

# A WORD BY THE AUTHOR, FORTY YEARS LATER\*

Furio Cerutti\*\*

As Mariana Teixeira asked me if I would consent to the publishing of the Portuguese translation of this forty-year old article, I was at the same time pleased (and thankful to her) and scared. I had no recollection of what I had written at that time in the article and feared it was still driven by a dominant and absorbing interest (which I shared in the 1960s and 1970s) in one more vicissitude – at this time nearly hundred years old – of Western Marxism.

Solace came while rereading the article, a by-product of a research project I was pursuing at the University of Florence

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\* Commentary for the Portuguese translation of “Georg Lukács und die Kritische Theorie” published in this volume (*Dissonancia: Critical Theory Journal*, v. 7, 2023, e2023030). The original text appeared in the vol. 1 of the proceedings of the 1985 *Bloch-Lukács-Symposium* in Dubrovnik.

\*\* Former Full Professor of Political Philosophy at the University of Florence and Affiliate Professor at the Sant’Anna School of Advanced Studies, Pisa, Italy. E-mail address: [furio.cerutti@unifi.it](mailto:furio.cerutti@unifi.it).

with a team of PhD candidates who had me as supervisor. We wanted to write a history of the *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* in the persuasion that the novelty and richness of the original Critical Theory (little to do with the present fuzzy meaning of this formula!) can be better appreciated by looking at the whole range of the contributions published there rather than exclusively focusing on some major authors. We published a number of single contributions, but the project as a whole collapsed: it was too ambitious for our very limited resources. Also, in those years my personal research interest took a new course: away from a historiographic approach, whose place was taken by a theoretical one, now focused on the new realities defining the contemporary and future world (nuclear weapons and global warming, on which I published much later, in 2007, a book under the title *Global Challenges for Leviathan*) and newly emerging categories such as political identity (in general and specifically in Europe – the subject of four edited books around the turn of the century). Amusing that I found the hours of archival research spent in the Horkheimer-Archiv in Frankfurt am Main, I do nonetheless confess that the effort to conceptualise philosophically the effective state of the world as mirrored in hard and political science has been much more exciting and fruitful for my brains than reviving and narrating the attempts made in the 1920s and 1930s to recapture a world already marked by failed or degenerated revolutions within the frame of a doctrinarian tradition – of which however its presumed founder is told to have said “moi, je ne suis pas marxiste”.

The article published here was written at the time in which my intellectual reorientation began to take shape; its content shows traces of a break with philosophical Marxism as *Weltanschauung* pretending to enshrine not only the true philosophy of history, but also a better knowledge of reality than the intellectual institutions (social sciences, economics) tasked with its observation and analysis – the theory of the “attributed class consciousness” (*zugerechnetes Klassenbewusstsein*) in *Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein* being the most striking example of this extremist arrogance, based on “a metaphysical transfiguration of the revolution” (Horkheimer, as quoted in my article).

In this light I am pleased to say to myself that hours and days of hard work in the Horkheimer-Archiv, even if not crowned by the publication of a history of the *Zeitschrift*, were worth the toil just because of Horkheimer’s frank and resolute statement that I was able to unearth: “More urgent than human beings becoming different is that they fare better (*besser geht*)”. Horkheimer is annoyed by Lukács’s and Bloch’s (and others’) philosophical expectations of a de-reified “new human being”, and ends with an ejaculation that sounds social-democratic, and it is. Alone, its attitude is not immersed in moderatism, but rather animated by his articulated sensitivity for the misery of and the contempt for concrete individuals as witnessed by the aphorisms of *Dämmerung*. This is the *humus* for his break with speculative projects of renovation as well as for his redefinition of materialism (in the first articles published in the *Zeitschrift*), which was interwoven with history, morality and anthropology.

I am curious to see whether the present revival of interest for Marx and the several Marxisms is well aware of the danger into which my generation incurred in the 1960s and 1970s, as we rediscovered the debates of fifty years before and sometimes fell into the trap of using them for interpreting and allegedly subverting the present (despite the little echo found among the working population) instead of forging new tools to take stock of the actual state of society. Since this work went far beyond the limits and the beneficial effect of reviving the history of ideas, we often wasted time, misused the chances of a more appropriate understanding of the world, while some even tried to apply obsolete and coarse categories to political action – in some cases with disastrous and bloody effects. The use of history is never decoupled from responsibility for its implications.