

counterpart, fifteen years later, in Adorno's disarray at the rebellion of an intelligentsia that confounded (appropriated) his philosophy, in the great student demonstrations of the sixties. The quest for a revolutionary art has revived in the West with a new intensity since then.

Theodor Adorno

Reconciliation under Duress

The nimbus which still surrounds the name of Georg Lukács today, even outside the Soviet bloc, is something he owes to the writings of his youth – the volume of essays *Soul and Form*, *The Theory of the Novel* and the studies collected in *History and Class Consciousness*, in which he became the first dialectical materialist to apply the category of reification systematically to philosophy. Inspired originally by people like Simmel and Cassner, his ideas were then further developed by the South-Western school.¹ He soon began to reject psychological subjectivism in favour of an objectivistic philosophy of history, which became highly influential. *The Theory of the Novel* in particular had a brilliance and profundity of conception which was quite extraordinary at the time, so much so that it set a standard for philosophical aesthetics which has been retained ever since. As early as the beginning of the twenties his objectivism started to adjust itself, albeit not without some initial resistance, to the official communist doctrine. He acquiesced in the communist custom and disavowed his earlier writings. He took the crudest criticisms from the Party hierarchy to heart, twisting Hegelian motifs and turning them against himself; and for decades on end he laboured in a series of books and essays to adapt his obviously unimpaired talents to the unrelieved sterility of Soviet claptrap, which in the meantime had degraded the philosophy it proclaimed to the level of a mere instrument in the service of its rule. Only for the sake of the early writings, which were disparaged by his Party and which he had himself abjured, has anyone outside the Eastern bloc taken any notice at all of the works he has published over the last thirty years, among them a thick volume on the young Hegel. This remains true today, even though his former talent can still be discerned in one or two of his studies on German realist

¹ I.e. the neo-Kantians in Heidelberg such as Windelband, Rickert, Emil Lask, but also Max Weber.

literature in the 19th century, in particular those on Keller and Raabe. It was doubtless his book *The Destruction of Reason* which revealed most clearly the destruction of Lukács's own. In a highly undialectical manner, the officially licensed dialectician sweeps all the irrationalist strands of modern philosophy into the camp of reaction and Fascism. He blithely ignores the fact that, unlike academic idealism, these schools were struggling against the very same reification in both thought and life of which Lukács too was a dedicated opponent. Nietzsche and Freud are simply labelled Fascists, and he could even bring himself to refer to Nietzsche, in the condescending tones of a provincial Wilhelmian school inspector, as a man 'of above-average abilities'. Under the mantle of an ostensibly radical critique of society he surreptitiously reintroduced the most threadbare clichés of the very conformism which that social criticism had once attacked.

As for the book under consideration, *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*,² published in the West by Claassen Verlag in 1958, we can detect in it traces of a change of attitude on the part of the 75-year-old writer. These presumably have to do with the conflict he became involved in through his active role in the Nagy government. Not only does he talk about the crimes of the Stalin era, but he even speaks up on behalf of 'a general commitment to the freedom to write', a formulation that would earlier have been unthinkable. Lukács posthumously discovers some merit in Brecht, his adversary of many years' standing, and praises as a work of genius his *Ballad of the Dead Soldier*, a poem which must strike the East German rulers as a cultural-Bolshevist atrocity. Like Brecht, he would like to widen the concept of socialist realism, which has been used for decades to stifle any spontaneous impulse, any product incomprehensible or suspect to the apparatchiks, so as to make room for works that rise above the level of despicable trash. He ventures a timid opposition in gestures which show him to be paralysed from the outset by the consciousness of his own impotence. His timidity is no mere tactic. Lukács's personal integrity is above all suspicion. But the conceptual structure to which he has sacrificed his intellect is so restricted that it suffocates anything which might have breathed more freely; the *sacrificio dell' intelletto* does not let the intellect off scot-free. This casts a melancholy light on Lukács's unconcealed nostalgia for his own early writings. The notion of 'the immanent meaning of life' from *The Theory*

² The English edition was published by Merlin Press, London 1962. Page-numbers henceforward refer to the latter. Translations have sometimes been modified, however.

of the *Novel* recurs here, but it is reduced to the dictum that life in a society building up socialism is in fact full of meaning – a dogma just good enough to provide a plausible philosophical justification of the rosy positive attitude expected of art in the peoples' republics. The book is like a parfait or a sundae – halfway between a so-called thaw on the one hand and a renewed freeze on the other.

Operating reductively, imperiously distributing labels such as critical or socialist realism, Lukács still behaves like a Cultural Commissar, for all his dynamic assurances to the contrary. Hegel's criticism of Kantian formalism in aesthetics is reduced to the simplified assertion that in modern art the emphasis on style, form and technique is grossly exaggerated (see esp. p. 19) – even though Lukács must be perfectly well aware that these are the features that distinguish art as knowledge from science, and that works of art which ignored their own form, would destroy themselves as art. What looks like formalism to him, really means the structuring of the elements of a work in accordance with laws appropriate to them, and is relevant to that 'immanent meaning' for which Lukács yearns, as opposed to a meaning arbitrarily superimposed from outside, something he objectively defends while asserting its impossibility. Instead of recognizing the objective function of formal elements in determining the aesthetic content of modern art, he willfully misinterprets them as arbitrary ingredients added by an over-inflated subjectivism. The objectivity he misses in modern art and which he expects from the subject-matter when placed in 'perspective', is in fact achieved by the procedures and techniques which dissolve the subject-matter and reorganize it in a way which does create a perspective – but these are the very procedures and techniques he wishes to sweep away. He remains indifferent to the philosophical question of whether the concrete meaning of a work of art is in fact identical with the mere 'reflection of objective reality' (p. 101), a vulgar-materialist shibboleth to which he doggedly clings.

At all events, his own text disregards all the norms of the responsible criticism which his own early writings had helped to establish. No bearded Privy Councillor could pontificate about art in a manner more alien to it. He speaks with the voice of the dogmatic professor who knows he cannot be interrupted, who does not shrink from any digression, however lengthy, and who has evidently dispensed with those reactions which he castigates as aestheticist, formalistic and decadent, but which alone permit any real relationship with art. Even though the Hegelian concept of 'the concrete' still stands at a premium with him – especially

when he is concerned to restrict literature to the imitation of empirical reality – his own arguments remain largely abstract. His text hardly ever submits to the discipline imposed by a specific work of art and the problems implicit in it. Instead he issues decrees. The pedantry of his general manner is matched by his slovenliness in matters of detail. Lukács does not recoil from seedy truisms such as 'lecturing and writing are very different activities'; repeatedly uses the expression 'top-grade performance' [*Spitzleistung*], whose origins lie in the world of commerce and record-breaking (p. 11); he calls the obliteration of the distinction between abstract and concrete potentiality 'appalling' [*verherrend*] and recalls how 'from Giotto on a new secularity triumphs more and more over the allegorizing of an earlier period' (p. 40). We who figure as decadents in Lukács's vocabulary may seriously overvalue form and style, but at least it has preserved us hitherto from formulations such as 'from Giotto on', as well as from the temptation to praise Kafka because he is a 'marvellous observer' (p. 45). Nor will modernists have had very much to say about 'the series of extraordinarily numerous emotions which together combine to structure the inner life of man'. Confronted with such top-grade performances, which follow each other as rapidly as at the Olympic Games, one might well wonder whether a man who can write like this, in such obvious ignorance of the craft of the literature which he treats in such a cavalier manner, has any right at all to an opinion on literary matters. But in the stylistic amalgam of pedantry and irresponsibility to be found in Lukács, who was once able to write well, one senses a certain malice aforethought, a truculent determination to write badly, evidently in the belief that this sacrifice on his part will demonstrate by some magic trick that anyone who does otherwise and who takes pains with his work is a good-for-nothing. Indifference to style, we may remark in passing, is almost always symptomatic of the dogmatic sclerosis of content. The false modesty implicit in a style which believes itself to be dispassionate, as long as it abstains from self-reflection, only succeeds in concealing the fact that it has purified the dialectical process of its objective, as well as its subjective, value. Dialectics are paid lip-service, but for such a thinker all has been decided in advance. The writing becomes undialectical.

The core of his theory remains dogmatic. The whole of modern literature is dismissed except where it can be classified as either critical or socialist realism, and the odium of decadence is heaped on it without a quail, even though such abuse brings with it all the horrors of persecution and extermination, and not only in Russia. The term 'decadence'

belongs to the vocabulary of conservatism. Its use by Lukács, as well as his superiors, is designed to claim for the community the authority of a doctrine with which it is in fact incompatible. The idea of decadence can scarcely be entertained in the absence of its positive counterpart: the image of nature in all its vigour and abundance. The categories of nature are smuggled illicitly into the mediations of society, the very practice against which the tenor of Marx's and Engels' critique of ideology was directed. Not even the echoes of Feuerbach's doctrine of healthy sensuous existence were influential enough to procure entry for the terminology of Social Darwinism into their texts. As late as 1857–58, i.e. during the period when *Capital* was underway, we find the following statement in the rough draft of the *Grundrisse*: 'As much, then, as the whole of this movement appears as a social process, and as much as the individual moments of this movement arise from the conscious will and particular purposes of individuals, so much does the totality of the process appear as an objective interrelation, which arises spontaneously from nature; arising, it is true, from the mutual influence of conscious individuals on one another, but neither located in their consciousness, nor subsumed under them as a whole. Their own collisions with one another produce an *alien* social power standing above them, produce their mutual interaction as a process and power independent of them. . . . The social relation of individuals to one another as a power over the individuals which has become autonomous, whether conceived as a natural force, as chance or in whatever other form, is a necessary result of the fact that the point of departure is not the free social individual.'³

Such criticism does not even call a halt at that highly sensitive realm in which the appearance of the organic offers the most stubborn resistance to the social, and in which all indignation about decadence has its home: the sphere of sexuality. Somewhat earlier, in a review of C. F. Daumer's *The Religion of the New Age*, Marx had pilloried the following passage: 'Nature and womanhood are the truly Divine in contrast to humanity and manhood. . . . The devotion of the human to the natural, of man to woman, is the authentic, the only true humility and selflessness; it is the most exalted, indeed the only virtue and piety that exists.' To which Marx appends the following commentary: 'We see here how the superficiality and ignorance of this speculative spokesman of religiosity are transformed into a pronounced form of cowardice. Herr Daumer flees

³ Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, Harmondsworth 1973, pp. 196–7, trans. by Martin Nicolaus.

from the tragedies of history which threaten to come too close to him for comfort and seeks refuge in so-called nature, i.e. the cretinous rustic idyll, and he preaches the cult of womanhood in order to cloak his own effeminate resignation.⁴

Wherever people inveigh against decadence, this flight is re-enacted. Lukács is forced into it by a situation in which social injustice persists even though officially it has been abolished. Responsibility is shifted away from conditions for which men are responsible and back on to nature, or alternatively, on to a decadence which is conceived as its opposite. Lukács has of course made the attempt to conjure away the contradiction between Marxist theory and official Marxism by twisting the ideas of sick and healthy art back into social concepts: 'The relations between men change in the course of history, and the intellectual and emotional values placed on those relations change accordingly. But to realize this is not to embrace relativism. At any specific time one human relationship may be progressive and another reactionary. We can therefore make use of the concept of social health and establish it as the foundation of all really great art, for what is socially healthy becomes an integral part of the historical consciousness of mankind.'⁵

But the futility of this attempt is obvious. In any discussion of historical problems, the terms 'sick' and 'healthy' are best avoided altogether. They have no connection with the dimension represented by progress/reaction; they are simply dragged in for the sake of their demagogic appeal. Furthermore, the dichotomy of healthy/sick is as undialectical as that of the rise and fall of the bourgeoisie, which itself derives its norms from a bourgeois consciousness that has failed to keep pace with its own development.

I will not deign to dwell on the point that, in invoking the concepts of decadence and modernism – the two signify the same thing in his eyes – Lukács yokes together things and people who have absolutely nothing in common – not just Proust, Kafka, Joyce and Beckett, but also Benn, Jünger and perhaps even Heidegger; and in the realm of theory, Benjamin and myself. The facile tactic so popular nowadays of suggesting that an object of attack does not really exist as such, but disintegrates into a series of incompatible parts, is all too readily available to soften up attack and evade hostile argument with the gesture 'that doesn't apply to me'. At the risk therefore of being led to over-simplify by my own opposition

⁴ Karl Marx: Review of C. F. Daumer's *The Religion of the New Age*, in the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, Hamburg 1850.

⁵ Georg Lukács: *Healthy Art, or Sick in G.L. zum 70. Geburtstag*, Berlin 1955, p. 243.

to over-simplification, I shall keep hold of the central thread of Lukács's argument and not differentiate between the objects of his attack much more than he does himself, except where he travesties them to excess.

His efforts to bolster up the naive Soviet verdict on modern art, i.e. on any literature which shocks the naively realistic normal mind, by providing it with a philosophical good conscience, are carried out with a very limited range of tools, all of them Hegelian in origin. In the first place, in order to press home his point that modernist literature is a deviation from reality, he drags in the distinction between 'abstract' and 'real' potentiality: 'These two categories, their affinities, differences and opposition are rooted in life itself. Viewed abstractly, i.e. subjectively, potentiality is always richer than actual life. Countless possibilities seem open to the human mind, of which only a negligibly minute percentage can ever be realized. Modern subjectivism, discerning in this apparent plenitude the authentic abundance of the human soul, contemplates it with a melancholy tinged with admiration and sympathy. However, when reality declines to realize such possibilities, these feelings become transformed into a no less melancholy contempt' (p. 21–2). This point cannot simply be shrugged off, despite the percentage. When Brecht, to take an example, devised a kind of childish shorthand to try and crystallize out the essence of Fascism in terms of a sort of gangsterism, he made his 'resistible' dictator, Arturo Ui, the head of an imaginary and apocryphal Cauliflower Trust, instead of the most powerful economic organizations. This unrealistic device proved to be a mixed blessing. By thinking of Fascism as an enterprise belonging to a band of criminals who have no real place in the social system and who can therefore be 'resisted' at will, you strip it of its horror and diminish its social significance. This invalidates the caricature and makes it seem idiotic even in its own terms: the despotic rise of the minor criminal loses its plausibility in the course of the play itself. Satire which fails to stay on the level of its subject lacks spice.

But the demand for pragmatic fidelity to life can only refer to a writer's basic experience of reality and the *membra disiecta* of the subject-matter from which he fashions his work. In Brecht's case, this can only mean the actual bonds connecting politics and the economy as well as the need for the initial situation to fit the facts. It does not apply to what happens to these facts in the course of the work. Proust provides the most striking illustration of the unity of pragmatic fidelity and – in Lukácsian terms – unrealistic manner, for in his work we find the most intimate fusion of an extremely 'realistic' observation of detail with an aesthetic form

based on the principle of involuntary recollection. If any of the intimacy of this synthesis is lost, if 'concrete potentiality' is interpreted in terms of an unreflecting overall realism, rigidly partitioned off from the object it observes, while any element of art antithetical to the subject-matter is permitted only as a 'perspective', i.e. in the sense that a meaning is allowed to become visible without reaching the centre of the work, the real objects at its core, then what results is an abuse of Hegel's distinction in the interests of a traditionalism whose aesthetic backwardness provides an index of its historical falsity.

Lukács's central line of attack, however, is the charge of 'ontologism', which, if sustained, would enable him to pin the whole of modernist literature on to the archaic existential notions of Heidegger. Of course, Lukács himself follows the fashion and insists that the question 'What is Man?' has to be put (p. 19), and that we must not be deterred by the prospect of where it might lead. However, he does at least modify it by reverting to Aristotle's familiar definition of man as a social animal. From this he deduces the scarcely contentious proposition that 'the human significance, the specific individual and typical quality' of the characters in great literature, 'their sensuous, artistic reality, cannot be separated from the context in which they were created' (Ibid.). 'Quite opposed to this', he goes on, is 'the ontological view governing the image of man in the work of leading modernist writers. To put it briefly: in their eyes "man" means the individual who has always existed, who is essentially solitary, asocial and — ontologically — incapable of entering into relationships with other human beings.' (Ibid.). This is supported by reference to a somewhat foolish utterance by Thomas Wolfe, which clearly has no relevance to literary works, to the effect that solitariness is the inescapable fact of man's existence. But as someone who claims to think in radically historical terms, Lukács of all people ought to know that in an individualistic society loneliness is socially mediated and so possesses a significant historical content.

All such categories as decadence, formalism and aestheticism can be traced back to Baudelaire, and Baudelaire shows no interest in an unchanging essence of man, his loneliness or his derelict existence [*Geworfenheit*], but rather in the essence of modernity. 'Essence' itself in this poetry is no abstract thing in itself; it is a social phenomenon. The objectively dominant idea in Baudelaire's work is that the new, the products of historical progress, are what has to be conjured up in his verse. To use Benjamin's expression, we find not an archaic, but a 'dialectical' image in his work. Hence the *Tableaux Parisiens*. Even in

Joyce's case we do not find the timeless image of man which Lukács would like to foist on to him, but man as the product of history. For all his Irish folklore, Joyce does not invoke a mythology beyond the world he depicts, but instead strives to mythologize it, i.e. to create its essence, whether benign or maleficent, by applying the technique of stylization so despised by the Lukács of today. One is almost tempted to measure the achievements of modernist writing by inquiring whether historical moments are given substance as such within their works, or whether they are diluted into some sort of timelessness.

Lukács would doubtless deprecate as idealistic the use of terms like 'image' and 'essence' in aesthetics. But their application in the realm of art is fundamentally different from what it is in philosophies of essence or of primitive images, especially refurbished versions of the Platonic Ideas. The most fundamental weakness of Lukács's position is probably his inability to maintain this distinction, a failure which leads him to transfer to the realm of art categories which refer to the relationship of consciousness to the actual world, as if there were no difference between them. Art exists in the real world and has a function in it, and the two are connected by a large number of mediating links. Nevertheless, as art it remains the antithesis of that which is the case. Philosophy has acknowledged this situation by defining art as 'aesthetic appearance'. Even Lukács will find it impossible to get away from the fact that the content of works of art is not real in the same sense as social reality. If this distinction is lost, then all attempts to provide a real foundation for aesthetics must be doomed to failure. But artistic appearance, the fact that art has set itself apart in qualitative terms from the immediate actuality in which it magically came into being, is neither its ideological Fall, nor does it make art an arbitrary system of signs, as if it merely reproduced the world without claiming to possess the same immediate reality. Any view as reductive as this would be a sheer mockery of dialectics.

More to the point is the assertion that the difference between art and empirical reality touches on the former's innermost being. It is no idealistic crime for art to provide essences, 'images'; the fact that many artists have inclined towards an idealist philosophy says nothing about the content of their works. The truth of the matter is that except where art goes against its own nature and simply duplicates existence, its task vis-à-vis that which merely exists, is to be its essence and image. This alone constitutes the aesthetic; art does not become knowledge with reference to mere immediate reality, i.e. by doing justice to a reality

which veils its own essence and suppresses its truth in favour of a merely classificatory order. Art and reality can only converge if art crystallizes out its own formal laws, not by passively accepting objects as they come. In art knowledge is aesthetically mediated through and through. Even alleged cases of solipsism, which signify for Lukács the regression to an illusory immediacy on the part of the individual, do not imply the denial of the object, as they would in bad theories of knowledge, but instead aim at a dialectical reconciliation of subject and object. In the form of an image the object is absorbed into the subject instead of following the bidding of the alienated world and persisting obdurately in a state of reification. The contradiction between the object reconciled in the subject, i.e. spontaneously absorbed into the subject, and the actual unreconciled object in the outside world, confers on the work of art a vantage-point from which it can criticize actuality. Art is the negative knowledge of the actual world. In analogy to a current philosophical phrase we might speak of the 'aesthetic distance' from existence: only by virtue of this distance, and not by denying its existence, can the work of art become both work of art and valid consciousness. A theory of art which ignores this is at once philistine and ideological.

Lukács contents himself with Schopenhauer's aperçu that the principle of solipsism is 'only really viable with complete consistency in the most abstract form of philosophy' and 'even there only with a measure of sophistry' (p. 21). But his argument is self-defeating: if solipsism cannot be sustained, if it only succeeds in reproducing what it has begun by 'bracketing out', to use the phenomenological term, then we need have no fear of it as a stylistic principle. Objectively, then, in their works, the modernists have moved beyond the position Lukács ascribes to them. Proust decomposes the unity of the subjective mind by dint of its own introspection: the mind ends by transforming itself into a stage on which objective realities are made visible. His individualistic work becomes the opposite of that for which Lukács derides it: it becomes anti-individualistic. The *monologue intérieur*, the worldlessness of modern art which makes Lukács so indignant, is both the truth and the appearance of a free-floating subjectivity – it is truth, because in the universal atomistic state of the world, alienation rules over men, turning them into mere shadows of themselves – a point we may undoubtedly concede to Lukács. The free-floating subject is appearance, however, inasmuch as, objectively, the social totality has precedence over the individual, a totality which is created and reproduces itself through alienation and through the contradictions of society. The great works of modernist

literature shatter this appearance of subjectivity by setting the individual in his frailty into context, and by grasping that totality in him of which the individual is but a moment and of which he must needs remain ignorant. Lukács evidently believes that when the Habsburg monarchy in Kafka and Musil, or Dublin in Joyce make themselves felt as a sort of 'atmospheric backdrop for the action' (p. 21), it somehow goes against the programme but nevertheless remains of secondary importance. But in arguing thus for the sake of his thesis, he clearly reduces something very substantial, a growing epic plenitude with all its negative potential, to the status of a mere accessory. The concept of atmosphere is in any event highly inappropriate as applied to Kafka. It goes back to an Impressionism which Kafka supersedes by his objectivist concern with historical essence. Even in Beckett – and perhaps in him above all – where seemingly all concrete historical components have been eliminated, and only primitive situations and forms of behaviour are tolerated, the unhistorical façade is the provocative opposite of the absolute Being idealized by reactionary philosophies. The primitivism with which his works begin so abruptly represents the final phase of a regression, especially obvious in *Fin de Partie*, in which, as from the far-distant realm of the self-evident, a terrestrial catastrophe is presupposed. His primitive men are the last men. One theme we discover in his works is something which Horkheimer and I have already discussed in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*: the fact that a society wholly in the grip of the Culture Industry displays all the reactions of an amphibian. The substantive content of a work of art can survive in the precise, wordless polemic which depicts the dawn of a nonsensical world; and it can vanish again as soon as it is positively asserted, as soon as existence is claimed for it, a fate similar to the one that befalls the didactic antithesis between a right and a wrong mode of life to be found in Tolstoy after *Anna Karenina*.

Lukács's favourite old idea of an 'immanent meaning' points towards that same dubious faith in the face value of things which his own theory sets out to destroy. Conceptions like Beckett's, however, have an objective, polemical thrust. Lukács twists them into 'the straightforward portrayal of the pathological, of the perverse, of idiocy, all of which are seen as types of the "condition humaine"' (p. 32) – and in this he follows the example of the film censor who regards the content as a defect of the treatment. Above all, Lukács's confusion of Beckett with the cult of Being and even with the inferior version of vitalism to be found in Montherlant (*ibid.*) exposes his inability to see what is in front of him. This blindness arises from his stubborn refusal to acknowledge the central

claims of literary technique. He sticks imperturbably to what is narrated. But in literature the point of the subject matter can only be made effective by the use of techniques – something which Lukács himself hopes for from the more than suspect concept of 'perspective'. One would like to ask what would be left of Greek drama, which Hegel, like Lukács, has duly canonized, if the criterion of its value were the story which could be picked up in the street. The same holds good for the traditional novel and even for writers such as Flaubert who come into Lukács's category of the 'realist' novel: here too composition and style are fundamental.

Today, when empirical veracity has sunk to the level of superficial reportage, the relevance of technique has increased enormously. By structuring his work, the writer can hope to master the arbitrary and the individual against which Lukács so passionately inveighs. He fails to follow the insight contained in his last chapter to its logical conclusion: the purely arbitrary cannot be overcome simply by a determination to look at things in what purports to be a more objective manner. Lukács ought surely to be familiar with the key importance of the technical forces of production in history. No doubt this was more concerned with material than with cultural production. But can he really close his eyes to the fact that the techniques of art also develop in accordance with their own logic? Can he rest content with the abstract assertion that when society changes, completely different aesthetic criteria automatically come into force? Can he really persuade himself that this justifies him in nullifying the technical advance of the forces of production and providing for the canonical restoration of older, outdated forms? Does he not simply don the dictatorial mantle of socialist realism in order to expound an immutable doctrine which differs from the one he rightly repudiates only by its greater insensitivity?

Lukács places himself in the great philosophical tradition that conceives of art as knowledge which has assumed concrete shape, rather than as something irrational to be contrasted with science. This is perfectly legitimate, but he still finds himself ensnared in the same cult of immediacy of which he myopically accuses modernist literature: the fallacy of mere assertion. Art does not provide knowledge of reality by reflecting it photographically or 'from a particular perspective' but by revealing whatever is veiled by the empirical form assumed by reality, and this is possible only by virtue of art's own autonomous status. Even the suggestion that the world is unknowable, which Lukács so indelibly castigates in writers like Eliot or Joyce, can become a moment of knowledge. This can happen where a gulf opens up between

the overwhelming and unassimilable world of things, on the one hand, and a human experience impotently striving to gain a firm hold on it, on the other.

Lukács over-simplifies the dialectical unity of art and science, reducing it to bare identity, just as if works of art did nothing but apply their perspective in such a way as to anticipate some of the insights that the social sciences subsequently confirm. The essential distinction between artistic and scientific knowledge, however, is that in art nothing empirical survives unchanged; the empirical facts only acquire objective meaning when they are completely fused with the subjective intention. Even though Lukács draws a line between Realism and Naturalism, he nevertheless fails to make it clear that, if the distinction is to hold good, realist writing must necessarily achieve that synthesis with the subjective intentions which he would like to see expelled from Realism. In fact there is no way of preserving the antithesis between realist and 'formalist' approaches which, like an inquisitor, he erects into an absolute standard. On the one hand, it turns out that the principles of form which Lukács anathematizes as unrealistic and idealistic, have an objective aesthetic function; on the other, it becomes no less obvious that the novels of the early 19th century e.g. those of Dickens and Balzac, which he holds in such high esteem, and which he does not scruple to hold up as paradigms of the novelist's art, are by no means as realistic as all that. It is true that Marx and Engels might have considered them so in their polemic against the marketable romantic literature so fashionable in their day. Today, however, we not only see romantic and archaic, pre-bourgeois elements in both novelists, but even worse, Balzac's entire *Comédie Humaine* stands revealed as an imaginative reconstruction of the alienated world, i.e. of a reality no longer experienced by the individual subject. Seen in this light, the difference between it and the modernist victims of Lukács's class-justice is not very great; it is just that Balzac, in tune with his whole conception of form, thought of his monologues in terms of the plenitude of real life, while the great novelists of the 20th century encapsulate their worldly plenitude within the monologue.

This shatters Lukács's approach to its foundations. His concept of 'perspective' sinks inexorably to the level of what he strives in vain to distinguish it from in the last chapter of his book, namely an element of tendentiousness or, to use his own word, 'agitation', imposed from without. His whole position is paradoxical. He cannot escape the awareness that, aesthetically, social truth thrives only in works of art autonomously created. But in the concrete works of modern times this

autonomy is accompanied by all those things which have been proscribed by the prevailing communist doctrine and which he neither could, nor can, tolerate. His hope was that obsolete and unsatisfactory aesthetic techniques might be legitimated if they could achieve a different standing in a different social system, i.e. that they might be justified from outside, from a point beyond their own internal logic. But this hope is pure superstition. It is not good enough for Lukács simply to dismiss the fact that the very products of socialist realism that have claimed to represent an advanced state of consciousness, in fact do no more than serve up the crumbling and insipid residues of bourgeois art-forms. This is a fact which stands in need of an objective explanation. Socialist realism did not simply have its origins, as communist theologians would like to believe, in a socially healthy and sound world; it was equally the product of the backwardness of consciousness and of the social forces of production. The only use they make of the thesis of the qualitative rupture between socialism and the bourgeoisie is to falsify that backwardness, which it has long been forbidden to mention, and twist it into something more progressive.

Lukács combines the charge of ontologism with that of individualism, which, following Heidegger's theory of man's existential forsakenness [*Geworfenheit*] from *Being and Time*, he interprets as a standpoint of unreflective loneliness. Lukács criticizes this stance (p. 51), showing how the literary work emerges from the poetic subject in all its adventurousness, much as Hegel had shown in rigorous argument how philosophy emerges from the sensory certainties of the individual.⁶ But as that immediacy turns out to be mediated in itself, the work of art contains within itself all the elements which Lukács finds lacking in that immediacy, while, on the other hand, the poetic subject finds it necessary to start from what is nearest to itself for the sake of that anticipated reconciliation of consciousness with the objective world. Lukács extends his denunciation of individualism to include Dostoyevsky. His story *Letters from the Underworld* is 'one of the first descriptions of the decadent individual' (p. 62). But by this junction of decadence and loneliness the process of atomization which has its source in the principle of bourgeois society itself is converted into nothing more than a manifestation of decline. Over and above this, the word 'decadent' has connotations of the biological decay of individuals: it is a parody of the fact that this

loneliness must have roots reaching back far beyond bourgeois society, for gregarious animals likewise form what Borchardt called a 'lonely community'; the *zoon politikon* had to be developed at a later stage. What is an historical premise of all modern art, which can only be transcended where it is fully acknowledged for what it is, appears in Lukács as an avoidable error or even as a bourgeois delusion. However, as soon as he comes to grips with the most recent Russian literature, he discovers that the structural change he had posited, has not in fact taken place. But this does not teach him to renounce such concepts as decadent loneliness. The position of the modernists he censures – or their 'transcendental situation', to use his earlier terminology – is not an ontological loneliness, but one which is historically conditioned. The ontologists of today are all too concerned with bonds which ostensibly attach Man to pure Being but in fact confer the semblance of immortality on temporal authorities of all shapes and sizes. In this they would not hit it off so badly with Lukács as one might expect. We may readily agree with him that it is illusory to think of loneliness as an *a priori* form; loneliness is a social product, and it transcends itself as soon as it reflects on itself as such.

But this is the point at which the dialectics of aesthetics rebounds against him. It is not open to the individual to transcend a collectively determined loneliness through his own decision and determination. Echoes of this can be heard distinctly enough when Lukács settles accounts with the tendentious content of the standardized Soviet novel. In general it is difficult to rid oneself of the impression one gains when reading the book, especially the impassioned pages on Kafka (vide pp. 49f.), that he reacts to the writers he anatomizes as decadent much like the legendary cab-horse which stops in its tracks on hearing the sudden sound of military music, before it goes on pulling its cart. To enable himself to resist their blandishments the more easily, Lukács joins in the chorus of censors who, ever since Kierkegaard (whom he himself classifies alongside the avant-garde), if not as far back as the furore over Friedrich Schlegel⁷ and the early Romantics, have always waxed indignant over art that is merely interesting.⁸ We would need to change the nature of this discussion. The fact that an insight or a work of art can be said to be interesting does not automatically mean it can be reduced to sensationalism or the cultural market, even though these

⁶ *The Phenomenology of Mind*, trans. Baillie. See especially the end of the section on *The Unhappy Consciousness* (in Chapter IV): *Self-Consciousness passing into Reason*, which re-enacts the moves made earlier at the end of Chaps. I and II.

⁷ Focused on his 'obscene' novel *Lucinde*.

⁸ The 'interesting' developed as a concept during the Romantic period where it tended to be a defining feature of modern art and criticism, as opposed to classical beauty from which the public derived, in Kant's phrase, 'a disinterested pleasure'.