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*New German Critique*, No. 3 (Autumn, 1974), 12-44.

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# *Marxism and Art in the Era of Stalin and Hitler: A Comparison of Brecht and Lukács*

by Eugene Lunn

During the 1930s Bertolt Brecht and Georg Lukács developed independent Marxist perspectives on art and cultural life which differed in fundamental ways. Their contrasting efforts were directed in part toward the question of which literary traditions best suited the anti-fascist struggle. Yet the divergence of views cut deeper than disagreements about the uses of classical realism and modernist experimentation. Behind a dispute over literature and art—how to define “realism,” whether art should provide catharsis or enable us to feel “estranged” from its drama, etc.—lay differing orientations toward the Marxist heritage, toward the historical situation in which they lived, and the kind of society they were struggling to reach.<sup>1</sup> At the core of Lukács’ Marxist aesthetics is a traditional ethical humanism, drawn in patrician and idealist tones, and deeply committed to the continuity of European classical culture. Brecht, on the other hand, attempted to apply notions of scientific experimentation and economic production in search of a modernist aesthetic attuned to the technical and collectivist twentieth century. This essay seeks to construct a theoretical confrontation between these alternative postures which will emphasize their differing relations to the history of the interwar years.

At the outset, it will be useful to outline the perspectives of Brecht and Lukács on literature during the 1930s, in order to survey the areas of explicit dispute. During this decade Lukács had developed a carefully delineated polemical theory of modern European literature based largely upon a distinction between classical realism and naturalism. Alluding particularly to Balzac and Tolstoi, he defined realism as a literary mode in which the lives of individual characters were portrayed as part of a narrative which situated

1. The many attempts to compare Brecht and Lukács in recent years derive from the belated publication in 1966 of Brecht’s essays on literary realism, written in the late 1930s and contained in *Schriften zur Literatur und Kunst*, 3 vols. (Frankfurt am Main). These were reprinted in vol. 19 of the *Gesammelte Werke* (20 vols.) by the same publisher in 1967. All of the various comparative analyses have concentrated almost exclusively upon the different approaches to literature which these essays helped to clarify. The major studies are: Werner Mittenzwei, “Marxismus und Realismus: Die Brecht-Lukács Debatte,” *Das Argument*, 46 (March, 1968), 12-43; Klaus Völker, “Brecht und Lukács: Analyse einer Meinungsverschiedenheit,” *Kursbuch*, 7 (1966), 80-101; Helga Gallas, *Marxistische Literaturtheorie: Kontroversen im Bund proletarisch-revolutionärer Schriftsteller* (Neuwied and Berlin, 1971), especially pp. 11-30 and 135-178; Viktor Zmégac, *Kunst und Wirklichkeit: Zur Literaturtheorie bei Brecht, Lukács und Broch* (Bad Homburg, 1969), pp. 9-41; Fritz Raddatz, *Lukács* (Reinbek bei Hamburg, 1972), pp. 82-91; Henri Arvon, *Marxist Esthetics* (Ithaca, 1973), pp. 100-112.

them within the entire historical dynamics of their society. Viewed from the standpoint of participants and yet structured by the omniscient historical understanding of the author, great realist novels presented general historical reality as a process revealed in concrete, immediate, individual experience, mediated by particular groups, institutions, classes, etc. While the reader experiences how and why individuals actively contribute to their own "fates," such characters are seen as "typical" manifestations of wider historical currents.<sup>2</sup>

This carefully structured unity of inner psychology and outer social reality broke down, for Lukács, in the naturalism of Flaubert and Zola after 1850. The realist had presented everyday details of psychic mood or social fact as part of his/her character's life experience and development and in relation to historical "totality." Naturalists, on the other hand, present immediate empirical reality as an objectified "given," abstracted from individual and historical change. Events are presented merely as a "setting" or "background."<sup>3</sup> The richly defined, "harmonious" and active personalities of realism have given way to the "finished products" of naturalism.<sup>4</sup> The world appears "alien" because it is not viewed as changeable through purposive human action, while the reader is reduced to a passive observer of mechanically ordered occurrences.

For Lukács naturalism became the prototype of all modernist writing, in which reality is perceived merely in its factual immediacy, divorced from the context of "those mediations which connect experiences with the objective reality of society."<sup>5</sup> This underlying orientation united for Lukács the merely apparent opposition between "vulgar" materialist naturalism and extreme subjectivist expressionism and surrealism. Both extract immediate experience, portrayed as "objects" or as ecstatic emotion, from the historically changing social totality.<sup>6</sup> According to Lukács, modernist literature since Flaubert has uncritically reflected the immediate experience of chaos, alienation and dehumanization in advanced capitalist society, instead of carefully indicating their sources and the historical forces working

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2. The theory appeared in most of Lukács' work of the period, but was expressed most clearly in "The Intellectual Physiognomy of Literary Characters," translated in *Radical Perspectives in the Arts*, ed. Lee Baxandall (Baltimore, 1972), pp. 89-141.

3. Georg Lukács, "Narrate or Describe?" *Writer and Critic and Other Essays* (New York, 1971), p. 115.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 139.

5. Georg Lukács, "Es geht um den Realismus," *Marxismus und Literatur: Eine Dokumentation in drei Bänden*, ed. Fritz Raddatz, 2 (Reinbek bei Hamburg, 1969), pp. 67-68.

6. *Ibid.*, pp. 67-70.

towards overcoming them.<sup>7</sup>

For contemporary socialist writers, Lukács prescribed a continuation of the older traditions of “bourgeois realism,” with an added socialist perspective (his model for this was Maxim Gorki) and at the same time eschewed the contemporary “decadent” culture of bourgeois “decline.” This theory rested on a correlation of cultural health with the historical rise of social classes. Cultural forms of bourgeois ascent, developed by Goethe and Balzac for example, gave voice to progressive and humanist perspectives appropriate to a popular front battle against fascism; modernist literary forms since naturalism mirror, and are tied to, the irrationalist subjectivism or mechanical positivism of “bourgeois decay.” As such they can only feed, rather than be used against, fascist ideology (as was the case with expressionism, Lukács claimed).<sup>8</sup>

As early as 1932, in one of his rare direct comments on the dramatist, Lukács had attacked Brecht’s plays, in particular the didactic *Lehrstücke* of the period, arguing that Brechtian method prevented the development of a true socialist realism because it lacked the treatment of representative, yet individualized, characters in psychological conflict. Instead Brecht’s characters represented merely abstract functions in the class struggle, speaking in disembodied arguments and agitational dialogues.<sup>9</sup> Lukács regarded the “estrangement” effect as a merely formalistic device artificially imposed on the material. This critique was similar to Lukács’ general assault upon the modernist avant-garde.

In a series of short, unpublished essays of 1937-40, Brecht strenuously objected to the prohibitive narrowness of Lukács’ view of realism. “Realism is not a matter of form,” he insisted. “Literary forms have to be checked against reality, not against aesthetics—even realistic aesthetics. There are many ways of suppressing truth and many ways of stating it.”<sup>10</sup> To emphasize the formal and historical breadth of his definition, he argued that writers as diverse as Hašek and Shelley, Swift and Grimmelshausen, as well as Balzac, were great realists. Those experimenting with new formal means to reveal a changing social reality were not formalists, Brecht argued; formalism is the attempt to “hold fast to conventional forms while

7. Lukács, “Narrate or Describe?” pp. 144-146.

8. Georg Lukács, “Grösse und Verfall des Expressionismus,” *Marxismus und Literatur*, 2, pp. 7-42.

9. Georg Lukács, “Reportage oder Gestaltung? Kritische Bemerkungen anlässlich eines Romans von Ottwalt,” and “Aus der Not eine Tugend,” *Marxismus und Literatur*, 2, pp. 150-158 and 166-177. These originally appeared in the KPD journal *Linkskurve* and are carefully analyzed in Gallas, *Marxistische Literaturtheorie*, pp. 139-141.

10. Bertolt Brecht, “Weite und Vielfalt der realistischen Schreibweise,” *GW*, 19, p. 349.

the changing social environment makes ever new demands upon art."<sup>11</sup>

Lukács' argument had stressed the continuity of classical bourgeois realism and the needs of an emergent socialist literature. In response, Brecht emphasized the disparities between the social content of Balzac's work—tied to a social structure rooted in family property and defined by individual competition—and the collectivist realities of the twentieth century.<sup>12</sup> He argued that since we share this contemporary situation more with the modernists Joyce, Kafka and Döblin than with Balzac, we can turn their techniques more readily to our own purposes.<sup>13</sup>

At a more basic level than this debate on "realism," Lukács and Brecht were in disagreement concerning the essential functions of art. For Lukács, all great art presents a social "totality" in which the merely apparent contradiction between immediate experience and historical development is overcome, in which "the opposition of individual case and historical law is dissolved."<sup>14</sup> Through the reception of this "totality" the reader vicariously experiences the reintegration of a seemingly fragmented, dehumanized world. To Brecht, however, such a harmoniously structured reconciliation of contradictions facilitated a sense of cathartic fulfillment within the audience and made political action appear unnecessary. By accentuating contradictions between everyday appearance and what is historically realizable, Brecht hoped to galvanize his audience into action outside the theater. Art needed to be "open-ended," to be completed by the audience, and not "closed" by the author's reconciliation of contradictions.<sup>15</sup> Brecht insisted that a response to contemporary dehumanization which treated men and women as "rounded," "harmonic" and integrated personalities, as Lukács' literary theories suggested, was merely a solution on paper.<sup>16</sup>

Differences of genre no doubt contributed to the contrasts here: the focus of Lukács' attention was upon the broadly conceived, privately read and "contemplative" novel form; for Brecht it was the public and potentially "activating" drama. But these literary choices, as well as the more fundamental contrast between Lukács' classical humanism and Brecht's "production aesthetic," were themselves deeply influenced by their intellectual and political formations.<sup>17</sup>

11. Bertolt Brecht, "Die Expressionismus Debatte," *GW*, 19, p. 291.

12. Bertolt Brecht, "Bemerkungen zu einem Aufsatz," *GW*, 19, pp. 309-312.

13. Bertolt Brecht, "Ueber den formalistischen Charakter der Realismustheorie," *GW*, 19, pp. 303-306.

14. Quoted in Mittenzwei, p. 29.

15. Mittenzwei, pp. 29-32; Gallas, pp. 167-168.

16. Bertolt Brecht, "Bemerkungen zum Formalismus." *GW*, 19, p. 316.

17. Raddatz, *Lukács*, pp. 7-13.

*Early Intellectual and Political Formations, 1900-30*

Both Lukács and Brecht were "bourgeois" intellectuals before they were attracted to Marxism. Such platitudes, however, tell us little about the real social differences in their youthful backgrounds. Lukács grew up in Budapest in a rich Jewish family with important ties to the Hungarian aristocracy, as was common among wealthier Hungarian Jews. The son of the director of Hungary's leading bank, the Budapest *Kreditanstalt*, his father, originally named Joseph Löwinger, was given the name Lukács in 1890 (when Georg was five) and ennobled in 1901. His mother, manager of the patrician house, was born into the nobility. As late as the age of twenty-six Lukács was known by the name Georg von Lukács. This later admirer of Goethean classicism, nineteenth-century humanist high culture and Thomas Mann, thus, had his roots in the patrician wing of the *haute bourgeoisie*. This should be born in mind in considering his life-long attempt to rescue the essentials of classical culture in its contemporary age of decline. The Jewish component, on the other hand, may have played a role in the humanist Marxism and rationalist optimism with which he was to interpret the meaning of that heritage. His close relation to the "mandarins" of German academic and literary life before 1914—the strong influence of Weber and Simmel, and his early interest in Mann, for example—also played its part in encouraging a patrician interpretation of the pre-war crisis of bourgeois culture.<sup>18</sup>

The pattern of adolescent rebellion against parental authority often anticipates later forms of revolt. It is therefore significant that Lukács rejected a banking future desired by his father, turning instead to his uncle as a counter-model: a man who had withdrawn from the "vulgar" details of "everyday life" and devoted himself to the "higher" pursuits of meditation and Talmudic study.<sup>19</sup> In the years before 1914 Lukács hoped that the "inward" realms of art and philosophy would provide an escape from the social dehumanization which he saw in advanced bourgeois civilization.<sup>20</sup> The Marxist aesthetics which he constructed in the 1930s was to continue

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18. See Morris Watnick, "Georg Lukács: or Aesthetics and Communism," *Survey* (January-March, 1958), 60-66 and Raddatz, pp. 13-25. For the patrician orientation of Weber, Simmel and much prewar German sociology, see Fritz Ringer, *The Decline of the German Mandarins: The German Academic Community, 1890-1933* (Cambridge, Mass., 1969), and Arthur Mitzman, *The Iron Cage: A Study of Max Weber* (New York, 1970), pp. 187-191, 242-245, 256-270.

19. Raddatz, pp. 7-8.

20. Andrew Arato, "Georg Lukács: The Search for a Revolutionary Subject," *The Unknown Dimension: European Marxism Since Lenin* (New York, 1972), p. 83.

the early patrician humanism and idealism well described by Morris Watnick: "What appalled him most was the despoiled culture of modern industrial society, aesthetic ugliness and human uprootedness. The greatest influence here was Simmel, whose *Philosophie des Geldes* (1900) played a considerable part in his intellectual development. This was a romantic, anti-capitalist use of 'alienation' which, pessimistically, saw material progress per se as a threat to cultural values."<sup>21</sup>

Lukács experienced World War I from a distance—he was declared unfit for military service.<sup>22</sup> Because he was 29 at the outbreak of the war, Lukács had already developed deep roots in nineteenth-century idealist culture. His despair during the early war years included a profound concern for the threatened continuity of European humanist traditions. 1917 provided a release. The Russian Revolution gave Lukács renewed hope and in his view constructed a bridge into the future which would eventually rescue Europe from its own decay.<sup>23</sup>

Brecht came from a different sector of the increasingly differentiated bourgeoisie. His early social experience contrasted sharply with Lukács'. Both parents came from Achern, in the Black Forest, where the family had owned a tobacco store. His father was employed in a paper factory by the time of his son's birth in 1898, and by 1914 had become its director.<sup>24</sup> By this time he was a fairly well-to-do burgher. But the formation of this *Mittelstand* (middle class) life did not proceed that simply: the coefficient of the son's revolt against respectable bourgeois society, an allegiance to plebeian traditions against the rich, was partly rooted in the family's history. Bertolt's ancestors "had been shrewd, hard-headed peasants from Baden" before the family's tobacco shop had "lifted" them into the ranks of the *Kleinbürgertum* (petty bourgeoisie). An early model for the boy seems to have been a seventy-two-year-old grandmother who "suddenly shocked the family by abandoning the dull, cramped conventions of petty bourgeois gentility and consorting with all sorts of queer and not quite respectable people."<sup>25</sup> Brecht's later Schweikian insistence on the practical and down-to-earth material needs of survival, his admiration for the sly wisdom of anti-heroic cowardice and his distrust of high-flown sentiments and "Kultur," find

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21. Watnick, p. 65.

22. G.H.R. Parkinson, "Introduction," *Georg Lukács: The Man, his Work, his Ideas* (New York, 1970), p. 6.

23. Georg Lukács, "Preface to New Edition (1967)," *History and Class Consciousness* (Cambridge, Mass., 1971), p. xi.

24. Frederic Ewen, *Bertolt Brecht: His Life, His Art and His Times* (New York, 1967), p. 55.

25. Martin Esslin, *Brecht: The Man and His Work*, 2nd ed. (New York, 1971), p. 5.

some roots in this available plebeian alternative to the family's increasing social status. When he "left his own class," Brecht later wrote of himself, he "joined the common people."<sup>26</sup> Literal truthfulness here is less important than the social orientation it reveals: his was not the revolt of a patrician aesthete, but of a self-proclaimed "man of the masses." Even if such a posture was in part one of Brecht's masks, it left a deep imprint upon his work. Impatient with idealism, Brecht's pivotal emphasis upon the uses of scientific knowledge and upon art as an aspect of human technical production and labor was strongly conditioned by this commitment to the practical needs of the "plebeian" classes.<sup>27</sup>

Prevented by class background as well as by age from forming any deep roots in pre-war German culture of whatever variety, Brecht responded quite differently from Lukács to the horrors of war. Drafted at sixteen as a medical orderly, he came in direct contact with the results of the slaughter, and his later poetry was "haunted by images of dismembered bodies."<sup>28</sup> Brecht experienced the agonizing horror of a broken world, an experience which lent to his nihilistic early plays a brutal realism comparable to that of Grosz and Beckmann. In contrast to Lukács, the war and not the relatively stable and comfortably prosperous years of 1900-1914 served as Brecht's initiation into the world. Such a formative experience permanently frustrated any return to a pre-war normalcy at best only dimly remembered. The world appeared as though "swept clean" by destruction, and although widely differing possibilities for a new postwar culture and society of course existed, the reestablishment of continuity with the old was not likely to be a goal. The breakdown of tradition was simply an accomplished fact.<sup>29</sup>

Brecht's early, pre-Marxist plays (1919-27) reflect his plebeian sympathies and his adaptation to the intense social dislocations of the postwar years. Besides violent and biting satire on respectable hypocrisies and values, there is a fascination with aimlessly desperate outcasts—crooks, beggars, whores—and with the latest fashions of newly urbanized popular culture: jazz, boxing, pop music and American sounds. The pessimistic moods are neither

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26. Bertolt Brecht, "Verjagt mit gutem Grund," *GW*, 9, p. 721.

27. I have chosen here to use the term "plebeian"—and not the more sociologically distinct "proletarian" or "petty bourgeois"—because it seems closest to Brecht's own self-interpretation and expresses best the social-ethical outlook of much of his work, even though his theoretical and political writings often rely upon stricter Marxist categories. I am following the usage of the term in an early, excellent discussion of Brecht's plays by Hans Mayer, "Bertolt Brecht oder die plebejische Tradition," *Literatur der Uebergangszeit: Essays* (Wiesbaden, n.d. [though probably 1949]), pp. 225-238.

28. Esslin, pp. 7-8.

29. Hannah Arendt, *Men in Dark Times* (New York, 1968), pp. 218, 228.



traditionalist nor sentimental, but are expressed through the direct discourse of hard, cold statement.<sup>30</sup>

These contrasting earlier experiences of Brecht and Lukács helped shape their later differing views of Marxism, aesthetics and the cultural heritage. Born into a world of war and revolution, Brecht emphasized the continuities of classical bourgeois humanism and proletarian tradition to a far lesser degree, stressing instead the necessity of starting afresh, while radically transforming older materials.

By the 1930s Lukács began to de-emphasize class struggle, focusing instead upon the historical continuity of humanist tradition. Brecht, on the other hand, insisting that an emergent collectivist and proletarian culture would have to make radical departures from nineteenth-century bourgeois heritage, developed a more leftist, political perspective, focusing on class struggle. This contrast affected their differing assessments of an anti-fascist popular front, to which we shall return later, although it was already evident in their political developments before 1930.

By early 1924 Lukács had disowned the "ultra-leftism" apparent in his essay collection *History and Class Consciousness* and like Stalin had come to see western capitalism as stabilized.<sup>31</sup> He was responding here to the ebb of the postwar revolutionary wave in Germany as well as to the situation faced by the Hungarian Communist Party. A major figure in the Hungarian Party since 1919, by 1924 he had sided with the so-called Landler faction against Bela Kun. This faction defined the struggle against the extreme right-wing authoritarian Horthy regime in terms of the need for a broadly based democratic republic, instead of a socialist revolution.<sup>32</sup>

Hungary, of course, was not a modern capitalist nation, but "still semi-feudal in its pattern of landholding and society and guided by its regent, Admiral Nicholas Horthy, in the closest possible conformity to the spirit of the Old Regime."<sup>33</sup> In a pamphlet which came to be called the *Blum Theses*, and which contained the political outlook underlying much of his later work,<sup>34</sup> Lukács argued that within this overwhelmingly peasant society, the working classes were socially dependent on the agricultural poor and

30. See, for example, Bertolt Brecht, *Manuel of Piety* (New York, 1966), pp. 123, 249.

31. Paul Breines, "Praxis and its Theorists: The Impact of Lukács and Korsch in the 1920s," *Telos* (Spring, 1972), 87.

32. Rodney Livingston, "Introduction" to Georg Lukács, *Political Writings, 1919-1929* (London, 1973).

33. H.S. Hughes, *Contemporary Europe: A History* (Englewood Cliffs, 1961), p. 336.

34. See "Preface to New Edition (1967)," p. xxx, where Lukács speaks of the Blum Theses as containing the outlook which "determined from now on all my theoretical and practical activities."

politically dependent on the bourgeoisie and the Social Democrats. A broad "democratic" front was therefore needed to bring down the Horthy Regime and realize the full potential of bourgeois reforms.<sup>35</sup> To distinguish his proposal from a simple appeal for capitalist democracy, Lukács stressed that a democracy was required in which the bourgeoisie "has ceded at least parts of its power to the broad masses of the workers."<sup>36</sup>

Lukács' belief in the necessity for a popular front of the liberal bourgeoisie and workers was reenforced through his direct experience of Nazism in Germany during his short stay in Berlin between 1931 and 1932.<sup>37</sup> By this time, however, Brecht's political path was quite different. His first Marxist teacher, the sociologist Fritz Sternberg, followed Rosa Luxemburg's and not Lenin's ideas in his work on imperialism published in 1926. Brecht admired Luxemburg and, unlike Lukács, favored her penetrating critique of Lenin's view of party organization when he planned a play in her honor.<sup>38</sup>

The figure who most influenced his Marxism, however, was Karl Korsch, a close intellectual friend of Brecht's by 1928.<sup>39</sup> In contrast to Lukács, whose *History and Class Consciousness* paralleled his own work *Marxism and Philosophy* (1923), Korsch had not shifted from his earlier leftist position, never acceded to the bolshevization of the KPD and the Comintern, and was finally expelled from the party in 1926. His attacks on the Comintern as an instrument of Russian foreign policy repudiated the theory of capitalist "stabilization" as a reflection of "the needs of a defensive state trying to form an alliance with world capitalism." Even before the depression Korsch had argued that "all the objective requirements for concrete revolutionary politics" existed in Germany.<sup>40</sup>

By 1930 Brecht's politics contrasted markedly with those which Lukács propounded in the *Blum Theses*. Brecht neither accepted official Bolshevik discipline nor looked favorably upon "bourgeois democracy" as a necessary expedient. More independent of Stalinism, his Marxism focused early on

35. Georg Lukács, "Blum Theses," in *Political Writings, 1919-1929*, pp. 229-253; Peter Ludz, "Der Begriff der 'demokratischen Diktatur' in der politischen Philosophie von Georg Lukács," *Festschrift zum achtzigsten Geburtstag von Georg Lukács* (Neuwied and Berlin, 1965), pp. 63-64.

36. Lukács, "Blum Theses," p. 243.

37. Helga Gallas' analysis of his work from this period (in *Marxistische Literaturtheorie*) provides ample evidence for this, though not always explicitly.

38. Klaus-Detlev Müller, *Die Funktion der Geschichte im Werk Bertolt Brechts: Studien zum Verhältnis von Marxismus und Aesthetik* (Tübingen, 1967), pp. 23-26.

39. Wolfdietrich Rasch, "Bertolt Brechts Marxistischer Lehrer," *Mercur*, 17 (1963), p. 1003.

40. Fred Halliday, "Karl Korsch: An Introduction," *Marxism and Philosophy* (New York, 1970), pp. 17-20.

class struggle categories, which the depression only intensified. Whereas Lukács' formative political development occurred in the relatively stable period between 1924 and 1928, and was mediated particularly by Hungarian conditions, Brecht's coincided with the accentuated class struggles within advanced German capitalism after 1928, with Korsch providing a link to the experiences of 1918-19. Yet such political differences were only part of the contrast in their approaches to Marxism.

#### *Orientations Toward Marxism*

Throughout his career, Lukács criticized capitalism in terms derived largely from an aesthetic and ethical humanism and idealism, rather than in terms of social and economic inequalities or the political power of corporate wealth. For him capitalism represented the "enslavement and fragmentation of the individual and of the horrifying ugliness of life which inevitably and increasingly accompanies this development." Under this social system, "all human aspirations toward a beautiful and harmonious existence are inexorably crushed by society."<sup>41</sup> For Lukács, one of the primary attractions of Marxism was its potential as an historical theory for *overcoming* materialist concerns. It is significant that he conceived of true art under capitalism as essentially free of the apparatus of economic production. In 1920 he defined culture as "the ensemble of valuable products and abilities which are dispensable in relation to the immediate maintenance of life." From such a perspective "liberation from capitalism" was envisioned as a "liberation from the rule of the economy,"<sup>42</sup> a view which Lukács later formally disavowed but retained in practice. Moreover, he repeatedly cited the division of labor under capitalism as a source of the fragmentation of human essence and personality.<sup>43</sup> In his view capitalism was inherently hostile to art and culture and this "disintegration of the concrete totality into abstract specializations"<sup>44</sup> was a major cause.

In his interpretation of Marxist humanism, Lukács saw Marx and Engels urging "the writers of their time to . . . grasp man in his essence and totality."<sup>45</sup> Here and elsewhere he came close to creating an "essentialist"

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41. Georg Lukács, "The Ideal of the Harmonious Man in Bourgeois Aesthetics," *Writer and Critic*, p. 92.

42. Georg Lukács, "The Old Culture and the New Culture," *Marxism and Human Liberation*, ed. with intro. by E. San Juan, Jr. (New York, 1973), p. 4.

43. See, for example, his piece "Marx and Engels on Aesthetics," *Writer and Critic*, pp. 61-88.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 70.

45. *Ibid.*

ontology of “anthropological man,” interpreting “the course of history as a battle between human wholeness and the successive modes of alienation introduced by the different divisions of labor.”<sup>46</sup> Lukács interpreted humanism as a critique of the “subjugation” of “man’s nature” under capitalism.<sup>47</sup> A profound involvement with Hegel had led him to conceive of history as the “realization” and “fulfillment” of the totality of human attributes.<sup>48</sup> In the *Holy Family* (1845), however, Marx had distinguished himself from an ontological reading of the theory of alienation and had “challenged the static implications of Feuerbach’s anthropology by making de-alienated man an historical potentiality rather than an inherent reality.”<sup>49</sup> Lukács’ “humanism” overplayed the classical idealist elements of the youthful Marx’s synthesis and in so doing, neglected their later grounding in a history of social production, a major change between the early Marx and *Kapital*.

In Moscow in 1931 Lukács had enthusiastically examined the newly discovered *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* which further helped him to see Marx’s writings from the perspective of his youthful indebtedness to Goethean humanism as well as Hegelian idealism. Lukács’ works of the mid-1930s on Hegel and Goethe illustrate this well.<sup>50</sup> His view of art as a “totalizing” perspective, as a reconciliation of the opposition of historical essence and sensate appearance, derives, of course, from an Hegelian reading of Marx.<sup>51</sup> Behind his term “realism” lay Hegel’s aesthetics —with its praise of “visible-concrete” as against “conceptual-abstract” means of representation—as well as Goethe’s method of perceiving the general in the individually specific.<sup>52</sup> Lukács’ insistence that realist literature depict harmonious, many-sided, creatively developed individual personalities owes much to both the aesthetic humanism of the young Marx and to Weimar classicism.

Brecht, on the other hand, searching for the contemporary functions of cultural models, regarded German classical and idealist culture as an

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46. Stanley Mitchell, “An Extended Note to Ian Birchall’s Paper,” in *Situating Marx* (London, 1972), p. 149.

47. Lukács, “Preface to New Edition (1967),” p. xxiv.

48. Silvia Federici, “Notes on Lukács’ Aesthetics,” *Telos* (Spring, 1972), 147; and Stanley Mitchell, “Extended Note to Ian Birchall’s Paper,” *Situating Marx*, p. 149.

49. Martin Jay, “The Frankfurt School’s Critique of Marxist Humanism,” *Social Research*, 39:2 (Summer, 1972), 292.

50. Georg Lukács, *Der junge Hegel* (Zürich, 1948); and *Goethe und seine Zeit* (Berlin, 1946).

51. Mittenzwei, pp. 29-31.

52. Gallas, p. 170.

ideological prop of the ruling classes of early twentieth-century Germany. Whatever initial role Faustian heroics or Schillerian pathos may have performed in the 1790s, they had been emptied of this meaning and turned to manipulative advantage in the language of contemporary domination. In *Saint Joan of the Stockyards*, written at the beginning of the depression, Brecht parodied the social functions of lofty classical language by having the industrialist Pierpont Mauler repeatedly use it in his apostrophies to money and power. This was Brecht's view of the real "vulgarity" of his culture, what Fritz Stern has aptly described as the "vulgar idealism" of the German upper middle classes after 1870.<sup>53</sup>

As for Hegelian idealism, while Brecht's Marxism focused on the dialectical interaction of object and subject, he tended to distinguish the Marxist from the Hegelian dialectic. In this he may well have been influenced by Korsch's development after 1930. Korsch's *Karl Marx* (which Brecht admired greatly and which he and Korsch discussed at length in Svendborg, Denmark, in 1933-36 while the book was still a manuscript) viewed Marx as having advanced from Hegelian philosophy to materialist science.<sup>54</sup>

Instead of linking Marxism with Hegel and Goethe, Brecht emphasized the indebtedness of Marxist critical rationalism to the radical materialists of the French Enlightenment, and in particular to Denis Diderot. Building upon Diderot, the philosopher of theater, and Enlightenment aesthetics in general, Brecht asked from the actor "that his tears flow from the brain,"<sup>55</sup> and that art combine entertainment and education in changing social reality. Instead of rounded aesthetic "experience," Lukács' concern, the focus in both Brecht and Diderot is upon the intellectually cognitive and politically useful function of art.<sup>56</sup> The central figure of the *Encyclopedia*, himself endeavoring to evade the censors, would have greatly appreciated Brecht's use of *Sklavensprache* (the speech of slaves) as the art of the possible, avoiding suicidal heroics in its communication of useful truths.<sup>57</sup> Finally, like the Russian avant-garde of the 1920s, Brecht strongly rejected the nineteenth-century idealist redefinition of art as an imaginative pursuit

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53. Fritz Stern, "The Political Consequences of the Unpolitical German," *The Failure of Illiberalism* (New York, 1972).

54. Rasch, p. 1004; Karl Korsch, *Karl Marx* (London, 1938), p. 169.

55. Darko Suvin, "The Mirror and the Dynamo," *Radical Perspectives in the Arts*, ed. Lee Baxandall (Baltimore, 1972), p. 83.

56. Müller, pp. 172-174.

57. Theo Buck, *Brecht und Diderot: Ueber Schwierigkeiten der Rationalität in Deutschland* (Tübingen, 1971), pp. 64-65.

higher than “mere” craft or technical skill; instead it was his intention to forge, in materialist terms, a link with the constructive, mechanical and useful “arts,” such as the “art of directing, of teaching, of machine building and of flying.” In this view, Brecht came particularly close to seventeenth- and eighteenth-century French and English philosophy in linking art, science, production and social praxis,<sup>58</sup> and it is not surprising then that he emphasized Marx’s relation to this tradition.<sup>59</sup>

Brecht saw Marxism as a materialist and scientific method able to undermine the idealist culture and ethics which kept the “common people” in their place. Long before he read Marx, his works revealed a suspicion of merely emotive, idealistic or religious responses to social realities. In viewing art as a demythologizing tool, he used skeptical scientific thinking as a model.<sup>60</sup> His purpose was not merely the joys of satirical exposure, though these are not to be minimized; it was to develop a *modus operandi* for radical social change. In this sense, utility was the guiding thread: if moral idealism was to serve rather than hinder the transformation of society, then compassion would have to be made truly functional.

Before his acquaintance with Marxist theory, Brecht had been both fascinated and horrified by the stock-exchange;<sup>61</sup> he first studied *Kapital* in 1926, he tells us, to comprehend the dynamics of the grain market for the play he was then writing (later integrated into *Saint Joan of the Stockyards*).<sup>62</sup> Regarding this “cold” study of Marx, Brecht later suggested that his training in the natural sciences (as a medical student) may have immunized him against strong emotional influences and conditioned his more scientific interest in Marxism.<sup>63</sup> This, of course, was another Brechtian mask — an attempted pragmatic and productive response to his own pain at socially-caused suffering. Yet it is true, as *Galileo* so well illustrates, that he considered critical and scientific inquiry alone able to serve the cause of the plebeian poor and oppressed. Whereas Lukács’ work is associated with the attack on positivist and merely economist Marxism, Brecht criticized those

58. Besides Diderot, Brecht drew upon Francis Bacon’s concept of an inductive, experimental and socially emancipatory science. See “Notizen über realistische Schreibweise,” *GW*, 19, pp. 367-369 and Heinz Brüggemann, *Literarische Technik und Soziale Revolution: Versuche über das Verhältnis von Kunstproduktion, Marxismus und literarischer Tradition in den theoretischen Schriften Bertolt Brechts* (Reinbek bei Hamburg, 1973), p. 256.

59. Brüggemann, pp. 255-256.

60. John Willett, *The Theatre of Bertolt Brecht: A Study from Eight Aspects* (New York, 1959), pp. 78-79.

61. Mayer, p. 102.

62. Brecht, *GW*, 20, p. 46.

63. *Ibid.*, p. 96.

sentimental humanists who were suspicious of useful scientific and economic knowledge. "They think that truth is only what sounds nice," he wrote. "If truth should prove to be something statistical, dry or factual, something difficult to find and requiring study, they do not recognize it as truth; it does not intoxicate them."<sup>64</sup> Two years after the Nazi take-over he wrote: "Times of extreme oppression are usually times when there is much talk about high and lofty matters. At such times it takes courage to write of low and ignoble matters such as food and shelter for workers; when all sorts of honors are showered upon the peasants it takes courage to speak of machines and good stock feeds which would lighten their honorable labors."<sup>65</sup>

Yet the distinction between Brecht's interest in a materialist science and Lukács' Hegelian Marxism should not be overdrawn. Brecht directed his "estrangement" devices against a merely empirical perception of contemporary reality. Like Marx, he understood science as a process of inquiry into historical structures not always revealed in the empirical "facts." Whether or not Marx's work is to be judged strictly as "scientific," Brecht's own view of science was developed in terms of Marx's practice of a critical, dialectical and historical method very different from its later positivist reading. Here there is a similarity especially with the earlier Lukács of *History and Class Consciousness*, the critic of the mechanistic orthodoxies of the Second International.

The central essay of that book had been the widely influential discussion of Marx's theory of reification. In the famous section in *Capital* on the "fetishism of commodities," Marx provided a more concrete economic basis and a wider application for the earlier treatment of "alienation." Not only does the worker's labor and his own self appear to him as something "alien" under capitalism, but all active human relations, the real basis of economic life, are "reified" into an apparent mere play of objective forces. Productive life, "definite social relations between men, assumes, in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between things."<sup>66</sup> Since both Brecht and Lukács, as well as many other twentieth-century Marxist cultural theorists, rely heavily upon this analysis, it is worth comparing their applications of it.

In the 1930s Lukács drew on the theory of reification in his literary studies when he criticized naturalist and modernist literature for failing to go

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64. Bertolt Brecht, "Writing the Truth: Five Difficulties," in *Gallileo* (New York, 1966), p. 135.

65. *Ibid.*, p. 134.

66. *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York, 1972), p. 217.

beyond a fatalistic misperception of historical reality in its representation of a split between personal action and objective change. Balzac, in Lukács' view, unlike later writers of a fully developed capitalist society, had been able "to see objects not as completed material substances but as they issued from human work," apprehending "social change as a network of individual stories."<sup>67</sup> Brecht too sought to attack contemporary reification, although the devices of "estrangement" used for that purpose needed the viewer to complete the demystifying process through intelligent political actions. Ernst Bloch has shown the various ways in which Brecht attempted to shock his audiences out of their involuntary adjustment to lives "reified into things," *Verfremdung* ("estrangement") effects designed to actively overcome *Entfremdung* ("alienation").<sup>68</sup> If, as Brecht believed, capitalist "normality" numbs the perception of history as endless change and human construction and veils the contradictions between professed values and social realities, then the unexpected must be called upon to awaken the dreamer from his "reified" sleep.

Yet with all this apparent similarity, the two did not see alienation in the same manner. Lukács was acutely troubled by what he saw as the "degradation and destruction of the individual under capitalism," and insisted that a contemporary realist literature must reassert the "noble" resistance of individuals against their environment, portrayed in the great novels of the nineteenth century.<sup>69</sup> For him, alienation derived from the capitalist division of labor in which the individual worker's experience of a unified and "self-contained" process was destroyed.<sup>70</sup> Hence his concept of realism called for a social totality not abstracted from personal, individual experience—which would only mirror the process of alienation—but concretely revealed through inner psychology as well as external, and individualized, human interaction. In this way, the reader's experience of art would counteract the social experience of dehumanization, and help him/her realize individuality.

For Brecht, however, the classic nineteenth-century drama of the individual versus society obscured collective realities of modern social production and failed to grasp the extent of contemporary reified consciousness. Brecht argued that one can no longer expect private, everyday

67. Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Form: Twentieth-Century Dialectical Theories of Literature* (Princeton, 1971), pp. 203-204.

68. Ernst Bloch, "Entfremdung, Verfremdung: Alienation, Estrangement," Brecht, ed. Erika Munk (New York, 1972), pp. 7-11.

69. Lukács, "The Idea of the Harmonious Man in Bourgeois Aesthetics," p. 98.

70. Lukács, "The Old Culture and the New Culture," pp. 6-7.



life to provide access to general historical dynamics. The functioning reality of a large corporation, for example, cannot be understood from individual personal experience.<sup>71</sup> To encompass the full social totality requires a level of abstraction beyond the techniques of nineteenth-century literary realism, an art which flaunts its own reality as an "artifice" or "construction" in order to pierce the illusory cognitive claims of private experience. Aesthetic antidotes to historical development could not be effective. Instead of seeking "typical" harmonious individualities as concretized historical forces or providing individualized "catharsis" for the emotionally involved reader, Brecht attempted to reveal the contemporary dynamics of collective social structures hidden from normal personal experiences by estranging the reader from them.

Reacting against the inward focus of much German cultural tradition, Brecht avoided individual psychological portraiture in focusing upon his character's active, social behavior. Furthermore, he sought every means to prevent audience "identification" with individual characters. As we have seen, Lukács strongly criticized this. The difference stemmed, in part, from Brecht's view that only an activist and collectivist value structure would help emancipate the lower classes, whereas for Lukács the "destruction of the individual" was at the heart of capitalist alienation and must be resisted in art. Beyond this, however, Brecht had attempted to apply Marx's analysis of reification to twentieth-century collective and "mass society," where technologized social engineering exceeded Marx's experience, as well as that of his favorite "realist" writer, Balzac. Brecht argued that unlike the 1830s, this was a collectivist age, in which individuals are formed less by families than by factories, governments, armies, etc. Hence he felt a constructivist aesthetic was needed, whereby the audience clearly sees the author's "building-up" of complex reality in a "montage of images."<sup>72</sup>

In Brecht's 1926 play *A Man is a Man*, Galy Gay is so insistently and repeatedly transformed from one persona to another by the forces of his environment that it would be anachronistic to see him as alienated from himself in these roles: his "self" is in each of the transformations.<sup>73</sup> Such a viewpoint, which received largely pessimistic expression in this early play, provided, of course, its own solution: total changeability encourages the hope that things can be very different. The issue for Brecht was not any inevitable psychic depersonalization in the modern, collectivist age—a

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71. Bertolt Brecht, "Der Dreigroschenprozess," *GW*, 18, pp. 161-162.

72. Brecht, "Bemerkungen zu einem Aufsatz," *GW*, 19, pp. 308-312.

73. Bertolt Brecht, "Mann ist Mann," *GW*, 1, pp. 297-377.

common traditionalist reading of the theory of alienation—but the question of how technology is used and to whose advantage. In his plays Brecht observed present emancipatory possibilities from the vantage of their fuller realization in a potential future.<sup>74</sup> All human life was seen as a process of continual historical change,<sup>75</sup> and not the realization of some “essence,” as in Lukács’ teleological view. Brecht’s modernist “humanism” contrasted in this way from Lukács’ classical version.

### *Constructing a Marxist Aesthetics*

In recent years Lukács’ literary studies of the 1930s have been praised by some as the work of a subtle dialectical Marxist and criticized by others as either mechanistically materialist or subjectively idealist. In fact, although Lukács viewed his work as a return to dialectical methods, he is more correctly seen in terms of all three postures, depending upon which aspect of his aesthetics one examines: his content analysis of realism; his view of the historical sources of literary representation; or his discussion of the social reception of art.

In Lukács’ theory of realism he argued for a dialectical drama in which “typical” subjective personalities pursued their goals in actions continually mediated by larger elements of the objective historical process. The active function of the “subjective factor” in the transformation of objective conditions was to be structured as part of an endless interaction of consciousness and social being. But Lukács concentrated such dialectical treatment entirely upon a content aesthetic *within* the novel. Reduced to political impotence after 1928, his political perspectives for the next decades continued the strong evolutionary focus of his view of capitalist stabilization. By the early 1930s Lukács separated literary dialectics from political praxis and fell back upon a “copy” theory of artistic representation which essentially denied the novelist the productive power of consciousness. “Any apprehension of the external world,” he wrote in a revealing piece of 1934 entitled “Art and Objective Truth,” is “nothing more than a reflection in consciousness of the world that exists independently of consciousness.”<sup>76</sup> Here Lukács reproduced the deterministic Marxism which marked the passivity and reactive politics of the Second International as well as of Soviet Russia after 1930.

Lukács followed Marx and Engels in strongly opposing the reductionist

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74. Suvin, p. 88.

75. Müller, p. 52; Brüggemann, pp. 90-95.

76. Georg Lukács, “Art and Objective Truth,” *Writer and Critic*, p. 25.

view that an author's class or conscious ideology simply dictated the meaning of their work, although he did not always apply this caution to literature he disliked. Nevertheless his historical analysis of the social sources of literature does indeed *reduce* it to a mere repetition of an era's characteristic ideological positions, deriving these from the historical position of the dominant social class. Hence, while Balzac, in spite of his aristocratic royalism, revealed in his narratives the rational and historically optimistic ideology of the emergent bourgeoisie, expressionism simply mirrored the mystical irrationalism of "bourgeois decay." While this avoids crude economic determinism, passive reflection of historical ideologies was no real alternative to a mechanistic aesthetics: the realist artist ends up reproducing cognitively the objective historical essence contained behind merely sensate appearances. There is no mediation of the social relations by the forces of production of which literary techniques are a part. Form is merely an expression of objective content. In epistemological as well as productive terms, the artist's work is superfluous.<sup>77</sup>

If Lukács' conception of the origins of literature made peace with the rigidly objectivist Marxism of communist orthodoxy, his aesthetic idealism found expression in the dimension of literary response. For Lukács the work of art, a reflection of reality, was actually an "illusion" of a self-contained historical totality. To achieve its effect—the cathartic immersion and surrender of the reader to the fictional momentum—the artist must be able to create a fully believable "illusion" of life, to make this created "world" emerge as the reflection of life in its total motion. While the work "by its very nature offers a truer, more complete, more vivid and more dynamic reflection of reality than the recipient otherwise possesses," a work of art becomes such only "by possessing this self-containment, this capacity to achieve its effect on its own."<sup>78</sup> Thus, Lukács had managed to keep alive his youthful desire for creative works which liberated from dehumanized specialization and permitted the experience of final truths.<sup>79</sup> Although by 1930 the ultimate "essence," for Lukács had become historical change, the notion of the privileged autonomy of art remained.

Brecht's plays, on the other hand, sought to demystify the notion of art as an autonomous and privileged "illusion" of life's integration by repeatedly exposing its own workings as a changeable construction. In his theoretical

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77. See the excellent discussion in T. Metscher's philosophically articulate "Aesthetik als Abbildtheorie: Erkenntnistheoretische Grundlagen der materialistischen Kunsttheorie und das Realismusproblem in den Literaturwissenschaften," *Argument*, 77 (December, 1972), 919-976.

78. Lukács, "Art and Objective Truth," pp. 36-40.

79. Georg Lichtheim, *Georg Lukács* (New York, 1970), p. 5.

writings of 1928 to 1940, he criticized the approach which regarded art as a special form of the cognitive "reflection" of reality. Whereas Lukács viewed realist literature as an objective "picture" (*Abbild*) of historical change, Brecht challenged such undialectical materialism and viewed representation as including "both the model to be represented and the ways of representing it."<sup>80</sup> He firmly rejected the reductionist and reified concept of "superstructure" implicit in the views of art and consciousness as mere passive "reflexes" of a socio-economic base, and saw literary activity, instead, as part of a "transforming praxis" similar to other forms of productive consciousness. "Should we not simply say," Brecht asked, "that we are not able to perceive anything that we are not able to change, even that which does not change us?"<sup>81</sup> Following Marx's critique of Feuerbach's mechanical materialism, Brecht viewed art not merely as a reflection of economic relations but as itself a "practical building element of this reality, a constitutive part of the productive activity of the societal individual."<sup>82</sup> The dramatist's literary theory and practice was closely related to Marx's concept of knowledge as critique. Art, in this view, was not merely mimetic, but anticipatory. Insisting on the relative autonomy of intellectual praxis, Brecht held that art could aid in the transformation of the given reality through its ability to anticipate an alternative and realizable socio-economic system.<sup>83</sup>

The ability of art to help in changing the given social relations, derived for Brecht, not from any allegedly privileged position "above" the tumult of the everyday world, but from the opposite: its position as part of the productive forces of society. In a manner which linked the dialectics of Marxist political economy with enlightenment aesthetics, he saw art as a technical skill, engaged in experimentations and rooted in the collective apparatus of industrial production. In this view, art as production was linked not merely with "superstructural" elements such as cognitive abstraction, but with those technical forces of collective production fettered by social relations based upon private accumulation. With this "classical" analysis of the political economy of capitalist contradictions, Brecht offered an alternative to traditional Marxist aesthetics with its exclusive focus upon the reflection of ideological social content.

In reply to Lukács' attack on modernist literary techniques, Brecht pointed to the contradiction, to be resolved by historical praxis, between the

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80. Suvin, p. 82.

81. Brecht, *GW*, 20, p. 140.

82. Brüggemann, p. 84.

83. Brecht, *GW*, 20, pp. 76-78.

potential emancipatory use of montage, Joycean inner monologue and Kafkaesque distancing, for example, and the social relations to which they have been previously connected. These formal means are not inevitably tied to their current social or ideological uses any more than advanced industrial production is wedded to the social relations which originally engendered them. They are all means of production or reproduction which have, inherent in them, potential functions in undermining those property relations which fetter their fuller development.<sup>84</sup> The relative "autonomy" of literary techniques and forms from social and ideological history was, for Brecht, that of all technological means of production.

An enthusiastic fascination with urban modernity and its technical experiments had caused Brecht to concentrate upon their human potential and, at times, to neglect the problems resulting from industrial modernization, which Lukács' approach emphasized. In any case, his enthusiasm was sorely tried by the law suit he lost concerning the changes made in the filming of the *Three-Penny Opera*. The essay he wrote in response to this experience helped to clarify his thoughts on contemporary artistic production. Against traditional humanists, Brecht argued that cinema as mass entertainment was not an inferior art form. Rather, he saw it as able to expand the perceptual functions of art by its graphic focus on the external dynamics of social interaction, superceding the introspective psychology of old "untechnical" narrative art.<sup>85</sup> The collective and unmistakably technological production of cinema could provide the *coup de grâce* to illusionist aesthetics, demystifying the reverence of art as a higher reality with a religious "glow."<sup>86</sup>

Brecht's experience of the film industry in 1930 and 1931 accentuated his view of the proletarianization of the modern intellectual and artist. Instead of occupying a privileged position as a seer above the fray, Brecht argued (without fully demonstrating) that the artist was a brain worker in a position analogous to that of factory workers. To insist upon artistic autonomy from the cultural productive apparatus in hopes of avoiding the commodification of one's "creative product," was similar, according to Brecht, to an industrial worker exercising his/her ostensible "freedom" not to work for industrialists.<sup>87</sup> If art reveals the experience of alienated production

84. Brecht, *GW*, 19, pp. 360-361; Brüggemann, pp. 173-177.

85. Brecht, "Dreigroschenprozess," *GW*, 18, pp. 156-159.

86. *Ibid.*, p. 158. It should be noted that Brecht showed more care here than Walter Benjamin did later in avoiding the implication of inevitability in this optimistic assessment of the new media. See Benjamin's "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," *Illuminations* (New York, 1969), pp. 217-251.

87. Brecht, "Dreigroschenprozess," pp. 156-159.

under capitalism, it does so not as a mere "reflection" of a society presumed to be external to the art work, but as a consequence of the social position of intellectual workers themselves. The industrialization of art and artists was, in his view, both inescapable and of considerable human potential. With the true democratization of these means of production, artistic work would lose its quality of alienated labor by being consciously directed for collective human ends.

Brecht's view of the emancipatory potentials of modern technology was related to his critique of art as the "closed" creation of an omniscient author "distributing" his finished cultural products to an audience. This implicitly elitist concept had been continued in Lukács' view that the reader passively "experiences" the author's "totalizing" integration of reality. Culture is not seen here as qualitatively redefined by self-determining, collectivist production, but as passive quantitative *distribution* of the given traditional cultural forms.<sup>88</sup>

It was within such a perspective that Lukács carried out the debate on the "Volkstümlichkeit" of expressionist literature in the late 1930s. He praised the "popularity" of Maxim Gorki, Romain Rolland, Anatole France and Thomas Mann, for example, as opposed to modernist writers, claiming that their work had truly "penetrated into the mass."<sup>89</sup> Brecht, on the other hand, emphasized that no art is popular to begin with, but becomes so through its production, use and reworking over time. Against the charges that modernist art was unrelated to the masses, Brecht wrote of his work in a Berlin avant-garde working class theatre: "The workers welcomed any innovation which helped the representation of truth, of the real mechanism of society; they rejected whatever seemed like playing, like machinery working for its own sake, i.e., no longer, or not yet, fulfilling a purpose. . . I speak from experience when I say that one need never be frightened of putting bold and unaccustomed things before the proletariat, so long as they have to do with reality."<sup>90</sup> Instead of "penetrating" the mass with his art, Brecht frequently attempted to develop that art through such exchanges and criticisms.

Respecting the intelligence of his audiences, Brecht had very early broken from the patronizing concept of "laying on" an artistically closed

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88. This view pervades the 1920 essay, "The Old Culture and the New Culture," and is implicit in many of Lukács' later literary studies.

89. Lukács, "Es geht um den Realismus," p. 82.

90. *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, ed. John Willett (New York, 1964), pp. 110-111.

“experience” which would merely reinforce the pervasive training in passive consumption.<sup>91</sup> His insistence upon leaving his dramatic works “open-ended” was related to a strong libertarian perspective. Marxists who condemn expressionism often fear its uncontrollable, “libertarian moods,”<sup>92</sup> Brecht wrote during the debate on expressionism among German literary exiles in the years 1936-39; they seek to exercise authoritarian control over a rigidly defined concept of attainable “realist” art forms.<sup>93</sup> Instead, Brecht defined realism very broadly. His *Rezeptionsästhetik* (aesthetic of reception) implied a radical concept of democratic decision-making in its refusal to resolve contradictions within the art work, leaving this to the intellectually aroused audience. It is not surprising that in his political thinking Brecht showed great interest in Rosa Luxemburg’s notion of a socialist society built from below—a direct democracy of producers operating through workers’ *Räte* (councils)—the legacy of which was kept alive for him by Karl Korsch.<sup>94</sup>

Brecht envisioned modern media working against traditional elitist practices. As in other aspects of his Marxist aesthetics, he argued for going beyond questions of altered distribution to a view of culture as interacting production by all. In a series of notes about radio, written in 1932, Brecht spelled out one set of possibilities for the new media. If each radio were able to receive *and* transmit, allowing the listener to speak as well as to hear, it would be a “vast network of pipes,” making producers of all its users and bringing them all “into a relationship instead of isolating them.” To give a truly public character to “public occasions” the radio could provide means for the ruled to question the rulers, opening the communication process into a complex network of open challenge, debate and exchange. To underline how such a democratically controlled technology could dissolve the previously closed processes of social and cultural transmission from “on high,” Brecht emphasized that the prime objective could be that of “turning

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91. Walter Sokel, “Brecht und Expressionismus,” *Die Sogenannten Zwanziger Jahre*, First Wisconsin Workshop (Frankfurt am Main, 1970), pp. 72-73.

92. Bertolt Brecht, “Ueber den formalistischen Charakter der Realismustheorie,” *GW*, 19, p. 304.

93. Walter Benjamin, *Versuche über Brecht* (Frankfurt am Main, 1966), p. 132. Thinking of Lukács and other foes of modern art based in Moscow, Brecht said to Walter Benjamin in 1938 (*ibid.*): “. . . a state is all you can make with them, but not a community. Production makes them uncomfortable. You never know where you are with production; it is the unforeseeable. You never know what’s coming out. And they themselves don’t want to produce. They want to play the *apparatchik* and exercise control over other people. Every one of their criticisms contains a threat.”

94. Brüggemann, pp. 101-104.

the audience not only into pupils but into teachers." If such a libertarian and democratic use of modern technical production appeared "utopian," Brecht concluded, "then I would ask you to consider why it is utopian."<sup>95</sup>

*Stalinism, Nazism and a Popular Front*

Brecht used his production aesthetic as the central wedge of a critique of Stalinist Russia. In order to complete this study it is necessary to examine Brecht's and Lukács' contrasting reactions to Soviet practice, as well as to the other burning issues of the period 1933-39, the Nazi dictatorship and the definition of a "popular front" to oppose it. In these critical years those reflecting upon Marxism and art were confronted with immediate political demands.

Since 1917 Lukács had been buoyantly optimistic concerning the Bolshevik Revolution, which he saw as a cultural "salvation from abroad." In Morris Watnick's words: "Since the capitalist West, in his view, already found itself in a quagmire of cultural decadence, the Soviet Union stood as the sole remaining hope for nourishing and transmitting that culture to the future."<sup>96</sup> If Brecht's choice of Denmark after 1933 was part of a wider pattern of critical distance which he maintained from Communist, and especially Soviet orthodoxy, the Hungarian critic's accommodations to Stalinism were symbolized, and accentuated, by his Moscow exile after 1932.

It was not merely because of his proximity to the Stalinist machine of repression in the 1930s that Lukács was to write of "the living heroes who really liberated mankind, the heroes of the great October Revolution."<sup>97</sup> In his literary writings of the period, Lukács made it clear that he regarded Soviet society under Stalin as having "realized" socialism,<sup>98</sup> a position which lent a retrospective, teleological optimism to his view of the historical process. Because of his identification of Soviet Russia with the cause of socialism and the fight against fascism, Lukács engaged in the self-abasing recantations which allowed him to remain with the Communist fold and avoid Korsch's political isolation. Even in his heretical *History and Class Consciousness*, Lukács had insisted upon the strictest Party discipline, outdoing Lenin in elevating the intellectual vanguard "to the role of an

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95. Bertolt Brecht, "Der Rundfunk als Kommunikationsapparat," *GW*, 18, pp. 129-131. See Hans Magnus Enzensberger, "The Consciousness Industry: Constituents of a Theory of Media," *New Left Review*, 64 (November-December, 1970) for a recent extrapolation from Brecht's suggestions.

96. Watnick, p. 57.

97. Georg Lukács, *Studies in European Realism* (New York, 1964), p. 241.

98. *Ibid.*



independent historical entity which alone embodied the true consciousness of revolution," against Marx's insistence upon the *self-emancipation* of the working class.<sup>99</sup> Such political elitism helps to explain how Lukács managed to wed an elevated culturally "humanist" Marxism to Stalinist politics.

Particularly germane to our discussion is Lukács' relation to "socialist realism" in the Soviet Union, a literature of sentimentalized, "positive heroes" which facilitated official denials of continued social contradictions and struggles; the return of social hierarchy and privilege tied to a "heroically" monumentalist culture; and the rise of a new uncritical technical and managerial "intelligentsia."<sup>100</sup> In the era of limited de-Stalinization in the 1960s, Lukács was to claim that thirty years before he had attempted to fight against "socialist realist" policies by implicitly comparing its simplistic propaganda with the classical realist achievements of Balzac, Tolstoi and Goethe.<sup>101</sup> It is true that his critique of a literature, produced by Party order and judged for its immediate agitational value, as well as his opposition to a vulgar Marxist reduction of literature to its class origins, had been aimed squarely at officially sanctioned practice in Russia, and that these positions often placed Lukács in great danger.<sup>102</sup> Equally significant, however, was that the critic's championing of classical realist tradition and virulent rejection of modernist "decadence" provided shreds of intellectual respectability to the literal liquidation of modernist experiment and experimenters. Furthermore, although Lukács may have seen his Balzac model as an implicit critique of the trivialities of current "socialist realism," his own argument for a reassuring plot outline, with positively portrayed individual heroes, was eminently consistent with the official theory, even if its practitioners failed to present Lukács' desired "social totality" in their works.<sup>103</sup> In this, Lukács' position came close to a dignified, patrician

99. Lichtheim, p. 47.

100. Isaac Deutscher, *Stalin: A Political Biography* (New York, 1960), pp. 337-342; John Berger, *Art and Revolution: Ernst Neizvestny and the Role of the Artist in the USSR* (New York, 1969), pp. 60-63.

101. Georg Lukács, "Preface," *Writer and Critic*, p. 7. George Steiner ("Georg Lukacs and his Devil's Pact," *Language and Silence* [London, 1969], pp. 291-306), among older liberal critics, has defended Lukács along these lines. Younger German critics, such as Helga Gallas and Klaus Völker, have claimed, on the other hand, that Lukács was a major influence upon Zhdanovite policies with which his literary critical work was entirely consistent. See Gallas, *Marxistische Literaturtheorie* and Völker, "Brecht und Lukács: Analyse einer Meinungsverschiedenheit."

102. Hans-Dietrich Sander, *Marxistische Ideologie und Allgemeine Kunsttheorie* (Tübingen, 1970), pp. 220-229; Hans-Jürgen Schmitt, ed., *Die Expressionismusdebatte: Materialien zu einer marxistischen Realismus-Konzeption* (Frankfurt am Main, 1973), p. 10.

103. Lukács, "The Intellectual Physiognomy of Literary Characters," p. 125.

version of Soviet Party doctrine. The similarity lay in his continued use of a fixed and static notion of "culture," the democratization of which amounted merely to its increased "distribution" among the masses. Significantly, in 1920 Lukács had written: "Communism aims at creating a social order in which everyone is able to live in a way that in pre-capitalist eras was possible only for the ruling class."<sup>104</sup>

Although Brecht never fully adhered to Korsch's attacks upon the Soviet Union and could speak positively of Soviet achievements,<sup>105</sup> he was far more independent of Stalinism than Lukács. Unlike Lukács, he saw strict Party discipline, even when necessary, as fraught with dangers and riddled with contradictions to the moral codes enjoined by humanist ethical traditions. In the *Measures Taken* (1930), which experimented with the full embrace of such discipline, Brecht accentuated for the audience the agonizingly painful contradictions of a real situation. His avoidance of the comforting simplicities of the more sentimental Gorki works admired by Lukács, in which questionable actions are performed only by the ruling classes, won him Moscow's embarrassed strictures upon the play in 1931.<sup>106</sup>

That Brecht did not choose the Soviet Union in his exile from Nazi Germany after 1933 is attributable in part to his awareness of the fate of Russian avant-garde artists under the Stalinist liquidation of cultural experiment in the 1930s.<sup>107</sup> The concrete physical danger was quite real, should he emigrate East. Whatever the reasons for his choice of exile, however, Brecht's questioning of Soviet cultural policy in the 1930s extended to frequent critical observations on the social, political and ideological *roots* of the artistic straitjacketing there. He was appalled by the deterioration of Marxism in Russia into a closed, ideological, self-justifying system, controlled by a "clerical camarilla" and transformed into a static and uncritical *Weltanschauung*.<sup>108</sup> He strongly criticized the subordination of western Communist parties to Stalin's view of Russia's needs and deplored the resultant decay of critical intelligence within party ranks.<sup>109</sup> "Only blockheads can deny," he said to Walter Benjamin in 1938, that "Russia is

104. Lukács, "The Old Culture and the New Culture," p. 5.

105. Brecht, *GW*, 20, pp. 66-67, 120.

106. Esslin, pp. 163-164.

107. See John Fuegi, "The Soviet Union and Brecht," *Brecht Heute: Jahrbuch der Internationalen Brecht-Gesellschaft*, 3 (1973), 209-221.

108. Brecht to Korsch, letters of 1937 and February, 1939, held at International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam. The letters are numbered 1386/27 and 210/02; Walter Benjamin, *Versuche über Brecht*, p. 128.

109. Brecht, *GW*, 12, p. 539.

now under personal rule."<sup>110</sup> More fundamentally, he was well aware of Korsch's critique of the Soviet bureaucratic apparatus and frequently questioned Soviet claims that it was serving the interests of the working masses, instead of its own political rule.<sup>111</sup> With Walter Benjamin as his audience, he impersonated the Soviet State and slyly pouted: "I know I *ought* to wither away."<sup>112</sup> In letters to Korsch in 1939 and in 1941 he asked the anti-Stalinist heretic to provide a dialectical analysis of the problems of economic growth in the Soviet Union and their relations to the destruction of independent working-class organizations, and commented skeptically on the alleged historical justification for the elimination of the Soviets.<sup>113</sup>

For Brecht realist literature had to serve a critical function in relation to developing social reality. The cheery positivism of so-called "socialist realism" in the Soviet Union utterly failed in this regard.<sup>114</sup> His critique of Soviet cultural life embodied the fundamental emphases of his production aesthetics: measured against the standard of an historically emancipating social production, Soviet art merely continued the alienated pseudo-autonomy of passively received art "objects." Just as the replacement of privately concentrated property by state control did not insure that alienated factory labor would be overcome—since it was yet to be controlled by the producers themselves in the Soviet Union—so the mere *appropriation* of traditional cultural production had not put an end to the reified concept and experience of art.<sup>115</sup> This restriction of literature simply translated a wider failure: instead of qualitatively emancipating social labor, the Stalinist regime focused entirely on quantitatively increased production.<sup>116</sup> In both the Party-controlled economy and the traditionalist restriction of realist techniques, "the new humanity of the class conscious proletariat"—of both factory and intellectual laborers—was not being permitted "to form itself."<sup>117</sup>

Of even greater immediate importance than the assessment of Soviet development in the 1930s, was the need to fight the Nazi regime in Germany. For Lukács, as George Lichtheim has written, "the decisive battle had to be fought out at the level of conscious choice between the two basic

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110. Benjamin, p. 131.

111. Brecht, *GW*, 12, p. 537; 10, pp. 67, 121.

112. Benjamin, p. 128.

113. Brecht to Korsch, February, 1939, 210/02; Rasch, 998-1000.

114. Brecht, *GW*, 19, pp. 445-446.

115. Brecht, *GW*, 20, p. 120; Brüggemann, pp. 104-115.

116. Brüggemann, *ibid.*

117. The quotation is taken from *GW*, 19, p. 316.

currents within German culture: rationalism and humanism on the one hand, irrationalism and barbarism on the other. In political terms, the intelligentsia had to be converted." Germany's classical tradition—in which Hegel and Marx were linked with the humanist Weimar of Goethe and Schiller—needed to be restored "before it was overwhelmed by the romantic flood and the latter's catastrophic outcome."<sup>118</sup> This perspective was to dominate Lukács' later attempt to trace the alleged "intellectual origins" of Nazism in *Zerstörung der Vernunft* (*Destruction of Reason*, 1949).

In a 1934 essay Lukács viewed the expressionists as romantic anti-capitalists whose implicit ideological position—whatever their conscious motives—linked them with the irrationalist mysticism of Wilhelminian philosophy, ostensibly one of the central sources of Nazi belief.<sup>119</sup> His attack set the stage for the later debate on expressionism. Whatever its merits as an interpretation of the literary movement, and these were not very great, the approach failed to go beyond Nazi ideology in interpreting Hitler's regime. With "culture" discussed in terms of historically "progressive" ideologies, and barbarism seen as resulting from their overthrow, Lukács neglected a social and political analysis of Nazism as a movement and as a regime, in its concrete relation to traditional elites and to the hard-pressed lower middle classes.

The social implications of Lukács' own position were close to the patrician anti-fascists, whose leading spokesman, Thomas Mann, provided Lukács with his primary example of contemporary cultural resistance. Neglecting in Mann what was closest to himself, Lukács failed to see that the impulse which moved the novelist "into opposition and exile was not just 'progressive antifascism'...it was rather the antagonism of the cultivated patrician bourgeois to the savage plebeians, the *Kleinbürger* and *Lumpenproletariat* who were running amok in the shadow of the swastika."<sup>120</sup> Denouncing as "petty bourgeois" such immature and "irrational" forms of rebellion as expressionism,<sup>121</sup> Lukács sought to fight Nazism by invoking the patrician respectability of earlier bourgeois high culture. His neglect of the material and social needs of the bulk of the German population derived less from any claims of an allegedly pivotal position occupied by the cultural elite, than from Lukács' own obsessive absorption with allaying guilt for his "irrationalist" youth.

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118. Lichtheim, pp. 85-86.

119. Lukács, "Grösse und Verfall des Expressionismus," pp. 11-17.

120. Isaac Deutscher, "Georg Lukács and Critical Realism," *Marxism in Our Time* (Berkeley, 1972), p. 285.

121. Lukács, "Grösse und Verfall des Expressionismus," p. 39.

Instead of a struggle between humanist "culture" and fascist "barbarism," Brecht saw the Nazi movement and regime in the much stricter Marxist sense of a conflict between capitalist and proletarian classes. At times he indulged in a common vulgar Marxist identification of fascism with capitalism in crisis. Western European and American capitalism, he argued, had not yet found it necessary to overthrow democratic restraints in their protection of property, as had the German and Italian rich, but their time would soon come.<sup>122</sup> While Lukács avoided *any* class analysis of fascism, Brecht overlooked the importance of traditional military, bureaucratic and aristocratic elites in the victory of Central European fascism.

Even in the most dogmatic pronouncements of the period, however, Brecht gave considerable attention to the pivotal ideological appeals of Nazism to the lower middle classes and avoided the conspiratorial implications of a vulgar Marxist appraisal. Brecht saw the vaunted *Volksgemeinschaft* as an attempt to obfuscate the class divisions not only between proletarian and capitalist, but between *Mittelstand* small business, white-collar elements and the economic elites.<sup>123</sup> In *Mother Courage*, begun in the late 1930s, he showed an impoverished small trader, who in attempting to profit from war, merely suffered from the slaughter. Brecht's plays were often concerned with such examples of "false consciousness" among the lower middle classes. He correctly noted, moreover, how ideological manipulation would merely result in the sacrifice of *Kleinhandel* (small trade) to the expanding big business war economy.<sup>124</sup>

Instead of seeing the ideological struggle between classical humanism and romantic irrationalism, a view which Lukács shared with liberal anti-fascists, Brecht concentrated on Nazi idealist rhetoric and its capacity to obscure the material problems of the masses, especially the lower middle classes. He pointed out how, to the unpolitical and economically insecure *Kleinbürger*, idealistic self-sacrifice for *Volk*, soil and race was officially enjoined and passionately embraced.<sup>125</sup> In Brecht's eyes an elevated idealist humanism was an unproductive response to such mythologizing heroic rhetoric, since this merely continued the struggle at a level of reified

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122. Brecht, *GW*, 20, pp. 188, 239-242.

123. Brecht, *GW*, 20, pp. 237-238; Fritz Sternberg, *Der Dichter und die Ratio: Erinnerungen an Bertolt Brecht* (Göttingen, 1963), pp. 18-19; Müller, pp. 76-82.

124. On this historical trend after 1933, see David Schoenbaum, *Hitler's Social Revolution* (New York, 1966), pp. 113-151. On the economic and social sources of the plight of the *Mittelstand* in the Weimar Republic see Chapters 1 and 2 of Herman Lebovics, *Social Conservatism and the German Middle Classes, 1914-1933* (Princeton, 1968).

125. Brecht, *GW*, 20, p. 182.

abstraction which favored Nazi ability to hide the real world. What was needed, instead of talk about defending "culture," was a literature of plain-speaking realism. This Brecht attempted to present in works such as *Schweik in the Second World War*, whose "idiotic" little "hero" subverts, out of practical opportunism, the heroic poses of those in power. If culture is to be defended, Brecht argued further, it needs to be seen in relation to the entire productive activity of the masses.<sup>126</sup>

The experience of Nazism heightened Brecht's desire for a realist literature which would reveal a material reality hidden by official culture. In this art no period or literary style had a monopoly. Explicitly countering Lukács, Brecht defended modernist experiment where it had exposed a reality opaque to everyday "experience," and cited Nazi manipulation of language and visual image as the real formalism. His suspicion of the aesthetics of catharsis had been accentuated by an observation of Nazi theatricality, the deliberate Wagnerian construction of an illusionary reality with which spectators would passionately identify.<sup>127</sup> His sharp rejection of a vicariously fulfilling emotionality and insistence upon critical observation and intelligence, moreover, was closely connected with an awareness of the manipulated psycho-drama of Nazi political culture.<sup>128</sup> To paraphrase Walter Benjamin, Brecht's politicizing of art intended to challenge the aestheticized politics of the Nazis.<sup>129</sup>

Like Lukács after 1928 and official Communist policy after 1934, he too favored a popular front against Nazism. Whereas the former sought upper middle class liberal allies with the working classes, thus accentuating the classical patrician strand of the literary heritage, Brecht implicitly worked for a united front of workers, the lower middle classes, peasants, and the alienated intelligentsia against the economic and political elites, either old or new. His hope for a popular front of SPD and KPD against the Nazis, which Stalin had effectively opposed in the critical years 1930-33, had been for a common effort of rank and file workers more than for alliances of parliamentarians, trade union bureaucrats and communist officials.<sup>130</sup>

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126. *Ibid.*, p. 249.

127. Brecht, *GW*, 18, p. 132; *Schriften zum Theater*, 5 (Frankfurt am Main, 1963-64), pp. 92-94. For an excellent discussion and illustration of this aspect of Nazi culture see Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film* (Princeton, 1960), pp. 300-303, where the Nazi film *Triumph des Willens* is analyzed.

128. Ewen, pp. 217-218.

129. The formulation is used in Walter Benjamin's "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," p. 242.

130. Fritz Sternberg, *Der Dichter und die Ratio*, pp. 26-27.

*Progress as Faith or as Project*

In their responses to Stalinism and Nazism, Brecht and Lukács revealed strikingly different views of the modern historical process. Laboring under the strain of his own extremely pessimistic view of western society and culture before and during World War I, Lukács moved in the 1920s and 1930s toward its compensatory, opposite pole—a sanitized view of history as inevitable stages of progress. His portrayal of Nazism as “barbaric” and “decadent” denuded contemporary history of its real contradictions and terrors and set “heroic” Soviet “progress” in a single contrasting positive light. The latter would bypass the “decay” and “sickness” of advanced capitalist society and continue the progressive culture of an earlier bourgeois humanism. In a manner very similar to Stalinist polemics, Lukács’ positivistic and deterministic view of history allowed him to view modern western art (such as expressionism), as “objectively” reactionary.

For one who had contrived to believe in a closed historical process of progressive stages known in advance, western modernist pessimism was to be repressed in favor of the implicitly progressive perspectives found in a Balzac or Goethe, or the “enthusiastic certainty of victory” which the critic found in Gorki.<sup>131</sup> What Lukács demanded of literature, in effect, and what Kafka, Joyce and Toller did not provide, was a continuous reassurance that this road to progress was inevitably proceeding in spite of capitalist “decay,” world war and fascism (and often in spite of the author’s own political sympathies). His adoption of an Hegelian teleology of history’s “cunning” and imminent rationality as well as his passive aesthetics of reflection are to be seen in this light: if art helps to convince one, through a positive resolution of contradictions, of inexorable progress toward human fulfillment, then there remains little urgency to intervene actively for its success.

Lukács’ optimism needed constant protection against the painful doubts raised by contemporary European and particularly German experience. This helps to explain the frantic tone of his one-sided attacks on all deviations from nineteenth-century historical rationalism. The experience of fascism was thereby prevented from influencing the simple faith in progress, reason and humanity cultivated by Lukács since the early 1920s. One of the central building blocks for this evasion of the troubling realities of contemporary history was the extreme geographical split within his perceptions, which separated a sanitized young and fresh Soviet Russia from the “decaying” West of advanced capitalism. In the 1930s neither area received

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131. Lukács, “The Ideal of the Harmonious Man in Bourgeois Aesthetics,” p. 99.

from Lukács the kind of critical analysis which was needed. Instead he largely identified himself with Stalinist Russia and read the western cultural tradition with a retrospective optimism, condemning the modernists for their despairing abandonment of the faith in history.

Brecht never embraced such a pacified optimism. Instead, Marxist perspectives after 1928 provided him with "seedlings of hope" which he planted in a ground of historical pessimism and skepticism framed by experiences of war, fascism and Stalinism. One of the recurrent motifs of all his poetry and drama is the imagery of the "dark times" in which we live. Refusing to turn his back on the palpable experience of despair which his early plays and poems reveal, Brecht feared that Nazism might usher in a "new dark age." By the late 1930s he was thinking beyond the immediate conflicts to "encompass all the social struggles of humanity, where qualities like cunning and endurance are more important than heroism." Instead of the well-rounded individuals of Lukács' liking, Brecht's wise "sages" were anonymous, resourceful and resilient men or women of the masses—Galy Gay, Herr Keuner, Azdak or Schweik—who ask questions "even from under the wheels," as he wrote of Kafka's characters.<sup>132</sup>

Critics have often failed to see that Brecht's Marxism, far from being a compensatory optimistic facade which fails to hide a "basically pessimistic" outlook,<sup>133</sup> was deeply enriched by this experience. Like Gramsci and Walter Benjamin, Brecht avoided the truly pessimistic "optimism" of the official Communist faith in historical inevitability—that disastrous assumption which had inhibited the KPD from effectively resisting the Nazi seizure of power. Whereas Lukács never truly confronted Nazism directly and continually evaded its disturbing counterweight to any traditional nineteenth-century faith in the "nobility of humanity" and the certainty of historical progress, Brecht managed to live and work in the tension between despair and hope, emphasizing the contradictory nature of every historical situation. Brecht's Marxism does not view history as an objectively guaranteed march toward a goal already known in advance. History, rather, is a project, mediated by given social realities, but proceeding from the concrete transforming praxis of human beings.<sup>134</sup> The experience of present

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132. Stanley Mitchell, "Introduction to Benjamin and Brecht," *New Left Review* (January-February, 1973), pp. 3-4.

133. This view, associated in the United States with the work of Martin Esslin and Robert Brustein, is developed at length in the recent study of Qayuum Qureshi, *Pessimismus und Fortschrittsglaube bei Brecht* (Köln, 1971).

134. Brüggemann, pp. 90-91.



despair shown in his plays is not denied or evaded by being contrasted with a *potentially* more just future.

Refusing to evade the troubling realities of his time through recourse to a comforting faith in inevitable progress, Brecht's art aimed to assault his audience's passive and fatalistic inertia, its adjustment to the "course of things." The shocks of "estrangement" from "normal" perceptions were urgently needed to encourage active intervention into the historical process. Lukács' retrospective sociology of literary reflections, on the other hand, contained little of this urgency. The critic's carefully preserved belief in the inexorable upward march of history encouraged a contemplative aesthetic whose critical edge was aimed at any pessimistic art works which might shake the faith.

Brecht was far more open to the fragmented and contradictory moods of contemporary literature. Works of very different implicit ideological persuasion might well contain "moments" of real experience upon which the reader or audience needed to reflect. Although he viewed Kafka's extreme historical pessimism critically—stressing the different uses to which his literary techniques might be applied—Brecht could also learn from him concerning the resistible dangers of contemporary history.<sup>135</sup> Literature in any case presented problems to be resolved outside it, not reassuring answers. The central issue was whether processes of decay and ascent were to be segregated out or compartmentalized into different historical periods and geographical locations, as Lukács had done: simply judging early bourgeois Europe and contemporary Russia as "progressive" and condemning late bourgeois society as "decadent." As Ernst Bloch wrote in response to Lukács' attack on expressionism: "Aren't there any dialectical relations between decay and ascent? . . . Aren't there here also materials of transition from the old to the new?"<sup>136</sup>

Brecht's art and thought were directed toward problems of contemporary advanced industrial society, from which Lukács sought to escape. Lukács never lost his early revulsion toward twentieth-century culture and the social confusions it revealed. As late as 1970, one year before his death, he wrote: "With its forms of organization, its science and its techniques of manipulation, modern life moves relentlessly toward reducing the word to the mechanical simplicity of a mere sign. That means a radical departure from life."<sup>137</sup> Significantly, his literary taste was for works which reveal the

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135. Mitchell, "Introduction to Benjamin and Brecht," p. 4.

136. Ernst Bloch, "Diskussionen über Expressionismus," *Marxismus und Literatur*, 2, p. 56.

137. Lukács, "Preface (1970)," *Writer and Critic*, p. 11.

*emergence* of modern social classes (i.e., the French bourgeoisie in Balzac, the Russian proletariat in Gorki), and not the problems of a mature industrial society.<sup>138</sup> His construction of a Marxist aesthetics is related to these historical persuasions, especially the traditionalist manner in which he conceived of both realism and humanism.

Brecht's work, on the other hand, was a product of the new urban, technological society of the Weimar Republic. Very early he simply accepted this world as his milieu, not bemoaning the passing of patrician cultures, but seeking instead to create an art attuned to the new age. In his aesthetic experimentalism and intentionally open-ended dramas he shared the perspectives of the modernist avant-garde, as Poggioli has carefully defined it,<sup>139</sup> but tried to turn it away from a defensive individualism contemptuous of the "new masses." Instead of being focused on what he came to see as the "backward" directions in Stalinist Russia,<sup>140</sup> his Marxism addressed itself to reified experiences under advanced capitalist conditions in the West. Here, in the asphalt cities of modernity, he sought to redirect its tendencies, saying, in essence, as in one of his critiques of Lukács: "There is no way back. It's a matter not of the good old, but the bad new. Not the dismantling of technology, but its build-up. We will not be human again by leaving the masses, but only through going into them. . . but not as we were earlier."<sup>141</sup>

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138. See pp. 207-211, from the chapter on Gorki, in *Studies in European Realism* (New York, 1964).

139. Renato Poggioli, *The Theory of the Avant-Garde* (New York, 1971).

140. Walter Benjamin, *Versuche über Brecht*, p. 130.

141. Bertolt Brecht, "Die Essays von Georg Lukács," *GW*, 19, p. 298.