

Introduction

The aim of this dissertation is to reconstruct a Lukácsian criterion for progressive works of art. This goal takes as a given the Marxist standpoint towards the problem of constructing an aesthetic canon, namely, that if we are to choose the artworks that narrate the history of our civilization, we should only choose the *progressive* works of art which shaped the direction of the future development of society¹ and promoted new social forms. I shall defend the claim that Lukács' criterion for progressive artworks can be the conceptual basis for reconstructing a progressive canon for contemporary works of art. This potential lies mainly in the three main concepts developed by Lukács in his 1930s defense of Realism against modernism: selection, prophetic typology and totality. In section one I will define these concepts. As a leading aid in this procedure, I have drawn upon Lukács defense of Realism as developed in 'Expressionism: its Significance and Decline' (1934), 'Realism in the Balance' (1938) and *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism* (1955).

It is important to stress that Lukács' criterion has been disregarded in contemporary aesthetics due to its link to Soviet Social Realism. However, I believe that this dismissal hinges on a simplified conception of Lukács' defense of Realism that stems from Bloch's criticism, which reduces the scope of Realism in a way that Lukács himself, who even considers Brecht a realist, would reject. Nevertheless, it is vital to acknowledge that the Lukácsian criterion has one major weakness I shall try to overcome: its requirement for a socialist perspective. This requirement should not be understood as the circumstantial contingency of Lukács' support to the policies of the Soviet Union, but rather as a consequence of how his theory of art's social role is linked to his philosophy of history. It is central to the argument of this dissertation that Lukács develops his criterion from the assumption of an orthodox Marxist philosophy of history which establishes socialism as the *telos* of history. The inapplicability of the original Lukácsian criterion nowadays is due to a generalized rejection of an orthodox Marxist conception of history which predominates in critical theory since the 1940s. Lukács' faith in unified *progress* towards a classless society is the central flaw of his philosophy of history, which I will denominate the conception of *diagonal history*. In section two, I will develop the conception of *diagonal history* which underlies Lukács aesthetics.

1 Although there is not a single form of Marxist Criticism, the defense of progressive artworks can be traced back to its origins. Marx and Engels claimed that '*progressive* literature had to reflect truthfully the deep-lying, vital processes of the day, to promulgate *progressive* ideas, and to defend the interests of the *progressive* forces in society' (Krylov, 1976:1, my emphasis). However, Marxist Criticism is divided with respect to the issue of whether or not it should have a prescriptive character. Here, I am concerned with Marxist Criticism in favour of this position, as advocated by Lukács. Within the proponents of prescriptive Marxist Criticism, I will leave aside the Soviet tradition of untheoretical and didactic nature and I will focus on what Jameson called 'a relatively Hegelian kind of Marxism' championed by Lukács, Bloch, and Benjamin. (Jameson, 1974:ix)

In section three, I shall show how this flawed conception of history is what led Lukács to reject Expressionism as a progressive movement. I take up Expressionism as a starting point for the evaluation of Lukács' criterion because it is symptomatic of how his original theory failed to notice the progressive potential of avant-garde movements. Lukács' defense of Realism against Expressionism hinges on his belief in the predictability of historical development which results in demanding progressive artworks to have a socialist perspective.

However, my aim is not simply to defend or attack Lukács but to show that his criterion can be modified in order to account for the impact of the legacy of Expressionism on contemporary artistic practices. In section four, I will introduce a *principle of heterogeneity* to construct a modified philosophy of history which I denominate the conception of *multidirectional history*. The main difference between diagonal history and multidirectional history is that multidirectional history stresses the positive potential of negating the current state of affairs through an *ecstatic* gesture. Multidirectional history gives more weight to the negative openness that takes place in the moment of social change itself, while diagonal history disregards this negation as a mere transitional step towards the following positive stage. At the end of the section, I shall argue that Lukács' criterion for progressive artworks can be reconstructed from the standpoint of *multidirectional history* so that the concepts of selection, prophetic typology and totality can account for the progressive character of Expressionism.

In section five, I will focus on Expressionist drama to show how it can meet the reconstructed Lukácsian criterion. I have analysed those plays whose structure and production treatment clearly influenced future modes dramatic forms. The primary source material for the study is not the dramatic text itself but rather the theatrical event, because the historical significance of Expressionist drama can only be made clear in the connections between Expressionist productions and German society concretized in the production of the plays. In this section, I accept Kuhns' rubrics of *Geist*, *Schrei* and Emblematic performance as a classification of Expressionist acting modes. Firstly, I will dismiss *Geist* performance as a regressive mode. Secondly, I will argue that both *Schrei* and Emblematic performances share an *ecstatic* character that anticipates the state of mind of the subject of postmodern progress and are thus progressive. Thirdly, I shall remark how *ecstatic* acting influenced Epic theatre to show how the legacy of Expressionism has remained present until the latest developments of drama, thus deeming its reexamination from the perspective of the modified Lukácsian criterion which redeems it from Lukács' original dismissal imperative.