

MIMESIS — LUKACS' UNIVERSAL PRINCIPLE

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LUKACS came to Marxism in a very complex way. In 1933 he wrote that he arrived at Marx through Kant and Hegel; but we could add that there was undoubtedly also a strong influence of *Lebensphilosophie*, of Simmel in particular, and unquestionably a strong intellectual dependence upon Max Weber. This admixture, still incompletely defined, shows the dilemma of Lukacs very sharply. He might have broken abruptly with all this; he did not. He came to Marxism through an evolution and when he finally emerged a Marxist, he consciously adapted all his prior knowledge and attitudes to his Marxist outlook. It would not make sense, therefore, to study the aesthetics of Lukacs in 1963 without a knowledge of his *Die Seele und die Formen* of 1914. His first Marxist works on aesthetics were published in the 1930s; their basic ideas date from earlier. Lukacs was then not yet a Marxist, but he had already read much in Marx. During 1915–25 his interpretations of artistic form and content became increasingly *historicized*. Even earlier, he was extremely sensitive to alienation in contemporary drama and the novel, and sought to balance the idea of *Totalität*—taken from Hegel and Simmel—with it. His reading in Marx gradually gave a definite socialist character to the concept *Totalität*. *Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein* (1923), that turning point in Lukacs' work which demonstrated the reification process and distinguished actual from potential consciousness, leads him to definite conclusions in aesthetics. Art, or more precisely, its genesis and function, had to be regarded in the light of class conflict and in terms of the perspective of the victory

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of socialism. Lukacs' essays from the time of his activity on *Die Linkskurve* were written in this spirit; at this time he formed his notion of the equivalence of partisanship in art with an authentic realism, that is, the capturing of true social process; and at this time he also proposed that realism be chosen as the means of looking at reality in its typicality (subject-object relationship), as opposed to naturalism, which provides only the artistic rendering of reportage. In all these writings Lukacs opposed sectarian efforts to cut socialist creative works off from the best creative efforts of critical bourgeois authors. He viewed the work of Thomas Mann in particular as an important bridge between the old and new cultural worlds. There are, according to Lukacs, historical epochs in which even the best artists find themselves unable to make unequivocal statements of their class allegiance. Such times are usually epochs of revolutionary change, when, like gods living in the empty spaces between particles of matter, the artists work in an Epicurean *Intermundium*.

If one were to say only this of Lukacs, the reader might conclude that his scientific talent lies mainly in his great erudition and his extremely clever adaptation of older philosophical ideas to the language of Marxism. Such a presentation would therefore falsify the value of his work, the most important element of which is his own creative philosophy. It is here that his aesthetic achievements are the greatest.

We come now to an extremely difficult subject: the history of Marxist aesthetics.

One of Lukacs' great merits is that he showed there is a Marxist aesthetics. At the same time, he undertook several analyses of changes within the Marxist doctrine (e.g., Mehring, Lenin). There is no doubt that no Marxist scientist has broadened the circle of aesthetic questions or analyzed and systemized them more deeply than Lukacs. Those who say that Lukacs provides the first Marxist system of aesthetics are not mistaken. There is no problem which he has not placed in a new light; no aesthetic question on which he has not shown that Marxism has its roots in the best European tradition. Always extremely sensitive to our cultural heritage, Lukacs still never fails to point out the revolutionary philosophical and aesthetic changes wrought by Marx.

When I reflect on the *novum* Lukacs has created in Marxist

aesthetic science, I think in the first instance of his research method. The study of the history of literature in the light of historical change does not seem particularly new; what is new, however, is his view of the philosophical interpretation of artistic creation. The analysis of the relation of content to form in an artistic work and the spiritual structure enclosing it, which iconology—arising from *Geistesgeschichte*—carries on today, was undertaken by Lukacs but with a rather different point of view. He regarded the creative work's existence from the viewpoint of the history of philosophy; he looked for the relation of an artist to the encompassing social processes through the prism of the alienation phenomenon. He went deeply into the artist's specific philosophy as presented in a given artistic creation, examining how that philosophy confronts other existent philosophies.

Lukacs, known for this kind of interpretation, also introduced another *novum* related closely to it: the historical interpretation of form and genre. From his first publications this problem interested him. However, the terminology and interpretation he used in 1910–11 were suggestive but murky; he wrote of ready-to-hand spiritual forms, waiting for an artist to put them into his work. But, even then, one could see his social interest in the subject. His attitude was changed rapidly and in the following years, Lukacs began to explain the failures of novels and dramas as an aspect of the failure of bourgeois culture. A fully developed Marxist interpretation of this problem did not come until he wrote *The Historical Novel* in the 1950s, but I do not know any major work by Lukacs which did not emphasize the relation of changing artistic forms to social changes. This sociology of forms has yet to be presented in a systematic way; perhaps Lukacs will do so in further volumes of his aesthetics. In any case, his analyses do approach problems which are usually untouched or hardly touched, and do so in the light of total Marxist doctrine. Only the art theoretician, Max Raphael (who spent his last years in the United States, and is hardly known either there or in Poland), has achieved some comparable success in this direction.

The third *novum* is Lukacs' analysis of realism. Despite the fact that on this point Marxist analysis is extremely rich, no one has equaled his deep philosophical analysis of this concept, nor have others brought such broad literary-historical studies to bear

in proving their thesis. The problem of realism—in Lukacs' interpretation—is connected with the questions of genesis and function in art; its relation to religion and science; and to beauty in nature and aesthetic emotion. Each of these questions Lukacs puts in his own untraditional way, and each one of his answers erects an impressive edifice, which together offer a fundamental *novum*. And here we come to our principal theme.

In 1963, Luchterhand, a West German house, published the first two volumes of Lukacs' aesthetics (*Die Eigenart des Aesthetischen*). Altogether they contain over 1700 pages and are, in a way, the sum-total of all Lukacs' analyses concerned with the specificity of artistic creation. A selective discussion is necessary, for despite the sustained quality of the work, many detailed problems are touched upon which would require separate comment. Because the chief subject is mimesis, or to be more exact, a theory of the universality of the reflection of reality in art, I shall analyze, along with Lukacs and in the light of this premise, the problem of the genesis of art and of its specificity.

Before undertaking this, it is necessary to say a few words about aspects of Lukacs' work that reveal a hitherto unknown Lukacs. Most strikingly, this work goes outside of literature, which has previously been the main field of his studies. The book is of much interest to art historians; Lukacs proves not only amazingly erudite in this field, but shows himself to be an independent and fertile researcher. He broadens the circle of problems from another aspect, inasmuch as his work: (a) gives a deeper Marxist analysis of how the world is known; (b) takes the analysis of art's genesis—as I have sought to demonstrate—from the viewpoint of a historical process that moves toward the independence of artistic forms, rather than from the traditional, well-understood (class-conditioned) point of view; (c) analyzes the future for art, especially in the light of an evolutionary release from the chains of religion; (d) analyzes Pavlov's concept of signal-systems from the viewpoint of the specificity of artistic and aesthetic cognition; and (e) analyzes especially the anthropomorphic character of art from the aspect of art's various functions and its role in the moral and political development of man. Yet we should realize that this is only, as Lukacs says, a preparation for analysis. The interpretation pro-

vided in these two volumes is drawn from the dialectical materialist perspective on art. From the viewpoint of historical materialism a short, summary account of artistic and aesthetic consciousness, based on the history of the various arts, has still to be presented.

The problem of genesis—as presented by Lukacs—has been little analyzed within the Marxist framework. The remarks of Ernst Fischer, in *The Necessity of Art*, do not provide a clear answer as to how artistic activity differs from other forms of social consciousness. I have analyzed the question in my lectures at the University of Warsaw during 1963–64 in a detailed way; this analysis is not yet published. In Lukacs' view, from a single material world of social praxis three fundamental forms of consciousness emerge: artistic, scientific, and everyday. Artistic consciousness is much closer to everyday consciousness than is scientific consciousness. This is because it is based on practical-sensuous, direct relation with reality. The object, which gives birth to the artistic consciousness and to which artistic consciousness returns, never is treated impersonally. Lukacs believes this striking difference is explained by the genesis of the phenomenon. In the genesis of art, he looks as well for the deeper determinant of artistic consciousness, which depends on concrete creation, i.e., the creation of works of art. Art develops slowly, against a background of the practical-technical conquest of reality which moves away from the magical-religious attitudes of primitive man. With Marx, Lukacs speaks of the objectification of the senses and of the release of man from direct dependence on reality. *Zur-Kunstwerden* as a process is not completely conscious, but goes forward in connection with a reality increasingly accessible and tangible to man. The more man focuses on sensually perceptible aspects of phenomena, the more deeply he penetrates real existence, the less is he dependent on the pressure of the magical-religious point of view, of which transcendentalism is characteristic. But how can such changes occur in the process of cognition? According to Lukacs, the cause lies as much in the biophysiological nature of the human being as in his social character, specifically in the human mimetic relation to reality.

If we go back to the beginnings of human civilization, not much remains aside from the plastic arts; even the remains of these arts require a difficult reconstruction. We should regard all such com-

pleted processes in the already assimilated perspective on the sequences of art and culture, looking not only at this or that sequence but at the entire context of the civilization. Lukacs thinks that the reconstruction of primitive conditions proves rhythm the most probable source, in the first instance, of artistic sensation. Rhythm—biologically taken—undergoes social modification through the labor process. Rhythm alone is not, however, an aesthetic element; after all, it is associated with definite contents and these contents are derived from *mimesis*. There is repetition of outside rhythms, participation in a magic ceremony, evocation of similar rhythm with others. According to Lukacs, only by understanding it in this way does rhythm have an anthropomorphic character, which means it answers to the needs of the man and allows him to express himself; in itself rhythm is something very mysterious and frightening, serving religious rather than aesthetic dispositions. Identical arguments apply to symmetry and proportion. It is not an aesthetic instinct which is crucial but rather the *reflection* of real spatial structure and real human experience, in relation to the real human biological constitution. Lukacs explains the appearance of asymmetry—as does Weyl (*Symmetry*, 1952)—by reference to the position of the heart. The basic meaning has again, however—together with the two above elements—a social praxis: Tools require a more exact symmetry and proportion to achieve a more effective production and a developing economy. The circle is closed. Mimesis manifests itself in definite production processes; and the results of these processes lead once again to an increased strength of the mimetic phenomenon.

In a similar way Lukacs explains the origin of ornament; he sees in it a tendency linked to the copying of nature and especially to specific production (baskets, pottery), thus discarding the hypothesis of an instinct for decoration supposed to be shared with animals. The consequence of this argument is a polemic with Worringer (*Abstraction und Einfühlung*, 1908), who held that ornaments had a special role in shaping primitive aesthetic attitudes and saw their genesis in a fear of mysterious powers. Lukacs does not doubt the transcendental experiences of the caveman; however, he says that like rhythm, ornament is first a reflection of geometry encountered in nature; second, it expresses among other things man's

adaptation to nature; and third, it is connected with many of the practical productive functions of man.

Art—in the light of the premises to this point—is always *diesseitig*, that is, sensuous-material, object-derived, and always *mimetic*. Its development moves from the reflection of abstract structure toward the reflection of concrete structure. If art fails to see the direct contact of man with reality, if it for instance absolutizes abstract forms, according to Lukacs it ceases to be art. What occurs is the *de-anthropomorphization* of art; art, in other words, is not yet freed from magic and religion, or is returning toward them (a case is modern art), or it subordinates itself to the rigor of scientific consciousness. Primitive art was not yet completely freed; despite the mimetic tendency, it was rooted deeply in magic or religion, having in view practical-social and transcendental purposes. However, the process of autonomization came about through the articulated usage of mimesis; for the act of copying sensuous, object-derived reality leads toward the break with magic. Mimesis presumes the relationship of fiction; the copy differs from what has been copied. Mimesis establishes a distance between the copy and reality; a distance not known in magical ceremony. Magic includes the object within the ceremonial sphere.

Mimesis tends, on the other hand, to see the structure of the given object, that is, the creative work, as a specific portion of the whole. An *eigene Welt* is created—a microcosm, a self-contained world of art. It is true that the self-contained world contains such elements as material and specific ways of expression (*homogenes Medium*), but in mimesis these are dependent. Copying is not a concept which Lukacs associates with photo-copying; in fact he declares the opposite. According to him, the crux is a knowledgeable mastering of the reality, a direct capturing of its basic characteristics, an expression of the complete human relation to nature and social life in given concrete historical conditions. Art, therefore, is an expression and evocation of the experience of a man seeing himself in relation to the total world as he finds it (the idea of *Totalität*). Materials and expressive means—based on the sensuous apparatus—may be most varied instruments of the mimetic-evocational attitude. It is in this way that art is shaped as a product of the independent form of consciousness.

Let us recapitulate the characteristic stages of that process.

Choice of what is close to man; objectification of the sensuously-given object; shaping of the self-enclosed structure, which is nonetheless in direct relation to the artist's emotion and to the concrete social reality that determines his view of nature and sensuously delineates its typical characteristics (*Besonderheit*). Lukacs concludes from this set of considerations that shaped structure is indeed a form, but always a content-form. Content after all constitutes the form, human content—derived from both the world within and the world without. The birth of the process here sketched is reconstructed by Lukacs on the model of dance, pantomime, and song as the most primitive artistic manifestations, and from the example of the plastic arts; he emphasizes that the aesthetic senses are visual and auditory, and a distance from outer reality is here implied. Lukacs does not exactly define the period in which this process of the autonomization of art occurred, but suggests, with Gordon Childe (*Man Makes Himself*, 1936), that the moment came following the neolithic revolution, in the era of the decadence of primitive communism.

Two obvious conclusions flow from the foregoing: (a) mimesis is a universal principle of art, and (b) art creates its own relatively autonomous world. To the second conclusion, Lukacs links further considerations about the *Für-sich-sein* of art. In the case of every social phenomenon, one can notice and deduce that its existence always is of a subject-object nature. The world always exists for us. Nevertheless the accent in various forms of consciousness is always changing; in science the world of objects (*An sich*) is the decisive element, while in religion the world of the subject (*Für uns*) is decisive, even considering the fact that religious consciousness mystifies a god as a superhuman absolute. Art has to constitute a particular field—wherein man most fully expresses himself (*vollendete intensive Totalität*), wherein in a way he intensifies reality, affirming his situation in the world. The *Für-sich-sein* of art, then, is an expression of man's consciousness given in closed subjective structures, providing a full statement of the characteristic features of reality. Thus the *Für-sich-sein* is always the same existential category of art, while at the same time it always takes *historically different shape*.

To the first conclusion Lukacs brings a consideration of borderline cases, such as music, architecture, applied arts, and landscape

gardening. If every authentic art must be realistic, if its *Für-sich-sein* must be tangible through the capturing of typical characteristics of the world, then all the arts should be open to analysis undertaken with the aid of the identical research tools. This is the essence of Lukacs' position, but he introduces an additional proviso. In the different arts or genres typicality is differently shape-giving (*Besonderheit*), that is, in the epic it adheres more closely to singularity (*Einzelheit*) and in drama to the general (*Allgemeinheit*). Therefore the creation of art is "a system of tensions," a dynamic structure whose oppositions depend in the same way on the materials and on a set of expressive means as they do on the historical moment. This reservation does not yet, however, reach down to the fundamentals of the various mimeses. To it Lukacs adds a statement that there is direct, indirect, and double (*gedoppelte*) mimesis.

Thus in music, the reflection is concerned with emotions which reflect real social attitudes. The inner world (*Innerlichkeit, des Seelische*) manifests—in an indirectly described manner—events from the objective world. Should one fetishize the subjective sensation, or musical form only, then music loses meaning. But if one accepts the idea that music must have a cathartic effect as an expression of life attitudes, then one arrives at its essence. Thus understood, music is a realistic art. Architecture similarly does not present reality, but is nonetheless realistic. It reflects not just proportions and antique symmetries, but through these expresses human needs. Man lives in a coordinate system: back-front, right-left, up-down. He adapts space to his ends, and within the limits of the adaptation he transmits his social-historical attitude. Here, then, we are concerned with the expression and evocation of feelings (*Empfindungskomplex*); and here also there is danger of the de-anthropomorphization of art, if one allots a superior or exclusive role to technical-constructive elements. In landscape gardening matters are similar, inasmuch as mimesis concerns the relation of man to nature, a relation which is of course social and concretely historical (*Stoffwechsel der Gesellschaft mit der Natur*). If the art of gardening is treated as nature itself (in a wild state), or as a projection of taste (pathetic fallacy)—one eliminates its meaning. It then becomes either the reality itself or an exclusively subjective reality. The art closest to architecture, according to Lukacs, is film.

In both cases the mimesis is precisely a double copying of reality. In architecture—let us repeat—one finds a reflection of the proportion and symmetry of spatial structures, and through these of social attitudes as well. In film one finds a photographic reflection of the world, and with this and through this, a typical structuring of the social reality. In both cases mimesis alone is the constitutive aesthetic element. Nature itself is not beautiful, nor has the mechanical reflection of nature an aesthetic value. To create art man must choose and provide a typicalization. An art in which man locates himself is always realistic.

The purpose of this article has been to present some of the ideas which appear in Lukacs' latest work. Due to the limitations of space, I have not been able to present everything adequately. Of necessity I have not gone into Lukacs' many-sided polemics against other basic aesthetic theories of art's genesis and specificity. Nor have I reconstructed the progress of his arguments from one thesis to the next, where he often does not offer a solution but only shows the possibility of overcoming an impasse. Since an argument with Lukacs' work would require a large separate study, I would like to conclude by presenting the reader with a few questions which I feel must be asked in regard to certain of his theses.

Lukacs employs the method of research derived from Marx's formulation that man's anatomy explains the anatomy of the monkey, and that to determine structure without a genetic analysis is impossible. (*Capital* is the best example of this.) Accepting the method, which I use in similar research, I would add that Lukacs has not striven sufficiently for the maximum objectivity possible today about past historical process. He begins with the probably-normative premise that the only art is a realistic art as he himself understands it, and traces its origins in light of this premise. From his rich materials, then, he draws out only as much as he puts in. Proving in this way that mimesis is a universal principle, he justifies his polemical jousts against modern art, that is, the so-called avant-garde, which in its entirety he treats as a fetishized, de-anthropomorphized creation. One can see very clearly here that Lukacs' deductions do not help correct the *circulus vitiosus* shown within them.

The premise that mimesis is the source of the development of

a relatively autonomous artistic structure is correct, and Lukacs' arguments here are fully convincing. When he sets out to prove, on the other hand, that mimesis is general and all-embracing (i.e., from it flow all the other motifs in the process of the autonomization of art), then his deductions appear arbitrary. In primitive conditions the composition of sensuously-given quantities, properly organized, always expressed some content, but it was not always concerned with the representation of real relations, even abstractly, i.e., geometric space. Apparently, Lukacs fails to appreciate the significance of transcendence in the artistic consciousness of primitive man, and wrongly makes the post-neolithic revolution the period of the full independence of art understood as mimesis. The history of art shows rather that mimesis, while accompanying art from the beginning, in subsequent phases of development gives priority to formal structure, and this becomes the fundamental artistic principle. Of course mimesis never disappears; later records of art are filled with the unwaning tension between the artistic recreation or reproduction of reality, and a retention of artistic structure within the limits of the form itself. At the same time, nothing shows that forms alone, given sensuousness and possessing expressive power, must always and everywhere act in a de-anthropomorphic way. After all, these also express the *Diesseitigkeit* of a man and in them his whole relation to the given social world is often projected.

I do not think that the principle of mimesis is as universal as Lukacs states. I base my judgment on his own considerations, among other things. When Lukacs set out for instance to prove that gardening, architecture, or music are mimetic arts, he was forced to bring in supplemental theses conflicting, to my mind, with his initial thesis. Mimesis is supposed to concern the relation of art to a directly given outside reality. In the arguments focusing on music and architecture, however, the accent moves to psychological or psycho-social attitudes. If one were to posit the expression of definite psychic or psycho-social states as a constitutive element of mimesis, then the concept would be so altered that Lukacs' entire thesis would become a truism. It would become an elastic statement—such as that art is always dependent on reality, by which one would understand the world of subject and the world of object in

the same way. Even should the "reflection" be verified in a limited sense, yet in a broader sense (as an expression of psychic states) it is so vague that Lukacs himself carefully avoids any strong statement about the relation between the emotional burden of music and architecture and their equivalent human psycho-social attitudes in this or that historical moment.

Even were we to assume the universality of the mimesis principle, the thesis of realism as applicable to all the arts would still be very doubtful. Lukacs' analysis of realism seems to me the best yet rendered in twentieth-century aesthetics, and not merely the best of the Marxist attempts. Agreeing with his concept of realism, I am the more surprised that he looks for typicality everywhere. One might assume that nonrepresentational painting, architecture, or music, for instance, reconstruct some elements of the outer reality; but in such arts one should not speak of *Besonderheit*. One would have to formulate the idea of typicality differently, and relate it to expressive values as well. Such surgery as this seems extremely risky to me and hardly useful, because even in the representational arts, where typicality is more firmly verifiable, the researcher has no easy job.

Lukacs looks to socialist realism, as to other realism, not for ready answers, but for a basis in answering the questions posed to the world by its particular viewpoint (*Fortschrittsperspektive*). I find this view more convincing than any other interpretation of that artistic method. Even accepting this approach, however, I do not understand why Lukacs makes such a sharp demarcation between avant-garde and socialist art. After all, while their social perspective may often be far from socialism, these avant-garde artists (the best ones) frequently ask the same questions and they often give dramatic evidence of the social truths of our days. Thus I think that Lukacs' conception of *Totalität* as the artistic ideal allows for a far more subtle analysis of modern art than is found in *Realism In Our Time* (1958) or in many parts of *Die Eigenart des Aesthetischen*.

The fact that I have offered these critical notes in a brief form might mislead the reader. For this reason I should emphasize that despite the deceptively assailable appearance of Lukacs' work, it offers very difficult problems to a polemicist. He avoids all simplifica-

tion; he always takes note of counter-arguments at the suitable moment; he draws his conclusions after collecting empirical arguments. Because of some of Lukacs' formulations, he sometimes is lumped with certain Soviet researchers who reduce all problems of Marxist aesthetics to the question: realism or socialist realism. Not long ago a book by V. Razumny appeared (*Problems of Socialist Realism*, 1963). The author did not go beyond slogans, and—what is worse—he analyzed all aesthetic questions (form, style, taste, judgment, etc.) from the viewpoint of a very poorly understood realism. One need only compare that book—unfortunately, one of a large family—with Lukacs' work to become aware of the depth, richness, and in a scientific sense, the nobility of the conclusions in *Die Eigenart des Aesthetischen*. If there is any Marxist who can completely demolish the repeated attacks on realism as an artistic category or as a category of an ideological character (see, for example, the introduction by G. J. Becker to *Documents of Modern Literary Realism*, Princeton, 1963), then it is Lukacs. But, from Razumny's slogans, one would gather that it is his opponents who are right. This comparison with which I close my article may seem shocking. After all, many Soviet aestheticians and researchers from other socialist countries move the discipline forward—rightly. However, it still is an unquestionable fact that Lukacs remains the greatest individual scientist in the field. Marxist aesthetics can only be developed by incorporating his achievements and by learning from his mistakes. Only in this way will it be able to attain new horizons. Recognition of this fact implies social consequences—that is, it calls for the translation of Lukacs' work.

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