
Review article

We have not finished reading Lukács

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Abstract

This review article discusses two recent books about Georg Lukács (1885-1971), offering observations on his best-known publication – *History and Class Consciousness*, published one hundred years ago – and positioning this work in the arc of his project as a whole. Highlighting some of Lukács’s theories and arguments, the review also notes the contexts and considerations which shaped Lukács’s thought. The article aims to show how Lukács’s intellectual activities were related to his political commitment, both when serving as a Hungarian government minister (in 1919 and again, even more briefly, in 1956) and during the periods in which he ‘retreated’ to unofficial research, generating books which were often at odds with the prevailing orthodoxies of ‘dialectical materialism’.

Key words: Adorno, aesthetics, class consciousness, communism, critical theory, Frankfurt school, Hungary, Lukács, Marxism, reification, Stalinism

Georg Lukács, *The Specificity of the Aesthetic: Volume one*, Brill, Leiden, 2023 [1963]; xliv + 777 pp; ISBN 9789004526068, £255.00, hbk

Tyrus Miller, *Georg Lukács and Critical Theory: Aesthetics, History, Utopia*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2022; ix + 269pp; ISBN 9781399502412, £85.00, hbk (also available Open Access and free of charge at <https://edinburghuniversitypress.com/book-georg-Lukács-and-critical-theory.html>)

Matthew J. Smetona, *Recovering the Later Georg Lukács: A Study on the Unity of His Thought*, The MIT Press, Cambridge MA and London, 2023; xiii and 395pp; ISBN 9780262545372, £72.00, pbk

The new books reviewed here serve to disprove a mistaken view which is persistently promoted by some on the left: the opinion that subsequent to his 1923 collection of essays, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist dialectics*, and a short 1924 book on Lenin, Georg Lukács became ‘a petrified Stalinist whose work henceforth ... could be of no further interest’, a thinker who committed ‘self-betrayal in the interests of accommodating himself to ... the East Bloc’.¹ Slavoj Žižek sees Lukács’s work from the early 1930s as “‘Thermidorian’”, echoing Leon Trotsky’s characterisation of the Soviet Union under Stalin’s leadership.² Chris Nineham states that ‘Lukács moved away from revolutionary politics and dedicated himself to literary criticism’.³

Let’s pass over Nineham’s judgement that Lukács’s further forty-odd years of intellectual and political work as a communist can be defined as a shift ‘away from revolutionary politics’. We’ll also leave aside the question of whether someone who others call a ‘Stalinist’ can, nevertheless, write interesting books. And the question of whether some works of ‘literary criticism’ might be more useful than shelves full of leftist tracts.

The issue this review article *will* explore is the extent to which some of the themes and questions that shaped *History and Class Consciousness* continued to concern Lukács in his writings on literature, aesthetics and philosophy in the 1950s and 1960s. It will note the shifting political contexts and the way that events across the decades shaped his choices about what themes to focus on, and how to present his arguments.

The potential value of these arguments helps explain a current renewal of interest in Lukács. This has generated several recent books, edited collections, new forewords to reissued works and the first publication in English of some of Lukács’s less well-known works. In his widely-read recent interventions on ecology, Kohei Saito has highlighted Lukács’s pioneering recognition of Karl Marx’s concept of ‘metabolism’ between humans and nature, which – convected through the writings of his student István Mészáros – is shaping an important and ongoing attempt to combine Marxism and ecological politics, expressed in the work of John Bellamy Foster, Paul Burkett and others.⁴

In the context of such promising initiatives, Viktor Orbán’s reactionary government decided to close and break up the Lukács Archive and Library in Budapest. State vandalism of this major Hungarian intellectual and cultural resource has stimulated the important work of the Lukács Archive International Foundation, which aims to counter the risk of materials from Lukács’s library being lost, and to publish a range of writings by and about him.⁵

The context of *History and Class Consciousness*

Lukács was unusual amongst leading figures in the revolutionary years following 1917 in that he had not previously been a member of a social democratic party. Whereas most prominent communists had been active in and had eventually split from parties which made up the Second International, this son of a rich banker joined the newly formed Hungarian Communist Party (HCP) at the end of 1918 as the result of an intellectual ‘conversion’. In his twenties, alongside writing remarkable books on aesthetics and literature, and increasingly influenced by Georg Hegel’s philosophy, he had taken his ‘first lessons in social science’ from the German sociologists Georg Simmel and Max Weber, ‘and not from Kautsky’.⁶

The wider context was that the Hungarian party itself was formed in quite a different manner than most sections of the communist Third International: its initial cadre comprised men who had been conscripted into the Austro-Hungarian military and then taken prisoner in Russia, being tutored there by Bolsheviks before returning to Hungary at the end of the First World War. As Béla Kun and other HCP founding members arrived back in Budapest, they established contacts with trade unionists, left-wing social democrats, and members of radical academic and cultural circles: several of the remarkable people in the discussion groups which Lukács was central to would in due course serve alongside him by taking positions in the 1919 Hungarian Soviet Republic, including the composers Béla Bartók and Zoltán Kodály, and the pioneering cinematographer and film critic Béla Balász.⁷

The Soviet Republic collapsed after 133 days: Admiral Horthy’s paramilitary thugs unleashed a murderous ‘white terror’. Lukács, initially directed to stay in Budapest to try and sustain an underground party structure, escaped to Vienna a couple of months after Kun and most other leading HCP members had scrambled there.

In straitened exile, recurrently facing the threat of deportation back to Hungary, Lukács recast articles written during the Soviet Republic and immediately afterwards, replacing some passages from 1919 and 1920 with completely different arguments.⁸ Learning from defeat, Lukács superseded his earlier utopian leftism with a ‘new conception of revolutionary realism’ which Michael Löwy saw as the ‘final stage of his ideological path from the [pre-Marxist] tragic world view to Leninism’.⁹

In new chapters written in 1921–22, Lukács applied aspects of Hegel’s philosophical method to reanimate Marxist theory. Developing themes

which he had explored before becoming a communist, Lukács argued that the proletariat's position within capitalism meant that it could and should be the 'identical subject-object' of history. In German idealism, this concept caught the dialectical development through which the split between subjective perception and objective reality would be overcome and the totality of existence properly and actively apprehended. In Lukács's Marxist application of this concept, the working class's achievement of the standpoint of totality would both express and depend on making and sustaining a successful revolution.

There were (and are) huge subjective barriers to this happening: working people were (and are) prevented from recognising that they had (have) the capacity to transform society if they were to act as a class by a range of forces which organised and promoted bourgeois ideology. Social-democracy was (is) one of these, along with many other political and cultural practices.

In this context, the crucial role of the communist party was to organise working people through identifying and promoting the steps that the class should take to overthrow capitalism. This meant 'imputing' or 'ascribing' to working people the class consciousness that they yet needed to develop.

Some people have seen this concept of 'ascribed class consciousness' as inherently arrogant and elitist, and Lukács's crediting of the communist party 'vanguard' with the right to determine what working people should think as the first step of his supposed descent into Stalinism. Read carefully, though, Lukács's argument is entirely consistent not only with Lenin's politics of leadership, but with classical Marxism itself. For Mészáros, 'Lukács's distinction between "ascribed" and "psychological" class consciousness is a reformulation of one of the basic tenets of the Marxian system'.¹⁰

The most original and influential concept in *History and Class Consciousness* is also a reformulation and development of Marx's thinking – although neither Lukács nor anyone else knew this in the early 1920s. His account of 'reification' was consistent with considerations on alienation which Marx had set out in 1844 in Paris, in manuscripts which were not rediscovered until 1930 (in a neat coincidence, Lukács was by then employed at the Marx-Engels-Lenin Institute in Moscow, becoming one of the first people to work on them, though 'circumstances' and changes in his own thinking meant that he chose to refrain from commenting on the 1844 manuscripts' validation of his 1923 positions).¹¹

Critical continuities?

Grigory Zinoviev, presiding at the Fifth Comintern Congress in 1924, angrily denounced *History and Class Consciousness* together with Karl Korsch's *Marxism and Philosophy*: 'if we get a few more of these professors spinning out their "Marxist theories" we will be lost. We cannot tolerate such theoretical revisionism'.¹²

Following a series of defeats for communist parties, particularly in Germany, the emphasis which Lukács and Korsch put on the importance of agency and political creativity was unwelcome. Zinoviev and his comrades wanted – needed – to blame 'objective' factors for the setbacks, not to admit 'subjective' shortcomings in their own thinking and practice. In order to remain active within the communist movement, Lukács's public response was to suppress his book. He refused permission for it to be republished until 1967, when he added a preface setting out his ongoing disagreements with his younger self, whilst allowing that the book had signalled some important issues (after the fall of the Soviet Union, an unfinished manuscript was found which showed that, in fact, Lukács had not immediately moved on from his book, but worked on a 'clarifying defence of *History and Class Consciousness*' in 1925 and 1926).¹³

The standard account is that, as Lukács abandoned his positions from *History and Class Consciousness*, 'reification' was taken up by the German philosophers and sociologists who would form 'the Frankfurt School'. Extending Marx's understanding of commodity fetishism, the concept 'denotes the fact that all relations between men [sic] in the world of capitalism appear as relations between things', or 'making a human process into an objective thing'.¹⁴ For Herbert Marcuse, Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno and others, reification helped explain how subjective outlooks which serve capitalism become internalised psychologically, distorting peoples' personalities and values, and generating hopes and anxieties which not only reconcile them to but integrate them within an exploitative system. (They also used the term 'reified' in a second, related, way to denote thinking which was frozen, stultified, and ossified, contrasting this with properly dialectical method).

In his new book, Matthew J. Smetona takes a fresh approach, arguing that during the decades in which Adorno and his colleagues were downplaying the influence Lukács had once had on them, with Adorno later indulging in Cold War inflected criticism of his 'reconciliation' with Soviet Marxism, Lukács *did* sustain his understanding of reification, and found ways to combine this with an activist commitment to

communism. By reading Lukács' works on literature, aesthetics and philosophy from the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s in the light of Lukács' 'theoretical framework' from 1923, Smetona asserts 'a fundamental continuity between the Lukács of *History and Class Consciousness* and the Lukács of his later writings'.¹⁵ His argument amounts to an extended positive response to a question Fredric Jameson raised in 1971: 'what if, far from being a series of self-betrayals, Lukács's successive positions proved to be a progressive exploration and enlargement of a single complex of problems?'¹⁶

Smetona's view requires him to address the fact that 'the later Lukács' stated that, in 1923, he had himself failed 'to subject the Hegelian heritage to a thoroughgoing materialist reinterpretation and hence to transcend and preserve it'.¹⁷ Smetona's explanation is that those aspects of *History and Class Consciousness* which Lukács *did* abandon still left intact his 'critique of reification from the methodological standpoint of the dialectical conception of totality', and that this provided a consistent theoretical framework, the source of the sharp 'acumen' which Lukács applied in his criticism of 'manifold ideological spheres'.¹⁸

For example, Lukács's studies of major realist novelists including Walter Scott, Honoré de Balzac and Leo Tolstoy 'revealed them to be engaged in the de-reification of nineteenth-century social life'.¹⁹ Smetona argues that books including *Writer and Critic* and *Essays on Realism*, generally seen as part of his 'Stalinist period', are in fact 'literary continuations' of Lukács's thinking in *History and Class Consciousness*, promoting the kinds of critical thinking we should apply so as to resist 'habituation to the normal functioning of capitalism', as well as anticipating themes and terms which would be further explored in the unfinished books on ontology which Lukács worked on during his last decade.²⁰ Lukács's position over the decades was that 'realism ... is the only aesthetic path to de-reification': not only a key to assessing literary works but a pointer towards how we should make sense of – and change – social relations.²¹

The political implications of Lukács's literary criticism were clearly stated in his contributions to the debate on expressionism which engaged a range of German writers during the 1930s.²² Lukács saw his role as 'providing methodological guidance for writers to produce works that de-reify', with this production consisting in tracing 'the objective forms and institutions of society back to the relations between persons that constitute them'.²³ He believed that the apparently 'radical' expressionist movement involved 'false criticism': it was an example of how romantic 'opposition' to capitalism can turn out to be 'an apology by way of

a mystifying critique of the present'.²⁴ However 'dangerous' and unsettling it appeared to be, expressionism was shaped by a 'subjective-idealist "mental escape from reality"', illustrated in the fantastic ambitions of one of its theorists to "dissolve the surrounding reality into a non-reality": it was 'an "ideology of diversion" that "necessarily collapses into reaction"'.²⁵ Lukács later extended and organised such arguments into his 1954 book *The Destruction of Reason* (this is often misunderstood and dismissed as his most 'Stalinist' work, even though it directly inspired fundamental insights of figures in the thoroughly anti-Stalinist New Left, with the book is currently being recovered by some young left intellectuals to inform critiques of current individualistic and subjectivist versions of 'radicalism').²⁶

Smetona's arguments about the consistency of Lukács's thinking are an important rejoinder to the dominant tendencies to emphasise breaks in his work, and to assume that a move into a different genre (literary criticism) means a move away from earlier (revolutionary) concerns. But the frequent doubling back from Lukács's insights from the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s to show how they echo (with different phraseology) the 1923 book can feel overdone, sometimes to the point of making it seem that Lukács, in his later works, was primarily and continually concerned to signal his commitment to *History and Class Consciousness*. Nor is it essential to Smetona's core positions to claim so strongly that the 1923 book is itself unified in its arguments: its chapters are in fact uneven in quality and emphasis. Smetona could also have done more to link the evolution, impact and deepening of Lukács's thought to changes in the wider context: for example, the way his instincts and values matched the 1930s Popular Front approach was the basis for Lukács's authority amongst many communist intellectuals, and helped strengthen the self-confidence he drew on during the twisting post-war years.

Aesthetics

These are minor criticisms: Smetona provides clear accounts of *The Historical Novel*, *The Young Hegel* and other works, offering many stimulating insights. Two chapters are devoted to considering one of Lukács's last works, *On Peculiarity as the Category of Aesthetics*, written in 1967 (and not yet translated into English). This work forms a kind of methodological complement to Lukács's wide-ranging and complex 1963 text, *The Specificity of the Aesthetic* – the first volume of which, translated by Erik M. Bachman, and edited by Bachman and Tyrus Miller, has just appeared

as volume two of 'the Lukács library' in the *Historical Materialism* book series published by Brill.²⁷

What makes aesthetics relevant to revolutionary politics? German idealists followed Immanuel Kant in treating aesthetics not as the study of features in objects, but as the study of our ways of engaging with things. One of its attractive, civilising features was that highlighting our aesthetic sensibilities points to a positive quality in human nature which is immune to the pursuit of honour and profit: on the occasions where we take genuine pleasure in beauty, this experience is independent of consideration of personal advantage.

Linking such themes to proposals for political development, Johann Gottlieb Fichte and others argued that aesthetic education was critical for producing exemplary citizens. Friedrich Schelling considered 'aesthetics the most important means for resolving the social problems of his time'.²⁸ Terry Eagleton has recently asserted that 'the aesthetic theories of ... Friedrich Schiller lie behind [Marx's] vision of communism, a society in which everyone will be free to express the wealth and diversity of their powers'.²⁹

In the twentieth century (and today) one of the biggest barriers to taking steps towards such a society was that current social arrangements corrupt peoples' consciousness, with bourgeois ideology blocking and diverting the outlooks and efforts that could establish ways of living a sustainable life, free from exploitation and oppression. Understanding how our aesthetic sense works and how it can be guided by cultural activity (writing, art, film-making) was therefore, for Lukács, a crucial part of educating and preparing people for the progressive historical actions that could lead towards socialism.

In his stimulating new introduction to *The Specificity of the Aesthetic*, Bachman addresses the question of whether the book resonates with *History and Class Consciousness*, written forty years previously. It does, in so far as both works seek to identify 'the means by which correct consciousness is to be attained in the face of reification'.³⁰ However, by 1963, these means are no longer identified with the class consciousness of the revolutionary proletariat, but with writers and their readers who call forth 'the deepest truth of Marxism: the humanisation of man as the content of the process of history which realises itself – in a myriad of varieties – in each individual human life'.³¹

As Bachman argues, this shift towards socialist humanism and associated democratic commitments expressed Lukács's responses to events from the 1950s: de-Stalinisation under Khrushchev; the need to avoid

nuclear war; the good sense of the Soviet Union's aspiration to 'peaceful co-existence' between socialist and capitalist countries; and the crushing of the 1956 Hungarian uprising (Lukács served as a minister in Imre Nagy's reform communism government, and was arrested and detained in Romania after the Soviet invasion). Lukács's resulting understanding – the basis of his substantial and multi-layered 1960s writings on this subject – was that works of art, and proper responses to them, 'have key roles to play in the formation of subjects with political agency, of personalities who understand themselves to be more doing than done-to. Art, in this view, is not so much a "sublimation and displacement of politics" as it is the incubator of political passions, commitments, and activity'.³² Smetona's related judgement is that 'Lukács grasps the particularity of the aesthetic in terms of the social-historical struggle between the old and the new, the struggle between competing classes that constitute the sum total of interrelations (i.e., the totality) in a particular society at a particular time'.³³

The long goodbye

Miller's ongoing contribution through editing 'the Lukács library' is complemented by his new book, which considers aspects of Lukács's influence and some implications of his thinking today. Miller traces how Frankfurt School figures moved on from *History and Class Consciousness* after it had made a major impact on them in the early 1920s: Adorno and Walter Benjamin were amongst those drawn decisively to Marxism through reading the book. As Martin Jay has stated, if Lukács had seen the proletariat as, at least potentially, 'as both the subject and object of history which needed only to become conscious of this role to throw off its chains', Frankfurt School members 'came increasingly to look askance at this equation', at first through developing the well-grounded 'fear that the historical moment for this event had passed without the opportunity's having been seized'.³⁴

Where Smetona continually doubles back to the 1923 book, Miller 'displaces' *History and Class Consciousness* from the centre of his discussion, 'so as to tease out other threads of Lukács's work and related motifs in Frankfurt School critical writing'.³⁵ Through 'retracing the long goodbye of infelicitous encounters between Lukács and the Frankfurt School, and particularly his collisions with Adorno', Miller opens up interesting themes including 'various concepts of utopia, the relations of theoretical critique to practice, the critical function of art ... problems of Stalinism and

other forms of twentieth-century authoritarianism, and the question of democratisation in both capitalist and socialist societies'.³⁶ He also asserts that there are continuities even longer-lasting than those which Smetona sees: Miller believes that Lukács 'continued to assume' the 'conceptual framework' which informed his pre-Marxist works, such as the *History of the Evolution of Modern Drama* (written 1906 to 1909, and only partially translated into English) 'even decades later and across the ideological and geographical divide that separates his early Hungarian period from his Moscow exile', including in his major book *The Historical Novel*.³⁷

Georg Lukács and Critical Theory showcases fascinating material, including details of the pre-war years in which the young Lukács – together with his friend Ernst Bloch – were influenced by Martin Buber and his 'messianic hope of a genuine *Gemeinschaft*' (community).³⁸ At this time, Lukács saw 'redemption' as 'the achievement of *Gemeinschaft* in this world – the temporal transcending of individuality and complete identification with others'.³⁹ According to Béla Balász, Lukács gave art 'a moral mission' in relation to this goal, 'that of providing a vision of a new, homogenous world that could inspire the actualisation of utopia'.⁴⁰ Miller notes that 'the promised redemption that Lukács and Bloch sought to prefigure' at this time, as students living in Heidelberg, 'was not ... a proletarian revolution that would inaugurate humanity's entry into the realm of freedom, but rather a religious revolution that would bring about something like a Dostoevskian religio-anarchic community of goodness, making unnecessary secular law and the state'.⁴¹

The book's second part primarily covers Adorno's understandings of surrealism, kitsch, avant-garde art, and opera. By now Miller has moved some way from Lukács's work and direct concerns, with the third part then segueing into even more 'unexpected terrains', including consideration of the Marquis de Sade and (separately) John Dewey's Commission on the Moscow Trials, which investigated the alleged 'crimes' of Trotsky and others.⁴²

Lukácsianism today?

There can be no question of easily applying Lukács's views to current issues. For one thing, some of the (mutually contradictory) criticisms of his work by a range of scholars and activists would need to be allowed so as to further develop the very method which Lukács advocated. As part of this, some – including this reviewer – would argue that there is modernist writing and art that explores and represents subjective states of mind, even in disordered

states, and is at the same time a stimulating contribution to us apprehending reality. Whatever disagreements there might be about what the criteria and standards of progressive art should be, and about which creative works should be promoted over others, we should recover Lukács's foundational assumption that these issues deserve serious and consequential argument.

Nevertheless, even to think of a simplistic 'Lukácsianism' today would be at odds with one of his key insights, which is that the possibilities of theoretical insight and effective action are both resourced and constrained by current social arrangements. The biggest shift in his own thinking was from the urgent hope that 1919 could open the way to 'the actualisation of utopia' to decades of work addressing 'the question of what a decelerated path to socialism might mean'.⁴³ Miller sees this as the question which connects Lukács's literary criticism and other writings, because for 'a socialism that may take a long time to arrive ... one needs ... not ethical leaps of transcendence, but an immanent understanding of constrained action in restricted action-contexts, insight into the opaque motivations and consciousness of actors, and attention to the many-sided dynamics of character formation and deformation'.⁴⁴

To discern any credible 'path to socialism' in our times would be a great thing: it is the most necessary and the least likely of the broad scenarios which face humanity. Part of the reason for this sorry situation is that the global dominance of neoliberal capitalism over the last four decades has spawned and been served by influential cultures which celebrate and reinforce reification. Some of these are clearly reactionary, including the denial of (or attempts to diminish) the problem of catastrophic climate breakdown, and current forms of racism. Others are mistaken reactions to the threats that we face, including 'conspiracy theories' – some of these more or less directly amplify far-right agendas, but others involve attempts to make sense of things in contexts where trust in liberal politics and 'mainstream' media has understandably diminished. Left-wingers should be particularly concerned about mystifications and misunderstandings which are influential in our movements. Since the 1980s, successive forms of postmodernism have been generating serious confusion amongst people with progressive intent: a degree of scepticism in respect of grand narratives is one thing, but theories which disregard objective reality in the name of affirming individualistic subjective 'choice' make the expressionist movement of the 1920s look like a model of rationality.

Used critically, Lukács's work will help in making sense of and responding to these cultural challenges: applying some aspects of Lukácsian realism could help provide a counter-framework to extreme relativism

and the problematic politics which result from it. His work also reminds us of the importance of conceptual models for social change which need to be realistic, transformative, and effective on a range of levels. It is an important resource for those who do not believe ‘that the possibility of de-reification has been foreclosed’, or ‘that the aggregate of human attributes and capacities has been incorporated into the commodity-form such that it is not possible to explain the commodity-relation in terms of the relation between persons’.⁴⁵

There will, however – and apart from the intrinsic challenges of his work – be considerable obstacles to recovering and developing Lukács’s realist theory so as to clarify and then counter the multiple mystifications and complex obfuscations which misshape so much social thought and political debate today. As Bachman notes, his ‘vision of art’s progressive role in the history and future of the human race bespeaks a belief in ... two master-narratives (of the emancipation of mankind and the speculative unity of all knowledge)’ that are, to say the least, out of fashion: at every turn, ‘the postmodernist’s incredulity will thus clash with what she perceives to be Lukács’s naïve faith in liberation, totality, and narrative itself’.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, as Smetona concludes, ‘the dialectic never ends, nor does the need to de-reify, so long as we live under capitalism. Thus we will never be finished with the reading and rereading’ of Lukács.⁴⁷

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Notes

- 1 Miller, *Georg Lukács and Critical Theory*, p3 and p59. Miller is noting the misrepresentation, rather than promoting it.
- 2 Slavoj Žižek, ‘Postface’, in Georg Lukács, *A Defence of History and Class Consciousness: Tailism and the dialectic*, London, 2000, p151.
- 3 Chris Nineham, *Capitalism and Class Consciousness: The ideas of Georg Lukács*, London, 2010, p10.
- 4 Kohei Saito, *Marx in the Anthropocene: Towards the idea of degrowth communism*, Cambridge, 2022.
- 5 <https://www.lana.info.hu/en/front-page/>
- 6 Theo Pinkus (ed.), *Conversations with Lukács*, Cambridge MA, 1974, p100.
- 7 Mike Makin-Waite, ‘133 Days in 1919: The Hungarian Soviet Republic, and how it shaped the Comintern’, *Socialist History*, 55, (2019).
- 8 Michael Löwy tracks the rewriting in *Georg Lukács: From romanticism to Bolshevism*, London, 1979, pp173-179.

- 9 Ibid., p171.
- 10 István Mészáros, 'Contingent and necessary class consciousness', in Mészáros (ed.), *Aspects of History and Class Consciousness*, London, 1971, p94. Other opinions are also available: Edward Thompson railed against 'much latter-day "Marxist" writing' in which "'it", the working class, is assumed to have a real existence, which can be defined almost mathematically – so many men who stand in a certain relation to the means of production. Once this is assumed it becomes possible to deduce the class-consciousness which "it" ought to have (but seldom does have) if "it" was properly aware of its own position and real interests', E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, Harmondsworth, 1968, p10. Eric Hobsbawm, having noted Lukács's distinction 'between the actual ideas which men form about class, and which are the subject matter of historical study, and what [Lukács] calls "ascribed" class consciousness', thought it best to sidestep the tricky debate: 'historians ... are naturally more concerned professionally with what actually happened (including what might under specified circumstances have happened) than they are with what ought really to happen. I shall therefore leave aside much of Lukács's discussion as irrelevant to my purpose, which is the rather modest one of the historian'. E.J. Hobsbawm, 'Class consciousness in history' in Mészáros, *Aspects of History*, pp6-7.
- 11 Reviewers in Germany, where they were first published in 1932, noted that the manuscripts 'provided ... documentary confirmation of the primacy Lukács had given to the Hegelian-dialectical core of Marx's thought, and to the critique of reification'. Andrew Arato and Paul Breines, *The Young Lukács and the Origins of Western Marxism*, London, 1979, p209.
- 12 Grigory Zinoviev, 'The Struggle Against the Ultra-Lefts and Theoretical Revisionism', speech at Fifth Congress of the Communist International, June 1924.
- 13 Georg Lukács, *A Defence of History and Class Consciousness: Tailism and the dialectic*, London, 2000. 'Clarifying defence' is from Andrew Feenberg's speech at a conference of the Platypus Affiliated Society, University of Chicago, 1 April 2023.
- 14 Herbert Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution: Hegel and the rise of social theory*, London, 1968, p112; Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A vocabulary of culture and society*, London, 1990, p35.
- 15 Smetona, *Recovering*, p1.
- 16 Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Form*, Princeton NJ, 1971, p163.
- 17 Georg Lukács, 'Preface to the New Edition', *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, London, 1971, pXX.
- 18 Smetona, *Recovering*, p7 and p1.
- 19 Ibid., p21.
- 20 Ibid., p23 and p86.
- 21 Ibid., p41.

- 22 Defining contributions to the debate are collected in Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Ernst Bloch, Bertolt Brecht and Georg Lukacs, *Aesthetics and Politics*, London, 1977.
- 23 Smetona, *Recovering*, p96 and p158.
- 24 Ibid., p40.
- 25 Ibid., p41 and p42.
- 26 In his account of the development of the Nairn-Anderson theses, Perry Anderson cites the section of *The Destruction of Reason* on ‘some characteristics of Germany’s development’: ‘Lukacs’s concern with the ideological forms and functions of class consciousness in history looked not dissimilar to Gramsci’s preoccupation with the cultural patterns of domination and submission’, Perry Anderson, *English Questions*, London, 1992, pp3-4. A forthcoming special issue of the journal *Historical Materialism* will carry a range of pieces on issues raised by *The Destruction of Reason*.
- 27 Volume one of the Lukács Library was also edited by Miller: *Georg Lukács, The Culture of People’s Democracy: Hungarian essays on literature, art, and democratic transition, 1945-1948*, Leiden, 2013.
- 28 Katerina Clark, *Moscow, the Fourth Rome: Stalinism, cosmopolitanism, and the evolution of Soviet culture, 1931-1941*, Cambridge MA, 2011, pp107-108.
- 29 Terry Eagleton, ‘Be Like the Silkworm’, *London Review of Books*, 29 June 2023.
- 30 Erik M. Bachman, ‘Art in Its *Eigenart*: Editor’s introduction’ to Georg Lukács, *The Specificity of the Aesthetic: Volume one*, p xxxiv.
- 31 Georg Lukács, *Record of a Life: An autobiographical sketch*, London, 1983, p169. The language here confirms Hegel’s influence on Lukács to the end.
- 32 Bachman, ‘Art in Its *Eigenart*’, pXXXIX.
- 33 Smetona, *Recovering*, p174. Smetona points out (p136, quoting *The Historical Novel*) that ‘totality in literary depiction does not consist of “completeness of description” but rather “the working-out of essential human and social determinants”’.
- 34 Martin Jay, *Permanent Exiles: Essays on the intellectual migration from Germany to America*, New York, 1986, p32.
- 35 Miller, *Georg Lukács and Critical Theory*, p3.
- 36 Ibid., p4 and p19.
- 37 Ibid., p65 and p72.
- 38 Lee Congdon, *The Young Lukács*, Chapel Hill NC, 1983, p77. It should be noted that *Gemeinschaft* was and is a highly complex and contested concept.
- 39 Ibid., p77.
- 40 Ibid., p79.
- 41 Miller, *Georg Lukács and Critical Theory*, p35.
- 42 Ibid., p19.
- 43 Ibid., p38.
- 44 Ibid., p38.

45 Smetona, *Recovering*, p22.

46 Bachman, 'Art and *Eigenart*', pX.

47 Smetona, *Recovering*, p355.