

conference at Birkbeck College.

He will be remembered by all who knew him for his amiability, his modesty, the ever renewed breadth of his interests, and above all, for his intellectual generosity. We will miss him.

His publications include:

1978: *Marxism and Education: A Study of Phenomenological and Marxist Approaches to Education* (RKP)

1982: *Education, State and Crisis: A Marxist Perspective* (RKP)

1984: *Marxism, Structuralism, Education: Theoretical Developments in the Sociology of Education* (Falmer)

1986: *The Politics of Multicultural Education* (Routledge)

1989 (2nd ed., 1993): *An Introductory Guide to Post-Structuralism and Post-Modernism* (Harvester)

1991: *Education and the Ideologies of Racism* (Trentham Books)

1992: *Jacques Lacan* (Harvester)

Peter Osborne

Marxism and Modernism

Two events on successive weekends in July afforded avid conferees the opportunity to compare and contrast Marxism and Modernism in widely differing circumstances.

The Socialist Workers Party organised *Marxism 93*, in London to introduce their numerous new recruits to 'the socialist solution', and to stimulate and consolidate the commitment of longer standing members. From the point of view of attendance the event was a great success. All the auditoria were packed, with as many as twelve sessions running concurrently.

Marxism 93 was advertised as a week of political discussion and debate. Alex Callinicos gave a Marxist interpretation of the Holocaust, an introduction to historical materialism and criticised the policy of UN interventions. Tony Cliff and Paul Foot put the Party's politics to the people and guest appearances were made by left luminaries such as Christopher Hill, Tony Benn and Robin Blackburn. Due to the nature of the event, which was not intended to be an academic conference, but a political rally, the level of discussion did not really do justice to the issues. The SWP has a line on almost everything from Islamic fundamentalism to Robin Hood, a line which is closely towed, with the disquieting consequence that consensus tends to function as the precondition and not the telos of any debate.

The exoteric approach to political education was evident from the lapidary nature of the questions posed and the answers supplied. Last year's notorious entries, 'Foucault/Derrida: enemies of Marxism?' (answer: yes) had given way this year to the tame, but equally unambiguous, 'Postmodernism/cultural materialism; alternatives to Marxism?' (answer: no). There were some surprises however. The answer to the teasing question, 'Opera – bourgeois entertainment or radical culture?' was radical culture. Bored with Neighbours, according to Anthony Arblaster, revolutionaries everywhere were now flocking to *Così fan tutte*. This unexpected valorisation of opera, as an oasis of near extinct revolutionary aesthetic practice, seemed perverse in the light of the wholesale refusal to analyse mass culture. Gareth Jenkins seemed happier to have insulted Adorno than to have read him. Had he done so he could have pointed out that so-called 'high' culture is no more exempt from commodity fetishism than 'low' culture. Besides which the question of the revolutionary potential of art cannot be reduced to the question of which areas of culture do or should or did appeal to the workers.

Another surprise, given that the talks were not designed to appeal to academics or sophisticates, was the readiness to invoke Heisenberg's uncertainty principle or chaos theory in considering the alleged determinism of Marx's theory of history. The presupposition behind this seemed to be that philosophical theory is bourgeois and elitist whilst scientific theory is inherently democratic and intelligible. However, one contribution to the ensuing discussion bucked the trend by quoting Lenin, quoting Engels, quoting Hegel that, 'freedom is the recognition of necessity', a

speculative insight which felt out of place in a discussion where the self-evidence of theoretical physics was preferred to the difficulties of the dialectic.

Modernism: Poetics, Politics, Practice at King's College, Cambridge was very much an academic affair. It had the cosy atmosphere of a symposium, because the forty-two contributors, mainly from the field of English Literature, made up a considerable part of the audience. The prohibitive price of the tickets prevented many students from participating. Last-minute visitors were turned away at the door, on the grounds that the conference had been sold out in advance, although there were plenty of seats available inside. Perhaps the corporate clients of the sponsors had failed to turn up again.

Proceedings began with Gillian Rose performing 'The Comedy of Hegel and the *Trauerspiel* of Modern Philosophy', arguing that Absolute Spirit must be read as the venture of recognition rather than the perfectibility of pneuma. Simon Jarvis spoke in the same session on reciprocity and soteriology, melding Marcel Mauss with an Adornian materialist understanding of literature. Jacqueline Rose adumbrated certain analogies between Woolf's idea of nationless women, and the problem of Zionism in Dorothy Richardson. In the evening Suzanne Raitt and Laura Marcus co-hosted a chat about 'Modernism and the New Biography'. On Sunday, Helga Geyer-Ryan deconstructed justice from Homer to Kafka in half an hour. As if this were not enough she also insinuated the demise of Marxism as an intellectual discourse (and the collapse of Eastern Europe to boot) from Derrida's critique of Walter Benjamin. This extraordinarily ambitious paper followed Drew Milne's sober, but high-speed, essay on revolutionary art and the philosophy of history. Milne drew on Marx's critique of neo-classicism in *The 18th Brumaire* and Benjamin's reflections on history to evaluate Ian Hamilton Finlay's provocative use of classical motifs.

Despite some very interesting contributions '*Modernism: Poetics, Politics, Practice*' suffered from too many speakers and not enough discussion. The situation was not eased by the arbitrary juxtaposition of the papers, which precluded dialogue between the speakers, a dialogue which might have justified there being so many speakers in the first place. For instance, Diana Collecott on 'H.D., Hellenism, and Sapphic Modernism' was programmed to speak with Andrew Michael Roberts on 'Men and Traffic: Economies of Masculine Desire in Konrad's "Karain" and the Nissan Primer Advert, "Car Wash"'. Any continuities, and there were continuities, were fortuitous. It is one thing to diagnose a fragmentation of discourses, and quite another to create one. In this respect *Marxism 93* was a better organised event, with fewer speakers, longer papers and more time for questions afterwards.

Gordon Finlayson