School critical theorists like Adorno in the 1920s–30s. As pointed out by the historian of the Frankfurt Institute Helmut Dubiel, as regards the role of consciousness, there had been no difference between Luxemburg and Lenin. From early on, the Frankfurt School critical theorists shared this perspective with their more directly political Marxist forebears:

[The] ascription of a continuum — that is, of a mediated identity — between proletarian class consciousness and socialist theory — united even such [apparently] divergent positions as those of Rosa Luxemburg and Lenin. . . . Georg Lukács formulated this conception in *History and Class Consciousness* (1923). Although this idea was traditionally held by the socialist intelligentsia . . . [this] speculative identity of class consciousness and social theory formed the self-consciousness of those socialist intellectuals who were not integrated into the SPD [German Social-Democratic Party] and KPD [German Communist Party] in the 1920s.²³

By comparison, the Marxist “orthodoxy” of both Stalinized international Communism and rump, post-WWI Social Democracy, as well as various “Left” oppositions to these, became ensnared in the antinomy presented by the contradiction — the important, constitutive non-identity — of social being and consciousness, practice and theory (or, as in debates around historic revolutionary Marxism, “spontaneity” and “organization”²⁴),

23. Helmut Dubiel, *Theory and Politics: Studies in the Development of Critical Theory* (1978), trans. Benjamin Gregg (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985), 24.

24. See: Adorno, “Marginalia to Theory and Praxis,” *Critical Models*, 274: “[A] non-repressive practice might be possible, and one might steer a path between the alternatives of spontaneity and organization;” and Adorno, “The dialectics of spontaneity; Marx, Rosa Luxemburg,” from the February 9, 1965 lecture on “The antinomies of freedom,” in *History and Freedom: Lectures 1964–65*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, U.K.: Polity Press, 2006), 216–217:

It is interesting to note that this concept of spontaneity is of central importance not just in Kant, but also in the Marxian theory of socialism. Moreover, both in Marx and more generally in socialist theory, it has the same dialectical quality, the same dual character . . . [as] in Kant. For the

whose dialectic had motivated the critical consciousness of practice for Marx as well as for the radicals in pre-1914 Social Democracy like Luxemburg and Lenin. As Karl Korsch put it in “Marxism and Philosophy” (1923),

As scientific socialism, the Marxism of Marx and Engels remains the inclusive whole of a theory of social revolution . . . a materialism whose theory comprehended the totality of society and history, and whose practice overthrew it. . . . The difference [now] is that the various components of [what for Marx and Engels was] the unbreakable

spontaneous action that Marx ascribes to the proletariat is supposed, on the one hand, to be an autonomous, rational, free form of action, action on the basis of known and comprehensible theory. At the same time, however, it contains an irreducible element, the element of immediate action that does not fit entirely into the factors that theoretically determine it; and, above all, it does not fit smoothly into the determining factors of history. On the contrary, even though it is determined *by* these, it seems to be a way leading *out* of them — in extreme contrast to all mechanistic interpretations of the course of history. You can see from this how this curious duality of spontaneity has continued to thrive, until it finally underwent a strange fate, on the one hand, of simply vanishing; that is to say, it too succumbed to the blind conformity to dominant power relations. On the other hand, in the minds of all those who have been opposed to this development, spontaneity has made itself independent in a strange way, and has split itself off from reason, as a protest against a mechanical determinism through cause and effect, and this protest applied to the presence of that determinism in socialist thought too. In this way it came close to anarchism even though anarchism had been subjected to astringent criticism in socialist theory. The greatest example of this protest is Rosa Luxemburg. . . . [T]he concept of spontaneity, which might be described as the organ or medium of freedom, refuses to obey the logic of non-contradiction, and is instead a unity of mutually contradictory elements. It points, therefore, to a strict conception of dialectic.

Importantly, the “protest against determinism” is located by Adorno in the pre-Stalinist period, in Rosa Luxemburg’s critique of the German Social-Democratic Party and international Marxist social democracy more generally, which she shared with Lenin. (See the note to Luxemburg’s biographer J. P. Nettl on the matter of “will,” above.)

interconnection of theory and practice are further separated out. . . . The umbilical cord has been broken.²⁵

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Lenin and Luxemburg in 1917 — Lukács and Korsch in 1923

The year 1917 is the most enigmatic and hence controversial date in the history of the Left, for it is marked by the most profound attempt to change the world that has ever taken place. The two most important names associated with the revolution that broke out at this time, in 1917 in Russia and in 1918 in Germany, are the 2nd International Marxist radicals Lenin and Luxemburg, each of whom played fateful roles in this moment. The two most important Marxian critical theorists who sought to follow Luxemburg and Lenin, to advance the historical consciousness and philosophical awareness of the problems of revolutionary politics in the wake of 1917, were Lukács and Korsch. While neither Lenin nor Luxemburg survived the revolutionary period that began in 1917, both Lukács and Korsch ended up disavowing and distancing themselves from their works, both published in 1923, that sought to elaborate a Marxian critical theory of the revolutionary proletarian socialist politics of Lenin and Luxemburg. While Lukács adapted his perspective to the prevailing conditions of Stalinism in the international Communist movement, Korsch became a critic of “Marxist-Leninist” Bolshevism, and an important theorist of Left- or “council-communist” politics. Meanwhile, retrospectively,

25. Karl Korsch, “Marxism and Philosophy,” 59.

Luxemburg was pitted against Lenin according to a similar degeneration and disintegration of the revolutionary consciousness that had informed the Bolshevik Revolution of October 1917.

The forms that this disintegration took involved the arraying of the principles of liberalism against those of socialism, or libertarianism against authoritarianism. Lenin and Lukács became emblems of authoritarian socialism, while Luxemburg and Korsch became associated with more libertarian, if not liberal, concerns. But what remained buried, under such a misapprehension of the disputed legacy of 1917, was the substance of agreement and collaboration, in the revolutionary Marxist politics of that moment, among all these figures. Behind the fact of Luxemburg's close collaboration and practical political unity with Lenin was the intrinsic relationship of liberalism with socialism, and emancipation with necessity. Rather than associating, in such a one-sided manner, Lenin with revolutionary necessity, and Luxemburg with desirable emancipation, the task for Marxist critical theory was to show how necessity, possibility and desirability were related, for both Luxemburg and Lenin, in ways that not only allowed for, but actually had motivated their shared, mutual thought and action, in the revolution that opened in 1917.²⁶ For both Lenin and Luxemburg had sought to articulate

26. For instance, see Rosa Luxemburg's article in defense of Lenin's Bolsheviks, "Blanquism and Social Democracy" (1906) (available on-line at: <<http://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1906/06/blanquism.html>>), in which she wrote that,

It is high time to finish with such scholasticism and all this hullabaloo to identify who is a "Blanquist" and who is an "orthodox Marxist." Rather we need to know if the tactic recommended by comrade Plekhanov and his Menshevik comrades, which aims to work through the Duma as far as possible, is correct *now*; or, on the contrary, if the tactic we are applying, just like the Bolshevik comrades, is correct — the tactic based on the

and fulfill the concerns of liberalism with socialism (for instance, in Lenin's qualified endorsement of self-determination against national oppression, how Lenin advocated the revolutionary social democratic workers' movement leading role in democratic and liberal political struggles of all kinds).

principle that the centre of gravity is situated outside the Duma, in the active appearance of the popular revolutionary masses. The Menshevik comrades have not yet been able to persuade anyone of the correctness of their views — and no-one will be persuaded any the more when they attach the Blanquist label to their opponents.

This was echoed later by Luxemburg's defense of the Bolshevik Revolution, in one of her last written and published articles, titled "The Russian Tragedy" (1918) (available on-line at: <<http://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1918/09/11.htm>>), where she wrote that,

The awkward position that the Bolsheviks are in today, however, is, together with most of their mistakes, a consequence of basic insolubility of the problem posed to them by the international, above all the German, proletariat. To carry out the dictatorship of the proletariat and a socialist revolution in a single country surrounded by reactionary imperialist rule and in the fury of the bloodiest world war in human history — that is squaring the circle. Any socialist party would have to fail in this task and perish — whether or not it made self-renunciation the guiding star of its policies. We would like to see the spineless jelly-fish, the moaners, the [Menshevik] Axelrods, Dans, or whatever their names are, who, mouths frothing, sing their plaintive song against the Bolsheviks in foreign lands. And — just look! — they have found a sympathetic ear in such heroes as Bernstein and Kautsky; we would like to see these Germans in the Bolsheviks' place! All their superior understanding would rapidly exhaust itself in an alliance with the Milyukovs in domestic policy and with the Entente in foreign policy; to this would be added a conscious renunciation of all socialist reforms, or even of any move in this direction, in domestic policy — all this due to the conscious eunuch wisdom that says Russia is an agricultural country and Russian capitalism is not adequately cooked.

Beginning during the 1905 Russian Revolution, Luxemburg consistently sided with Lenin's Bolsheviks in pre-WWI intra-party disputes, writing one of her more famous pamphlets, *The Mass Strike, the Political Party and the Trade Unions* (1906) while staying with Lenin and other Bolshevik leaders in Finland (Nettl 1966, 355–357). See also Luxemburg's December 20/28, 1918 article, in which she identified her own politics with "Bolshevism," titled "German Bolshevism" or "What is Bolshevism?" (available on-line at: <<http://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1918/12/20.htm>>).

Lukács and Korsch were the first to have rigorously explored the theoretical implications of the shared politics of Luxemburg and Lenin, in their works *History and Class Consciousness* and “Marxism and Philosophy,” both published in 1923. Both Lukács and Korsch approached what they considered the practical and theoretical breakthrough of the 3rd International Marxist communism of Luxemburg and Lenin, by a return to the “Hegelian” roots of Marxism, a reconsideration of its “idealist” dimension, against a “materialist” objectivistic metaphysics (that had lied behind “economism,” for example). This involved, for Lukács and Korsch, an exploration of Lenin and Luxemburg’s break from the objectivistic “vulgar Marxism” of the politics and theory of the 2nd International, exemplified by its premier theorist Karl Kautsky. Lukács’s term for such objectivism was “reification;” Korsch addressed it by way of Marx’s approach to the philosophical problem of “theory and practice,” which Korsch said had become “separated out” in the 2nd International period, their “umbilical cord broken,” whereas Lenin and Luxemburg had tried to bring Marxian theory and practice back into productive tension, and advance their relation through revolutionary Marxist politics.²⁷

27. See Rosa Luxemburg’s praise of the Bolsheviks in her posthumously published pamphlet *The Russian Revolution* (1918) in *The Russian Revolution and Leninism or Marxism* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1961), 80:

All of us are subject to the laws of history. . . . The Bolsheviks have shown that they are capable of everything that a genuine revolutionary party can contribute within the limits of historical possibilities. . . . What is in order is to distinguish the essential from the non-essential, the kernel from the accidental excrescencies in the politics of the Bolsheviks. In the present period, when we face decisive final struggles in all the world, the most important problem of socialism was and is the burning question of our time. It is not a matter of this or that secondary question of tactics, but of the capacity for action of the proletariat, the strength to act, the will to power of socialism as such. In this, Lenin and Trotsky and their friends were the *first*, those who went ahead as an example to the proletariat of the

Lukács and Korsch both attempted to grasp the issue of subjectivity, or the “subjective” dimension of Marxism. But it was this focus on subjectivity from which both Lukács and Korsch broke in their subsequent development, Lukács making his peace with Stalinist “dialectical materialism,” while later attempting to found a “Marxist ontology,” and Korsch distancing himself from what he came to call, pejoratively, the “metaphysical” presuppositions of Marxism.

Lukács and Korsch's trajectory away from their 1923 writings reflected, in their own ways, the return of the “vulgar Marxism” they had sought to supersede, in their theoretical digestion of 1917, a return marked by the Stalinization of the international Communist movement beginning in the 1920s. For example, Adorno was excited to meet Lukács in Vienna in 1925, only to be repulsed at Lukács's disavowal of the work that had so strongly inspired Adorno and his closest colleagues in Frankfurt School critical theory such as Benjamin and Horkheimer. Korsch, who had also, like Lukács, been associated with the Frankfurt School from its inception in 1922, came, by the end of the 1930s, to scorn the Frankfurt critical theorists as “Marxist metaphysicians,” while Lukács wrote of them contemptuously, as having taken up residence at the “Grand Hotel Abyss,” explicitly deriding them for following his early work. In such disavowals could be found evidence for the repression of the problems Lukács and Korsch had sought to

world; they are still the *only ones* up to now who can cry with Hutten: “I have dared!” This is the essential and *enduring* in Bolshevik policy. In *this* sense theirs is the immortal historical service of having marched at the head of the international proletariat with the conquest of political power and the practical placing of the problem of the realization of socialism, and of having advanced mightily the settlement of the score between capital and labor in the entire world. . . . And in *this* sense, the future everywhere belongs to “Bolshevism.”

address in elaborating Marxian theory from Lenin and Luxemburg's revolutionary thought and action in 1917–19.

As a function of subsequent history, the relation between “means” and “ends” for the Marxist radicals Lenin and Luxemburg in the moment of 1917 became obscured. Lenin became caricatured as believing, in some Machiavellian fashion, that the “ends justified the means,” or exemplifying “revolutionary will.” Luxemburg was equally caricatured, as an upholder of principled emancipatory means, in extolling the virtues of practical defeat, seemingly happy to remain a Cassandra of the revolution. Lenin came to stand for “organization,” and Luxemburg for “spontaneity,” travestying both. Biographically, this was crudely resolved in the image of Luxemburg's quixotic martyrdom during the Spartacist uprising of 1919, and in Lenin's illness and subsequent removal from political power at the end of his life, condemned to watch, helpless, the dawn of the Stalinist authoritarianism to which his political ruthlessness and pursuit of revolutionary ends had supposedly led. In either case, rather than a determined investigation of these revolutionary Marxists' thought and action, at the level of the basis for their self-understanding and political judgment, models from which it might have been possible to learn, elaborate and build upon further, they were regarded only as emblems of competing principles, in the abstract. Tactical considerations were falsely generalized into matters of principle. So Lenin's writings and actions were scoured for any hint of authoritarian inhumanity, and Luxemburg's for anything that could be framed for their supposedly more humane compassion. At the same time, even in their being falsely divorced retrospectively, the futility of both their politics was naturalized: it was tacitly understood that neither what Lenin nor Luxemburg aspired to achieve was actually

possible for them to have accomplished. They became, at best, tragically, at worst, monstrously utopian figures.

However, according to Adorno's writing on the legacy of Lenin, Luxemburg, Korsch and Lukács in his last completed book *Negative Dialectics* (1966), this way of approaching 1917 and its significance evinced "dogmatization and thought-taboo."²⁸ The thought and action of Lenin and Luxemburg were approached dogmatically, and their Marxism as well as that of their critical-theoretical inheritors, Lukács, Korsch, Benjamin and Adorno himself, were approached only with a powerful thought-taboo firmly in place: that the revolutionary moment of 1917 was doomed to failure, and that its fate was tragically played out in the character of the revolutionary Marxism of that time. Their Marxism was thus buried, in an attempt to ward off the haunting accusation that it did not fail so much as there was a failure to learn from it. But, according to Adorno, as in the cases of Lukács and Korsch's subsequent developments, after they became convinced of the "errors of their ways," the problematic legacy of 1917 has not been recognized and understood, but only rationalized, in an affirmation of history as it had unfolded.

The Bolshevik Revolution of October 1917 remained a question — the very same question that Lenin and Luxemburg very self-consciously went about trying address in theory and practice — whether it was asked explicitly or not. It was the great tabooed subject, even if that taboo was enforced, either by a mountain of calumny heaped upon it, or the "praise" it earned in Stalinist or "Trotskyist" communist "adherence." For

28. Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: Continuum, 1973), 143.

example, it remained unclear whether the “soviets” or “workers’ councils” that sprung up in the revolutions of 1917–19 could have ever been proven in practice to be an adequate social-political means (for beginning) to overcome capitalism. The Lukács of the revolutionary period had recognized the danger that,

[As Hegel said,] directly before the emergence of something qualitatively new, the old state of affairs gathers itself up into its original, purely general, essence, into its simple totality, transcending and absorbing back into itself all those marked differences and peculiarities which it evinced when it was still viable. . . . [I]n the age of the dissolution of capitalism, the fetishistic categories collapse and it becomes necessary to have recourse to the “natural form” underlying them.²⁹

Lukács thus recognized that the “producers’ democracy” of the “workers’ councils” in the revolutionary “dictatorship of the proletariat” was intrinsically related to, and indeed the political expression of, an intensification of the “reification” of the commodity form. Nevertheless, it seemed that the attempt, by Lenin and Trotsky’s Bolsheviks, to bring “all power to the soviets” in the October Revolution of 1917, and by Luxemburg’s Spartacists in the German Revolution that followed, was important to try to learn from, despite its failure. For this revolutionary moment raised all the haunting questions, and at the most profound levels, of the problematic relationship between capitalism and democracy.

29. Lukács, “Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat,” 208.

Korsch recognized that the revolutions of 1917–19 were the outcome of a “crisis of Marxism” that had previously manifested in the 2nd International, in the turn-of-the-century reformist “revisionist” dispute against Eduard Bernstein, et al., in which the younger generation of radicals, Luxemburg, Lenin and Trotsky first cut their teeth. But, according to Korsch in 1923, this “crisis of Marxism” remained unresolved. The revolutionary moment of 1917 could thus be said to be the highest expression of the “crisis of Marxism,” that Luxemburg, Lenin and Trotsky, and Korsch and Lukács after them, recognized as manifesting the highest expression of the *crisis of capitalism*, in the period of war, revolution, counterrevolution, civil war and reaction that set the stage for subsequent 20th century history. For Adorno, the world never really overcame or even recovered from this crisis of the early 20th century, but only continued to struggle with its still-unresolved aftermath.³⁰ In this sense, 1917 was not, in the self-understanding of its actors and thinkers, an attempt to leap from the realm of necessity, but rather the attempt to advance a necessity, the necessity of social revolution and transformation, to a higher stage, and thus open a new realm of possibility.

30. See, for example, Adorno, “Those Twenties” (1961), in *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*, trans. Henry W. Pickford (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 41–48:

[A] real possibility of a potentially liberated society [in the 1920s and subsequently] . . . only seemed so: already in the twenties, as a consequence of the events of 1919, the decision had fallen against that political potential that, had things gone otherwise, with great probability would have influenced developments in Russia and prevented Stalinism. It is hard to avoid the conclusion [of] this twofold aspect — on the one hand, a world that could have taken a turn for the better and, on the other, the extinguishing of that hope by the establishment of powers that later revealed themselves fully in fascism. (43)

The enigmatic silence that had come to surround the question of 1917 and its problematic legacy was masked by a deafening din of opprobrium meant to prevent hearing it. It remained, as Benjamin put it, an “alarm clock that rings continuously.”³¹ But, the degree to which those who came later did so, the repression of 1917 was achieved only at the cost of a regression that, as Benjamin put it, did not cease to consume the past and the ability to learn from it, ceding the meaning of history and its sacrifices to “the enemy,” and rendering those sacrifices in past struggles vain.³²

Recognizing the nature of the difficulty of 1917, that the problems found in this moment comprised the essence of its potential pertinence, was the first step in recognizing the character of the regression undergone since then. Like a troubling memory in an individual's life that impinges upon consciousness, the memory of 1917 that troubled one's conceptions of social-political possibilities could help reveal the problems one sought to be overcome, the same problems against which Lenin and Luxemburg had

31. Walter Benjamin, “Surrealism,” in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings*, vol. 2, 1927–1930, ed. Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 218.

32. Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History” (1940), in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt and trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1969), 253–264:

To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it “the way it really was” (Ranke). It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger. Historical materialism wishes to retain that image of the past which unexpectedly appears to man singled out by history at a moment of danger. The danger affects both the content of the tradition and its receivers. The same threat hangs over both: that of becoming a tool of the ruling classes. In every era the attempt must be made anew to wrest tradition away from a conformism that is about to overpower it. The Messiah comes not only as the redeemer, he comes as the subduer of Antichrist. Only that historian will have the gift of fanning the spark of hope in the past who is firmly convinced that *even the dead* will not be safe from the enemy if he wins. And this enemy has not ceased to be victorious. (255)

struggled, even if in failure, a brilliant failure from which, according to Adorno, one could not afford to be disinherited.³³

§

33. In an aphorism titled “Bequest,” in *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 1978), Adorno wrote,

If [Walter] Benjamin said [in his “Theses on the Philosophy of History” (1940)] that history had hitherto been written from the standpoint of the victor, and needed to be written from that of the vanquished, we might add that knowledge must indeed present the fatally rectilinear succession of victory and defeat, but should also address itself to those things that were not embraced by this dynamic. . . . It is in the nature of the defeated to appear, in their impotence, irrelevant, eccentric, derisory. What transcends the ruling society is not only the potentiality it develops but also all that did not fit properly into the laws of historical movement. . . . Benjamin’s writings are an attempt in ever new ways to make philosophically fruitful what has not yet been foreclosed by great intentions. The task he bequeathed was not to abandon such an attempt to the estranging enigmas of thought alone, but to bring the intentionless within the realm of concepts: the obligation to think at the same time dialectically and undialectically. (151–152)

Furthermore, in *Negative Dialectics* (1966), trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: Continuum, 1973), Adorno wrote,

Those who chide theory [for being] anachronistic obey the *topos* of dismissing, as obsolete, what remains painful [because it was] thwarted. They thus endorse the course of the world — defying which is the idea of theory alone. . . . If [one] resists oblivion — if he resists the universally demanded sacrifice of a once-gained freedom of consciousness — he will not preach a Restoration in the field of intellectual history. The fact that history has rolled over certain positions will be respected as a verdict on their truth content only by those who agree with Schiller that “world history is the world tribunal.” What has been cast aside but not absorbed theoretically will often yield its truth content only later. It festers as a sore on the prevailing health; this will lead back to it in changed situations. (143–144)

The problem of “Marxism and Philosophy” — Korsch and Adorno on theory and practice

[Marx wrote,] “[Humanity] always sets itself only such problems as it can solve; since, looking at the matter more closely it will always be found that the problem itself arises only when the material conditions for its solution are already present or are at least understood to be in the process of emergence.”³⁴ This dictum is not affected by the fact that a problem which supersedes present relations may have been formulated in an anterior epoch.³⁵

The original publication of Korsch's seminal essay “Marxism and Philosophy” coincided with Lukács's 1923 collection of essays, *History and Class Consciousness*. While Lukács's book has the word “history” in its title, it follows Marx's *Capital* in addressing the problem of social being and consciousness in a primarily “philosophical” and categorial manner, as the subjectivity of the commodity form. Korsch's essay on philosophy in Marxism, by contrast, is actually a historical treatment of the problem from Marx and Engels's time through the 2nd International to the crisis of Marxism and the revolutions of 1917–19. More specifically, it takes up the development and vicissitudes of the relation between theory and practice in the history of Marxism, which is considered *the* “philosophical” problem of Marxism.

34. Karl Marx's Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859).

35. Korsch, “Marxism and Philosophy,” 58.

Independently of one another, both Korsch's and Lukács's 1923 works shared an interest in recovering the Hegelian or "idealist" dimension of Marx's thought and politics.³⁶ Both were motivated to establish the coherence of the Marxist revolutionaries Lenin and Luxemburg, and these 2nd International-era radicals' shared grounding in what Korsch called "Marx's Marxism." Their accomplishment of this is all the more impressive when it is recognized that it was made without benefit of either of the two most important texts in which Marx explicitly addressed the relation of his own thought to Hegel's, the 1844 *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* (first published in 1932) or the notes for *Capital* posthumously published as the *Grundrisse* (1939), and also without access to Lenin's 1914 notebooks on Hegel's *Science of Logic* (1929). Due to a perceived shortcoming in the expounding of revolutionary Marxism, the problem for Korsch and Lukács was interpreting Marxism as both theory and practice, or how the politics of Lenin and Luxemburg (rightly) considered itself "dialectical." Both Lukács and Korsch explicitly sought to provide this missing exposition and elaboration.

Lukács and Korsch were later denounced as "professors" in the Communist International, a controversy that erupted after the deaths of Luxemburg and Lenin. (Another important text of this moment was Lukács's 1924 monograph in eulogy, *Lenin: A Study on the Unity of his Thought*.) In the face of this party criticism, Lukács acquiesced and made his peace with Stalinized "orthodoxy." Eventually disavowing his

36. For excellent interpretation of "idealism" as the philosophical issue being discussed here, namely, in Kant's sense of exploring the *a priori* conditions of possibility for rational subjectivity, see Robert Pippin's work on German Idealism, especially *Hegel's Idealism: The Satisfactions of Self-Consciousness* (Cambridge University Press: 1989), and *The Persistence of Subjectivity: On the Kantian Aftermath* (Cambridge University Press, 2005).

work of 1919–24 as comprising a misguided attempt to “out-Hegel Hegel,” Lukács even attempted to destroy all the existing copies of the unpublished “Tailism and the Dialectic,” his brilliant 1925 defense of *History and Class Consciousness*.³⁷

Korsch responded differently to the party's criticism. Quitting the 3rd International Communist movement entirely, he became associated with the “Left” or “council” communism of Antonie Pannekoek, Paul Mattick, et al. Though making a choice very different from Lukács and distancing himself from official “Marxism-Leninism,” Korsch also came to disavow his earlier argument in “Marxism and Philosophy.” Specifically, he abandoned the attempt to establish the coherence of Lenin's theory and practice with that of Marx, going so far as to critique Marx's own Marxism. Thus, in “The Present State of the Problem of ‘Marxism and Philosophy:’ An Anti-Critique” (1930), Korsch argues that, to the degree Marx shared a common basis with Lenin, this was an expression of limitations in Marx's own critical theory and political practice. Indeed, for Korsch it was a problem of “Marxism” in general, including that of Kautsky and Luxemburg. Ultimately, Korsch called for “going beyond” Marxism.

The complementary, if divergent, trajectories of Korsch and Lukács are indicative of the historical disintegration of the perspective both shared in their writings of 1923. Both had understood the “subjective” aspect of Marxism to have been clarified by Lenin's role in the October Revolution. The figure of Lenin was irreducible, and brought

37. Apparently he failed, since a copy was eventually found in Soviet archives. This remarkable document was translated and published in 2000 as *A Defence of History and Class Consciousness* (London: Verso).

out dimensions of the Marxian project that otherwise lay unacknowledged. As Adorno put it in private discussion with Horkheimer in 1956,

I always wanted to produce a theory that would be faithful to Marx, Engels and Lenin. . . . Marx was too harmless; he probably imagined quite naïvely that human beings are basically the same in all essentials and will remain so. It would be a good idea, therefore, to deprive them of their second nature. He was not concerned with their subjectivity; he probably didn't look into that too closely. The idea that human beings are the products of society down to their innermost core is an idea that he would have rejected as milieu theory. Lenin was the first person to assert this.³⁸

In this discussion, Adorno also proposed to Horkheimer that they “should produce a reworked [version of Marx and Engels's] *Communist Manifesto* that would be ‘strictly Leninist’.”³⁹

No less than Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness*, Korsch's “Marxism and Philosophy” inspired the work of the Marxist critical theorists associated with the Frankfurt School — Horkheimer, Marcuse, Benjamin, and Adorno. But the reputation of

38. Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, “Diskussion über Theorie und Praxis” (1956), in Horkheimer, *Gesammelte Schriften (GAS)* Vol. 19 (*Nachträge, Verzeichnisse und Register*) (S. Fischer, 1996), 69–71; quoted in Detlev Claussen, *Theodor W. Adorno: One Last Genius* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 233.

39. Claussen, 233; Horkheimer, *GAS* 19, 66. Furthermore, while “Marx wrote his critique of the [SPD, German Social-Democratic Party's] Gotha Programme in 1875[,] Adorno had for some time planned to write a critique of the Godesberg Programme [in which the SPD formally renounced Marxism in 1959]” (Rolf Wiggershaus, *The Frankfurt School: Its History, Theories, and Political Significance* [Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995], 598).

Korsch's work has been eclipsed by that of Lukács. What the usual interpretive emphasis on Lukács occludes is that the Frankfurt School writers grappled not only with the problem of Stalinism but "anti-Stalinism" as well.⁴⁰ Both Korsch's and Lukács's post-

40. From Phil Slater, *Origin and Significance of the Frankfurt School: A Marxist Perspective* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977):

[Horkheimer wrote, in "The Authoritarian State" (1940),]

"The concept of a transitional revolutionary dictatorship was in no way intended to mean the monopoly of the means of production by some new elite. Such dangers can be countered by the energy and alertness of the people themselves. . . . [The revolution that ends domination is as far-reaching as the will of the liberated. Any resignation is already a regression into prehistory. . . . The recurrence of political reaction and a new destruction of the beginnings of freedom cannot theoretically be ruled out, and certainly not as long as a hostile environment exists. No patented system worked out in advance can preclude regressions. The modalities of the new society are first found in the process of social transformation.] The theoretical conception which, following its first trail-blazers [such as Lenin and Luxemburg], will show the new society its way — the system of workers' councils — grows out of praxis. The roots of the council system go back to 1871, 1905, and other events. *Revolutionary transformation has a tradition that must continue.*" (66)

The Frankfurt School's respect for [Lenin] was due in large measure to his ability to retain the dynamic unity of party, theory and class, a unity subsequently lost. Marcuse's *Soviet Marxism* [1958] is here representative of the entire Frankfurt School:

"During the Revolution, it became clear to what degree Lenin had succeeded in basing his strategy on the actual class interests and aspirations of the workers and peasants. . . . Then, from 1923 on, the decisions of the leadership increasingly dissociated from the class interests of the proletariat. The former no longer presuppose the proletariat as a revolutionary agent but rather are imposed upon the proletariat and the rest of the underlying population." (66–67)

Looking round for a possible *practical* exponent of [the] views of the Frankfurt School, one immediately encounters the figure of Trotsky. . . . [Trotsky maintained that the bureaucratism of the USSR] completely disregarded Lenin's conception of the dialectical interaction of party and class. . . . [Trotsky wrote that] the Marxist theoretician must still retain the concrete historical perspective of class struggle:

1923 trajectories were critiqued by the Frankfurt School writers.⁴¹ As Adorno put it in *Negative Dialectics* (1966),

“[The causes for the downfall of the Social Democracy and of official Communism must be sought not in Marxist theory and not in the bad qualities of those people who applied it, but in the concrete conditions of the historical process.] It is not a question of counterposing abstract principles, but rather of the struggle of living social forces, with its inevitable ups and downs, with the degeneration of organizations, with the passing of entire generations into discard, and with the necessity which therefore arises of mobilizing fresh forces on a new historical stage. No one has bothered to pave in advance the road of revolutionary upsurge for the proletariat. [With inevitable halts and partial retreats it is necessary to move forward on a road crisscrossed by countless obstacles and covered with the debris of the past.] Those who are frightened by this had better step aside” [Trotsky, “To Build Communist Parties and an International Anew,” July 1933].

The Frankfurt School, while upholding a number of principles (which became “abstract” in their passivity and isolation), did indeed, in this sense, step aside. (68–70)

One is not without some justification in asking whether Council Communism could perhaps be a concrete embodiment of many of the principles of the Frankfurt School. . . . [But] the Council Communists did not point out the soviets’ [workers’ councils’] own responsibility for the collapse of the revolutionary wave of 1918–19. (73)

41. The reverse was also true. Korsch, in distancing himself from his 1923 work that was so seminal for the Frankfurt School writers, also came to critique them:

[Korsch] intended to try and interest Horkheimer and the [Frankfurt] Institute [for Social Research] in Pannekoek’s book *Lenin as Philosopher* (1938) [which traced the bureaucratization of the USSR back to the supposedly crude materialism of Lenin’s 1909 book *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*]. . . . [Either] Korsch [or, the Director of the Institute, Horkheimer himself] would write a review for [the Institute’s journal] the *Zeitschrift*. . . . Yet no such review appeared. . . . [Korsch suffered] total disillusionment with the Institute and their “impotent philosophy.” Korsch [was] particularly bitter about the “metaphysician Horkheimer” (Slater, 73–74).

The record for Korsch’s deteriorating relations with the Frankfurt Institute in exile is found in his private letters to Paul Mattick, editor of the journal *Living Marxism: International Council Correspondence*.

First Karl Korsch, later the functionaries of Diamat [Dialectical Materialism] have objected, that the turn to nonidentity would be, due to its immanent-critical and theoretical character, an insignificant nuance of neo-Hegelianism or of the historically obsolete Hegelian Left; as if the Marxist critique of philosophy had dispensed with this, while simultaneously the East cannot do without a statutory Marxist philosophy. The demand for the unity of theory and praxis has irresistibly debased the former to a mere underling; removing from it what it was supposed to have achieved in that unity. The practical visa-stamp demanded from all theory became the censor's stamp. In the famed unity of theory-praxis, the former was vanquished and the latter became non-conceptual, a piece of the politics which it was supposed to lead beyond; delivered over to power. The liquidation of theory by dogmatization and the ban on thinking contributed to bad praxis; that theory wins back its independence, is the interest of praxis itself. The relationship of both moments to each other is not settled for once and for all, but changes historically. Today, since the hegemonic bustle cripples and denigrates theory, theory testifies in all its powerlessness against the former by its mere existence.⁴²

In this passage Adorno was addressing, not the Korsch of the 1923 “Marxism and Philosophy,” but rather the later Korsch of the 1930 “Anti-Critique,” distanced from the

42. Translated by Dennis Redmond, 2001, at <<http://www.efn.org/~dredmond/ndtrans.html>>. The first sentence of this passage, mentioning Korsch, is inexplicably missing from the 1973 Continuum edition of *Negative Dialectics* translated by E. B. Ashton (see “Relation to Left-wing Hegelianism,” 143).

problem Adorno sought to address, of the constitutive non-identity of theory and practice. Adorno thought, like Korsch and Lukács in the early 1920s, that Lenin and Luxemburg's theoretical self-understanding, together with their revolutionary political practice, comprised the most advanced attempt yet to work through precisely this non-identity.⁴³

In Adorno's terms, both the later Korsch and official "Diamat" (including Lukács) assumed "identity thinking," an identity of effective theory and practice, rather than their articulated non-identity, to which Korsch had drawn attention earlier in "Marxism and Philosophy." Such constitutive non-identity was, according to Korsch's earlier essay, expressed symptomatically, in the subsistence of "philosophy" as a distinct activity in the historical epoch of Marxism. This was because it expressed a genuine historical need. The continued practice of philosophy was symptomatic expression of the need to transcend and supersede philosophy. Instead of this recognition of the actuality of the symptom of philosophical thinking, of the mutually constitutive separation of theory and

43. In a lecture of November 23, 1965, on "Theory and Practice," Adorno said,

I should like to say that there is no intention here of advocating a relapse into contemplation, as was found in the great idealist philosophies and ultimately even in Hegel, despite the great importance of practice in the Hegelian system. . . . The late Karl Korsch . . . criticized Horkheimer and myself even more sharply, already in America and also later on, after the publication of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. His objection was that we had regressed to the standpoint of Left Hegelianism. This does not seem right to me because the standpoint of pure contemplation can no longer be sustained. Though we should note, incidentally, that the polarity Marx constructs between pure contemplation on the one hand and his own political philosophy on the other does only partial justice to the intentions of Left Hegelianism. This is a difficult question . . . although we cannot deny the impressive political instincts which alerted Marx to the presence of the retrograde and, above all, nationalist potential in such thinkers as Bruno Bauer, Stirner and Ruge. (Adorno, *Lectures on Negative Dialectics* [Cambridge, U.K.: Polity Press, 2008], 52–53.)

practice, Korsch, by embracing council communism and shunning Marxian theory in the years after writing his famously condemned work, succumbed to what Adorno termed “identity thinking.” By assuming the identity of theory and practice, or of social being and consciousness in the workers’ movement, Korsch sought their “reconciliation,” instead of discerning and critically grasping their persistent antagonism, as would necessarily be articulated in any purported politics of emancipation.

Just as Adorno tried to hold fast to the Lukács of *History and Class Consciousness* in the face of Lukács’s own subsequent disavowals, the first sentence of Adorno’s *Negative Dialectics* reiterated Korsch’s statement in “Marxism and Philosophy” that “Philosophy cannot be abolished without being realized” (97):

Philosophy, which once seemed outmoded, remains alive because the moment of its realization was missed. The summary judgment that it had merely interpreted the world is itself crippled by resignation before reality, and becomes a defeatism of reason after the transformation of the world failed.⁴⁴

Philosophy’s end was its *self*-abolition. What Korsch prefaced to his statement helps to illuminate what Adorno meant. Korsch specified precisely what “the realization of philosophy” involves:

Just as political action is not rendered unnecessary by the economic action of a revolutionary class, so intellectual action is not rendered unnecessary

44. Translated by Redmond (2001).

by either political or economic action. On the contrary it must be carried through to the end in theory and practice, as revolutionary scientific criticism and agitational work before the seizure of state power by the working class, and as scientific organisation and ideological dictatorship after the seizure of state power. If this is valid for intellectual action against the forms of consciousness which define bourgeois society in general, it is especially true of philosophical action. Bourgeois consciousness necessarily sees itself as apart from the world and independent of it, as pure critical philosophy and impartial science, just as the bourgeois State and bourgeois Law appear to be above society. This consciousness must be philosophically fought by the revolutionary materialistic dialectic, which is the philosophy of the working class. This struggle will only end when the whole of existing society and its economic basis have been totally overthrown in practice, and this consciousness has been totally surpassed and abolished in theory. (97)

This was the original Marxist “defense” of philosophy that Adorno reiterated in *Negative Dialectics*. Over four decades previously, in 1923, Korsch had explicitly tied it to Lenin’s treatment of the problem of the state in *The State and Revolution* (1917). Just as, with the overcoming of capitalism, the necessity of the state would “wither,” and not be done away with at one stroke, so too the necessity of “philosophical” thinking as it appeared in the epoch of capital would dissolve. This side of emancipation, “theoretical”

self-reflection, thought's reflecting on its own conditions of possibility, remains necessary, precisely because it expresses an unresolved social-historical problem.

In "Marxism and Philosophy," Korsch analyzed Marxism as emergent from and historically continuous with the "revolt of the Third Estate," of the "bourgeois" liberal-democratic revolutionary epoch that preceded it. Korsch was concerned with Marx's continuity with Kant and Hegel. A problem that occurred to them, namely, of theory and practice, repeated itself, if in a more acute way, for Marx.⁴⁵ It is a problem of the philosophy of revolution, or of the "theory of social revolution." This problem presents itself only insofar as it is conceived of as part and parcel of the social-historical process of transformation and not as contemplation from without. As it was for Hegel, Marx's fundamental "philosophical" issue is this: How is it possible, if however problematic, to be a self-conscious agent of change, if what is being transformed includes oneself, or, more precisely, an agency that transforms conditions both for one's practical grounding and for one's theoretical self-understanding in the process of acting?

Korsch addressed the question of revolution as a problem indicated by the liquidation and reconstitution of "philosophy" itself after the crisis and "decay of Hegelianism" ("Marxism and Philosophy," 29). Why did philosophical development take a hiatus by 1848 and only appear to resume afterwards? What changed about "philosophy" in the interim? For Korsch recognized there was a curious blank spot or gap in the history of philosophy from the 1840s–60s, the period of Marxism's emergence. Korsch divided the relation of Marx's thought to philosophy roughly into three periods:

45. On the Hegelian issue of theory and practice, see Pippin, *Hegel's Practical Philosophy: Rational Agency as Ethical Life* (Cambridge University Press: 2008).

pre-1848, circa 1848, and post-1848. These periods were distinguished by the different ways they related theory and practice: the first period was the critique of philosophy calling for its simultaneous realization and self-abolition; the second, the sublimation of philosophy in revolution; and the third, the recrudescence of the problem of relating theory and practice.

Korsch's third period in the history of Marxism extended into what he termed the "crisis of Marxism" beginning in the 1890s with the reformist "revisionist" dispute of Eduard Bernstein et al. against the "orthodox Marxism" of the 2nd International — when the "revolutionary Marxism" of Luxemburg and Lenin originated — and continuing into the acutely revolutionary period of 1917–19, from the Russian Revolution of 1917 through the German Revolution and civil war of 1918–19, to the Hungarian Soviet Republic (in which Lukács participated) and the workers' council movement in Italy (in which Antonio Gramsci participated) in 1919.

It was in this revolutionary period of the early 20th century that "Marx's Marxism" circa 1848 regained its saliency, but in ways that Korsch thought remained not entirely resolved as a matter of relating theory to practice. In "Marxism and Philosophy," Korsch found that while Lenin and Luxemburg had tried to better relate Marxian theory and practice than 2nd International Marxism had done, they had recognized this as an ongoing task and aspiration and not already achieved in some finished sense. In the words of the epigraph from Lenin that introduces Korsch's 1923 essay, "We must organize a systematic study of the Hegelian dialectic from a materialist standpoint" ("On the Significance of Militant Materialism," 1922). If Marxism continued to be subject to a "Hegelian dialectic," thus requiring the "historical materialist" analysis and explanation

that Korsch sought to provide of it, this was because it was not itself the reconciled unity of theory and practice but remained, as theory, the critical reflection on the *problem* of relating theory and practice — which in turn prompted further theoretical development as well as practical political advances. As Adorno put it to Walter Benjamin in a letter of August 2, 1935,

The fetish character of the commodity is not a fact of consciousness; rather it is dialectical, in the eminent sense that it produces consciousness. . . . [P]erfection of the commodity character in a Hegelian self-consciousness inaugurates the explosion of its phantasmagoria.⁴⁶

Marxism was caught in the “phantasmagoria” of capital, while “exploding” it from within.

For the Korsch of “Marxism and Philosophy,” Lenin and Luxemburg’s “revolutionary Marxism” was bound up in the “crisis of Marxism,” while advancing it to a new stage. As Korsch commented,

This transformation and development of Marxist theory has been effected under the peculiar ideological guise of a return to the pure teaching of original or true Marxism. Yet it is easy to understand both the reasons for this guise and the real character of the process which is concealed by it.

What theoreticians like Rosa Luxemburg in Germany and Lenin in Russia

46. Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings* Vol. 3 (1935–38) (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 54–56; Adorno et al., *Aesthetics and Politics* (London: Verso, 1980), 111–113.

have done, and are doing, in the field of Marxist theory is to liberate it from the inhibiting traditions of [Social Democracy]. They thereby answer the practical needs of the new revolutionary stage of proletarian class struggle, for these traditions weighed “like a nightmare” on the brain of the working masses whose objectively revolutionary socioeconomic position no longer corresponded to these [earlier] evolutionary doctrines. The apparent revival of original Marxist theory in the Third International is simply a result of the fact that in a new revolutionary period not only the workers’ movement itself, but the theoretical conceptions of communists which express it, must assume an explicitly revolutionary form. This is why large sections of the Marxist system, which seemed virtually forgotten in the final decades of the nineteenth century, have now come to life again. It also explains why the leader of the Russian Revolution [Lenin] could write a book a few months before October [*The State and Revolution*, 1917] in which he stated that his aim was “in the first place to *restore* the correct Marxist theory of the State.” . . . When Lenin placed the same question theoretically on the agenda at a decisive moment, this was an early indication that the internal connection of theory and practice within revolutionary Marxism had been consciously re-established. (67–68)

Korsch thus established the importance for what Adorno called the “historically changing” relation of theory and practice, making sense of their vicissitudes in the history of the politics of revolutionary Marxism. Furthermore, by establishing the character of

the crisis of Marxism as a matter of theoretical reflection, Korsch re-established the role of consciousness in a Marxian conception of social revolution, why the abandonment or distancing of the practical perspective of revolution necessitates a degradation of theory.

Korsch and the 1960s “New Left” — the problem of “Leninism”

The translation and publication of Korsch's “Marxism and Philosophy” in 1970 was an event for the Anglophone New Left. As Adolph Reed wrote,

Leninism's elitism and denigration of consciousness had increasingly troubled me, but I feared I had no recourse without sacrificing a radical commitment. Korsch opened an entirely new vista, the “hidden dimension” of Western Marxism, and led to Lukács, a serious reading of Marcuse, and eventually the critical theoretical tradition.⁴⁷

Reed's brief comment is cryptic and can be taken in (at least) two opposed ways, either that Korsch provided the redemption of Lenin or an alternative to Leninism.

Such 1960s-era “New Left” ambivalence about “Leninism” can be found in attenuated form in Fred Halliday's Translator's Introduction. In it, Halliday sticks closely to a biographical narrative of Korsch's work, seeking to bring out the coherence of Korsch's early and later periods, before and after “Marxism and Philosophy,” while acknowledging the “erratic” character of Korsch's thought over the course of his life, and

47. Reed, “Paths to Critical Theory,” in Sohnya Sayres, *Social Text* Staff, eds., *The 60s Without Apology* (University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 257–258. Reed's essay was originally published in *Social Text* 9/10 (Spring–Summer 1984).

calling Korsch's tragic trajectory away from Lenin and Luxemburg's revolutionary Marxism a "fatal consequence" of the failure of the revolution (26). By casting the issue of Korsch's work as "interesting" (if "erratic"), Halliday remained somewhat equivocal about the relevance of Korsch's key text, "Marxism and Philosophy," and thus about the continued pertinence of the revolutionary Marxism that Lenin shared with Luxemburg. What remained unresolved?

Halliday also suggests that Korsch's pre-1917 interests in the "syndicalist movement," the "positive content and actively democratic aspects of socialism, by contrast with the orthodox Marxism of the 2nd International which he thought defined itself merely negatively as the abolition of the capitalist mode of production" (7–8), came to be expressed some years after the October Revolution, which witnessed "the decline in activity and the need for more critical reflection." At that time, Korsch returned to his earlier concerns, but with the tragic consequence of "lapsing into ultra-leftism and becoming cut off from the working class" (26).

Perhaps the motivation for Halliday's 1970 translation and publication of Korsch's "Marxism and Philosophy" was an affinity, after 1968, with Korsch's moment of "critical reflection" circa 1923. It may have expressed Halliday's hope that Korsch's further trajectory and fate might be avoided by the 1960s "New Left." In the wake of 1968, Halliday and others wanted to avoid the choice of either ultra-Leftism ("Luxemburgism") and "becoming cut off from the working class," or official "Leninism," and the 1923 Korsch seemed to provide a way out, through specific reflection on the problem of revolutionary political means and ends, in terms of articulating theory and practice.

Forgetting the theory-practice problem — Korsch on spontaneity vs. organization and 1848 vs. 1917

In his 1930 “Anti-Critique” of the 1923 “Marxism and Philosophy,” Korsch wrote,

When the SPD became a “Marxist” party (a process completed with the Erfurt Programme written by Kautsky and Bernstein in 1891) a gap developed between its highly articulated revolutionary “Marxist” theory and a practice that was far behind this revolutionary theory; in some respects it directly contradicted it. This gap was in fact obvious, and it later came to be felt more and more acutely by all the vital forces in the Party (whether on the Left or Right) and its existence was denied only by the orthodox Marxists of the Centre. This gap can easily be explained by the fact that in this historical phase “Marxism,” while formally accepted by the workers’ movement, was from the start not a true *theory*, in the sense of being “nothing other than a general expression of the real historical movement” (Marx). On the contrary it was always an *ideology* that had been adopted “from outside” in a pre-established form. In this situation such “orthodox Marxists” as Kautsky and Lenin made a permanent virtue out of a temporary necessity. They energetically defended the idea that socialism can only be brought to the workers “from outside,” by bourgeois intellectuals who are allied to the workers’

movement. This was also true of Left radicals like Rosa Luxemburg.
(113–115)

According to Korsch, the Revolution of 1848 and the role of the workers' movement in it had provided “a rational solution for all the mysteries” of the contradiction between theory and practice that later 2nd International Marxists tried to sidestep by simply adopting Marxism as an ideology. Korsch commented that,

[A]lthough [2nd International Marxism's] effective practice was now on a *broader basis* than before, it had in no way reached the *heights* of general and theoretical achievement earlier attained by the revolutionary movement and proletarian class struggle on a *narrower basis*. This height was attained during the final phase of the first major capitalist cycle that came to an end towards 1850. (116)

Since the mid-19th century, Marxism, according to the Korsch of the “Anti-Critique,” had grown ideological. Even Marx's *Capital* expressed a certain degeneration:

[T]he *theory* of Marx and Engels was progressing towards an ever higher level of theoretical perfection although it was no longer directly related to the *practice* of the worker's movement. (117)

In other words, the mature theory of Marx (and its development by Engels and their epigones) was itself “anachronistic” and thus unassimilable by the resurgent workers' movement of the last third of the 19th century.

Korsch abandoned his 1923 conception of Lenin and Luxemburg's rearticulation of 1848 in the theory and practice of 1917–19, the “transformation and development of Marxist theory . . . effected under the peculiar ideological guise of a return to the pure teaching of original or true Marxism.” Marx's Marxism, especially in his mature writings, could only be the elaboration of 1848, in isolation from the workers' subsequent actual political practice, to which it became ideologically blind and blinding. No adequate “theory,” that is, no “general expression of the real historical movement,” had emerged since. This non-identity and divergence of theory and practice that began in the period of Marx's maturity and continued into the 20th century meant, for the Korsch of the 1930s, that Marxism, even in its most revolutionary forms, as with Lenin and Luxemburg, had developed, not to express, but rather to constrain the workers' movement. Marxism had become an ideology whose value could only be relative, not qualitatively superior to others.⁴⁸ When he died in 1961, Korsch was working on a study

48. Such eclecticism on the Left has only deepened and become more compounded since Korsch's time, especially since the 1960s. However Marx may come up for periodic reconsideration, certain questions central to the Marxian problematic remain obscured. As Fredric Jameson has written,

A Marx revival seems to be under way, predating the current [2007–09] disarray on Wall Street, even though no clear-cut political options yet seem to propose themselves. . . . The big ideological issues — anarchism, the party, economic planning, social classes — are still mainly avoided, on the grounds that they remind too many people of Communist propaganda. Such a reminder is unwanted, not so much because it is accompanied by the memory of deaths and violence . . . as simply and less dramatically because such topics now appear boring. (“Sandblasting Marx,” *New Left Review* 55 [January–February 2009].)

For further discussion of the fluctuating currency and fortunes of Marxian approaches as a feature of modern history, see my “Symptomology: Historical Transformations in Social-Political Context,” *The Platypus Review* 12 (May 2009).

of Marx's rival in the 1st International Workingmen's Association, the anarchist Mikhail Bakunin.⁴⁹

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49. A. R. Giles-Peter, "Karl Korsch: A Marxist Friend of Anarchism," *Red & Black* (Australia) 5 (April 1973). (Available on-line at: <<http://www.geocities.com/capitolHill/Lobby/2379/korsh.htm>>.) According to Giles-Peter, Korsch came to believe that the "basis of the revolutionary attitude in the modern bourgeois epoch would be an ethic Marx would have rejected as 'anarchist'," and thus "explicitly rejected the elements of Marxism which separate it from anarchism."

As Korsch himself put it, in "Ten Theses on Marxism Today" (1950), translated by Giles-Peter in *Telos* 26 (Winter 1975–76) (available on-line at: <<http://libcom.org/library/ten-theses-korsch>>),

Marx is today only one among the numerous precursors, founders and developers of the socialist movement of the working class. No less important are the so-called Utopian Socialists from Thomas More to the present. No less important are the great rivals of Marx, such as Blanqui, and his sworn enemies, such as Proudhon and Bakunin. No less important, in the final result, are the more recent developments such as German revisionism, French syndicalism, and Russian Bolshevism.

Whereas Korsch in 1923 had grasped the essential and vital if transformed continuity between Marx and his precursors in the "revolutionary movement of the Third Estate" of the bourgeois liberal-democratic revolutions, by 1950 he wrote:

The following points are particularly critical for Marxism: (a) its dependence on the underdeveloped economic and political conditions in Germany and all the other countries of central and eastern Europe where it was to have political relevance; (b) its unconditional adherence to the political forms of the bourgeois revolution; (c) the unconditional acceptance of the advanced economic conditions of England as a model for the future development of all countries and as objective preconditions for the transition to socialism; to which one should add; (d) the consequences of its repeated desperate and contradictory attempts to break out of these conditions.