

intertwined with theological themes. The editors underline that Rose's broken middle revels in 'stressing the gap between theory and practice, which strain towards each other'. This proposes that Rose's entire oeuvre should be considered a critical Marxist project.

Both Osborne and Gorman's critiques are convincing, the former arguing that the link between Rose's Hegelian Absolute to theological themes undermines critical Marxist readings of her entire oeuvre, and the latter stressing that a hard break in Rose's early and late work mirrors the ambivalences in how Adorno related to material politics. They are persuasive mainly because, like Adorno, Rose did indeed have ambivalence in her own thought, in her case related to both politics and theology. And Rose did indeed ultimately fail to achieve, in Gorman's words, 'a

politics of revolutionary transformation.' Investigating Rose's place in Marxist modernisms, critical Marxisms and their afterlives is not a question of strictly categorising her as a thinker, just as the continuous interest in Adorno partially stems from the resistance his isms, aphorias and melancholy potentials poses towards strict categorisation. This parallels how Rose sees the Frankfurt School thinkers discussed in *Marxist Modernism* as hotly deliberating the potential of modernisms and getting much wrong. Yet she concludes that we nevertheless profit from their debates. Rose's fraught legacy asks who and what is allowed to be included in the debate on her place in Marxist thought, provocatively contributing to an ongoing conversation in constellation.

Rachel Pafe

## Adorno or Lukács?

Gillian Rose, *Marxist Modernism: Introductory Lectures on the Frankfurt School and Critical Theory* (London: Verso, 2024) 176pp., £17.99 pb., 978 1 80429 011 8

The publication of Gillian Rose's lectures on the Frankfurt School from 1979 gives us the opportunity to evaluate Rose's work and the legacy of the Frankfurt School. Rose's broadly positive account of the Frankfurt School, especially the work of Theodor Adorno, allows us to revisit an interpretation of the Frankfurt School that has become widespread.

The legacy of Rose has been shaped by her often dense and difficult philosophical work combined with the dramatic events of her life – an early death from cancer aged 48 in 1995, the late conversion to Anglicanism, and the relationships detailed in her memoir *Love's Work* (1995). That later work, re-published recently in the UK by Penguin Classics and in the US by NYRB books, has probably done the most to shape her image and legacy.

In theoretical terms she inhabits a complex and unusual position. While these lectures give the impression of a partisan of the Frankfurt School, her first book, *The Melancholy Science: An Introduction to the Thought of T W Adorno* (1978), offered some criticisms of the work of Adorno. It would be her 1981 book *Hegel Contra Sociology* that proved to be her most important work and

which cemented her position as a trenchant Hegelian critic of modern philosophy. Convincingly dismissing Althusser in a few pages, the book lambasted the baleful influence of neo-Kantianism on contemporary sociology and philosophy. This is a work of great complexity, but also importance. Compared to many of the recent Hegel 'revivals', such as that claimed by Slavoj Žižek, Rose's work is a model of rigour and analysis. She places Hegel's speculative mode as central and wields that mode as a powerful critical weapon.

After that Rose published a series of books that critique contemporary thought: *The Dialectic of Nihilism* (1984), *The Broken Middle* (1992), *Judaism and Modernity* (1993), and *Mourning Becomes the Law* (1996). While still intransigently criticising the thinkers associated with post-structuralism, these works showed an increasing engagement with religious thought, notably that of Kierkegaard. Rose's trajectory as a thinker was, of course, violently interrupted by her illness and death, but we can see an increasing turn to religious thought to heal the 'broken middle' of modern philosophy. In a way Rose remains with the division of her early reading that brought

her into philosophy: Plato's *The Republic* and Pascal's *Pensées*.

These lectures are, in fact, somewhat anomalous to this trajectory. Given in 1979 at the University of Sussex shortly after the publication of *The Melancholy Science* they lack that book's critical bite and show little sign of the rapid turn to Hegel. In fact, what we have here is a fluent account of the Frankfurt School that tells, what is by now, a familiar story. Rose is keen to emphasise two things: the convergence of Marxism and modernism in the Frankfurt School and the importance of the thought of Adorno for its thinking of reification (the turning of social relations into things or commodities) as operating at all levels of society.

The lectures are presented as discussions of the major figures, from Lukács to Adorno, via Bloch, Benjamin and Brecht. According to the editors they give us a more accessible Rose and certainly the tone is more informal and pedagogic than her other published works. The lectures are heavily focused on the Frankfurt School thinkers as analysts of culture, particularly literature and music. The claim is that both Marxism and modernism converge on the need to produce the new to match (or exceed) the development of capitalist society. They share, according to Rose, a common need for innovation. The fusion of Marxism and modernism sometimes leads Rose into errors, as when she supposes that the thinker Ernst Bloch is a composer, confusing him with Ernest Bloch. Her model is Theodor W. Adorno, who is not only a thinker of Marxism as modernism but also a composer and pianist. Rose goes even further by arguing that Adorno's contributions to Thomas Mann's novel *Doctor Faustus* elevate him almost to the status of co-author.

In the story of Marxism and modernism that follows Georg Lukács is the villain and Adorno the hero. Lukács has an honorable role for his discussion of the crisis of the epic and historical periodisation in his early pre-Marxist *Theory of the Novel* (1914) and for his pioneering discussion of commodity fetishism in *History and Class Consciousness* (1923). After that, however, Lukács has nothing to add, or less than nothing. His invocation of the party as the solution to commodity fetishism is dismissed by Rose without putting anything significant in its place and without considering Lukács's own self-criticism. His later turn to realism and hostility to modernism is seen as hopelessly retrograde and Stalinist. Realism is equated

to an accommodation with the powers that be and as an endorsement of a conservative ideology, while modernism is seen as a resistance to the culture industry and a radical alternative.



Rose begins her story of Marxist modernism with Ernst Bloch who, while not a member of the Frankfurt School, set it on its way with his embrace of the modernist aesthetics of expressionism. In fact, Rose claimed he 'escaped' Stalinism, when he lived in accommodation with it in the GDR until 1956. This error is all part of the need to blame the later Lukács for being a Stalinist thinker while exculpating the rest of the Frankfurt School. The importance of Bloch, for Rose, is that he presents a vision of revolution as explosive, challenges a model of history as linear, and celebrates Expressionism as the aesthetic of this explosive disruption. Rose certainly argues that Bloch is too extreme in his position and suggests he and Lukács are opposed in ways which miss the core concerns. She does conclude, however, that whatever his errors in emphasising the irrational and decline, Bloch is right in his argument for the non-linear vision of history. The problem is that there is little justification given for this argument.

Walter Benjamin is treated more critically than he usually is in accounts of the Frankfurt School. His embrace of the potentials of technology and popular culture is not treated as alternative to Adorno's high modernism but as a regression that is *too* hopeful. This faith in the potentials of technology is also used as a critical point against Brecht and his influence on Benjamin. While Brecht is called a 'saint' by Rose, she argues that he too is limited in his understanding of a critical realism. Brecht is treated as philosophically naïve and most useful for his criticisms of Lukács. Once again, Adorno is the more likely saint, as his account of Brecht is, for Rose, the best integration of the possibilities and limitations of Brecht's aesthetics.

What is Adorno's position? The importance of Adorno is his argument that commodity fetishism occupies all the levels of the art work, from its genesis to its consumption. There is no easy way out, although we might wonder if there is any way out? The dominance of commodity fetishism is used by Rose to explain Adorno's notorious hostility to popular culture, especially his essay on jazz, but also Adorno's critical remarks on modernism as well. While this is true the difficulty is that there is an imbalance in the account, in which high modernism offers more scope for resistance to commodity fetishism than does popular culture, which gets short shrift. A few times Adorno does discuss popular culture as a site of resistance, but this often seems to be for residual or archaic elements. Rose complicates the image of Adorno's elitism, but whether we can say she truly rescues him from it remains in question. The asymmetry of Adorno's account, and his tendency to see resistance in what lies at the edges of capitalist culture, leave us with an elitism that is only more refined.

The editor's offer a useful phrase when they suggest that Adorno's position amounts to an "aporetic" Marxism'. What this means is that Adorno does not resolve the contradictions of capitalist society or see the resolution of those contradictions in socialism as possible. Instead, he traces the aporias, the irresolvable contradictions, as the sites of resistance. In this way, with no grounding in the contradictions of reality, Marxism becomes a matter of faith in the face of despair and defeat. There is no doubt that Adorno recognised the deep sense of defeat in the post-war period, but being unable to escape that he left us with no exit.

Rose's *Hegel Contra Sociology* aimed to resolve the impasses of the Frankfurt School, including Adorno, by a new speculative thinking inspired by Hegel. She now took a more critical line on the inability of the Frankfurt School to transcend the limits of capitalist society. Rose also used Hegel to criticise Marx, arguing that he failed to grasp the centrality of culture as a mediating instance. The continuity with Rose's earlier work lies in the attention to culture, but now Rose argues that Adorno is unable to grasp history and abstraction, which are replaced with a Nietzschean 'morality of method'. Adorno repeats the problem of the Lukács of *History and Class Consciousness* of imposing an abstract solution on the problem of reification. If Lukács imposed the party as solution, Adorno imposes this Nietzschean method as a solution. Instead, Adorno's negative dialectics needs to be replaced by a Hegelian speculative dialectics.

The problem is that Rose limits the speculative dialectic to a cultural and phenomenological form. The speculative dialectic is detached from Hegel's metaphysical rationalism, and specifically detached from an objective logic of Being (detailed in Hegel's *Science of Logic*). It is also a reading that does not go into the dialectic of nature. Leaving the dialectic unable to deal with first and last things will then leave Rose vulnerable to them being dealt with by theology.

To return to *Marxist Modernism*, we can note that the dismissal of Lukács and the choice of Adorno creates a difficulty. This is especially true of the dismissal of the later Lukács, who makes powerful criticisms of his own earlier works, both the existentialism of *The Theory of the Novel* and the revolutionary Romanticism of *History and Class Consciousness*, which chime with Rose's doubts. But all Rose can see in the later Lukács is his compromises with Stalinism, his focus on realism as a misunderstanding of modernism, his lack of attention to style, and an inability to grasp capitalist society. This is most evident in her discussion of Lukács's *The Destruction of Reason* (1952), in which she repeats Adorno's criticisms, including the unfounded claim that Lukács calls Freud a fascist. While there are problematic Stalinist elements in *The Destruction of Reason* there are also powerful criticisms of irrationalism, especially of the work of Nietzsche, that the Frankfurt School often treated less than critically.

While it is easy to dismiss the later Lukács, his preference for Thomas Mann over Franz Kafka is one that



most would disagree with, we might pause with his realism. First, we need to understand the turn to realism as an answer to Lukács's earlier existentialism and Romanticism (as well as these traits in the later Frankfurt School). Realism is intended to grasp reality, not just as it is but also as it is contradictory and dynamic. For Lukács, following Marx, capitalism is a development that we need to transcend and we need to do so because capitalism cannot resolve its contradictions on its own terms. The power of realism, as an aesthetic, is that it helps us understand this reality. The second point is we need to grasp why Lukács criticises modernism and not assume modernism is just right, as Rose seems to do. For Lukács modernism reflects capitalist reality, but it only offers a limited image of this reality. Like Adorno, it tends to produce an aporetic image of capitalism as a set of unresolvable contradictions.

The issue of Stalinism is real. Lukács agreed with Stalin's argument for socialism in one country and was complicit in Stalinist terror. In terms of realism, Rose argues that 'Lukács and Stalin developed the concept of socialist realism', which suggests a bizarre working arrangement that did not exist. Certainly, Lukács did think realism and socialist realism was the correct aesthetic path. He also argued, after Stalin's death, that the Stalinist version of socialist realism was a kind of revolutionary Romanticism, not actually a realism. For Lukács the cure for the Stalinist version of realism was not less realism but more. It would only be by seeing the contradictory elements of the Soviet system that we could also transcend those limits as well.

This is not to minimize Lukács's compromises with Stalinism, but we must also recognise his later contestation of Stalinism through a return to Lenin. It is, however, to argue that there is more to realism than Rose is inclined to accept. This is also to challenge the broader cultural narrative of 'Marxist modernism' that has come to be the accepted framing for the Frankfurt School. Now modernism itself has receded into the historical distance and been absorbed into the functioning of what Adorno and Horkheimer called 'the culture industry' perhaps we can deepen some of the criticisms Rose poses through the concept of realism. While Rose dismisses realism as a critical tool for its lack of attention to style, a criticism from within modernism, we could ask if the broader remit of realism might draw our attention to the limits of

modernism in a more radical way. This is especially true of the point Lukács makes of modernism as a mirror of capitalist reality that can imagine no way beyond reality except in a mystical escape. The oscillation of modernism and the avant-garde between a technophilia and a mysticism is indicative of its inability to grasp the dynamics of capitalist reality as contradictory and transitory. Instead, realism suggests the objectivity of capitalist forms, their inevitable crisis, as well as the necessity that we mediate that sense of crisis through subjectivity.

In this way Lukács's realism answers the problem of his early existentialism and tendency to see the world as hopeless, by arguing that we need to understand the objective dynamics of capitalism and move beyond the sense of crisis and our own despair. It also moves beyond his Romantic invocation of the party as solution in *History and Class Consciousness*. Certainly, his later realism does not mean the abandonment of the party as the necessary collective mediator of social reality, but this party itself has to be attentive to the dynamics of that reality. In literary terms, this is why Lukács turns to the critical or bourgeois realism of the nineteenth century, especially Balzac, as a model. While Balzac is a reactionary, as Lukács knows, as such he is acutely sensitive to social change and tries to map that social change in his sequence of novels grouped as *The Human Comedy*, which provide a rich collective portrait of French society. In the same way a future socialist realism will be more confident in the rise of socialism as a solution, but it will not present this solution as overcoming reality through an act of will. This was the problem of Stalinist socialism, which Lukács would argue was not realistic enough in its hymning of shock workers or the wisdom of Stalin as the means to overcome impassés in social reality. In fact, Lukács would turn to Solzhenitsyn's *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, and his other novels, as realist critiques of Stalinism.

All this suggests that we turn a more critical eye on the work of Gillian Rose and of the Frankfurt School in the contemporary moment. The common recognition that Rose's most important philosophical work is *Hegel Contra Sociology* needs to be reinforced and developed through grasping some of the limits of that work. The scope of the Hegelian project and the revisions and expansions of it by Marx, Engels, and the classical tradition of Marxism need to be used here. Also, we need to develop and refine

Rose's powerful criticisms of neo-Kantian legacies, which tend to create fractured binaries and impose solutions by fiat. This can be extended to the legacies of the Frankfurt School, as Rose did, but also to the prevarications and tensions of Rose's own project.

If we do not overcome these limits and these fractures we will be left with the broken middle of our contemporary moment. This involves the celebration of the mystical and the marginal, as with the figure of Simone Weil, described by Rose as an 'angry angel' in *Judaism and Modernity*. Today Rose herself is slotted into the role of Weil: a tragic figure of the philosopher embracing an act of religious conversion in the face of suffering and death. On the other side to the mystic we have the Stalinist

image of an orthodoxy that is insufficiently self-critical and unable to come to terms with its own violence, as we find in Domenico Losurdo's *Stalin*. We live in a version of Koestler's choice between the mystical yogi and the Stalinist commissar. While it is possible to identify Lukács as a disguised figure of the Stalinist commissar we would want to suggest that his realism offers a way to mediate and transcend this impasse. Rose was right to point us to the antinomies which structure our thinking and the false solution of the holy city, the mystical or religious, as solution. Beyond Rome and Jerusalem lies a communism that can achieve a properly worldly resolution of the contradictions of the present.

Harrison Fluss and Benjamin Noys

## Screwball tragedy

Aaron Schuster, *How to Research Like a Dog: Kafka's New Science* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2024). 344pp., £27.00 pb., 978 0 26254 354 5

Life is merely terrible; I feel it as few other do. Often – and in my inmost self perhaps all the time – I doubt whether I am a human being.

Franz Kafka to Felice Bauer, July 7, 1913.

One cannot not live, after all.

Franz Kafka, *The Blue Octavo Notebooks*

In *How to Research Like a Dog: Kafka's New Science*, Aaron Schuster compels us to return to the nuts and bolts of Kafka's work, asking us to relearn our Kafka 'ABCs'. This formula becomes a running refrain throughout the book that alerts us to the crux of Kafka's structural dialectic. Although Kafka is often viewed as a non- or even anti-systematic thinker, it is the wager of the book that if one reads Kafka from the point of view of his fictional philosopher – the dog in Kafka's *Investigations of a Dog* – one sees delineated a contradictory dialectic differentiated from but proximate to a dialectic of contradiction. If we tarry with this contradictory dialectic, we discover Kafka's new science whose ambition is not to become the Queen but 'the demon of the sciences'. The adumbration of this science promises to be a '*folisophie*' (a follysophy) as Lacan has quipped.

Rereading Kafka from the point of his *folisophie* shifts

the accent in how we understand the dogmas of Kafka-dom. If Kafka's work is usually associated with the 'obscure and unassailable powers' of a 'godless modernity', 'an obscure agency lying beyond this world (the unreachable Sovereign, the inaccessible Law, the absent God, the larger-than-life Father)', Schuster's book demonstrates the problem in Kafka does not lie in a transcendence that confounds but 'the subject's failed insertion into the social world': his characters' inability to assume their symbolic place within the world. The subject is this very 'botched entry', which Kafka in a diary entry describes as 'a hesitation before birth.' (In chapter 3, Schuster offers a brilliant interpretation of this diary entry in terms of Plato's Myth of Er and Freud's account of the 'choice of neurosis' [*Neurosenwahl*].) Kafka's characters are not just victims of circumstance, determined by inexorable social forces (bureaucracy, the state, the family, capitalism, etc.) beyond their control. Rather Kafka depicts the ways in which his heroes 'self-sabotage', implicating themselves in structures that allow them to encounter the obstacles that drive them, never allowing them to settle into a comfortable place. As Kafka's dog will discover: 'My questions only serve as a goad to myself.' By