

# THE CONCEPT OF SOCIALITY IN THE LITERARY CRITICISM OF GEORG LUKÁCS, LUCIEN GOLDMANN, AND THEODOR W. ADORNO

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## ABSTRACT

*Michael Brown argues that what unites the human and social sciences is their evolving character, made explicit in the concepts of “reflexivity,” “course of activity,” and “theorizing.” Once the social sciences are taken as a whole, the notion of “sociality” will allow to grasp society as ever changing, as a becoming. I shall examine the notion of sociality in the literary criticism of Lukács, Goldmann, and Adorno, three authors who consider the essay as the adequate open form of critique in times of rapid social change. Originally adopted by the young Lukács, the essay tended to be abandoned by him when elaborating the concept of critical or socialist realism as a repository of timeless cultural values. In his studies in the European realist or the soviet novel, for example, on Balzac, Stendhal, Thomas Mann, or Solzhenitsyn, the dialectical concept of social totality becomes a sum of orientations, presenting the individual writer with the moral task to choose “progress” and discard “negativity.” The social is thus narrowed to individual choice. Different from Lukács, Goldmann’s literary theory defines cultural production as a matter of the social group, the transindividual subject. Goldmann was deeply marked by Lukács’s early writings from which he gained notably the notion of tragedy and the concept of maximum possible consciousness—the world vision of a social group which structures the work of a writer. Cultural creation is resistance to capitalist society, as evident in the literature of absence, Malraux’s novels, and the nouveau roman. In the writings of Adorno the social is*

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*lodged within the avant-garde, provided that one takes its means and procedures literally, e.g., the writings of Kafka. By formal innovation—among others the adoption of the essay, the small form, the fragment—art exercises criticism of the ongoing rationalization process and preserves the possibility of change (p. 319).*

**Keywords:** Essay; becoming; transindividual subject; Georg Lukács; Lucien Goldmann; Theodor Adorno

## INTRODUCTION

In his recent book, Michael Brown argues that what unites the human and social sciences is their social, evolving character. He seeks to understand how exactly the social is conceived in the agency-dependent sciences in order to create the conditions for the revision of their conceptual framework. Only a thorough review of the concepts used by the social and human sciences can make us understand that underlying the investigation into widely different fields of the humanities and social sciences there is one common denominator: “the concept of the social.” In other words, human nature is the social nature of individuals. To make this logic evident, the human and social sciences will have to overcome the deep-seated prejudice that—as agency-dependent sciences—they are not properly scientific (2014, p. 298). Brown argues that this perception, largely due to the fact that both social sciences and humanities practice a rigid delimitation of their respective domains, will be overcome by demonstrating the fluid boundaries between disciplines.

A close reading of Rousseau’s *Social Contract* leads Brown to conclude that the very terminology current in the human and social sciences points to the rigidity of thought underlying the different disciplines. Social nature is in constant movement; “intentionality” and “self-critical reflection” characterize any form of active participation in society. Brown suggests to replace the notion of “self-reflection” with “reflexivity”; the concept of “action” with that of “course of activity,” “theory” with “theorizing,” and to introduce the notion of “sociality” that becomes evident only when the human and social sciences are taken as a whole (2014, p. 288). Brown cites Sartre whose dialectical reasoning allowed him to seize both the movement of the method and that of the object, the social group. It follows that social and human sciences are dealing with the notion of *becoming*—though Brown does not use the term—bearing on philosophy and understanding of theory; consequently, knowledge can never be “positive” in the sense of definitive.

In this chapter, I want to address these propositions by discussing the unfolding theoretical approaches to literature of Georg Lukács, Lucien Goldmann, and Theodor W. Adorno, three critics whose historical experience makes them highly sensitive to the influence of social change on the production and perception of culture. In different ways the notion of becoming shapes their work which is bound up with the fate of marxism and the development of capitalist society. Born respectively in 1885, 1913, and 1903, they are concerned with the

definition of a humane culture in the violent and profound changes wrought by capitalism, revolution, and socialism in the first half of the twentieth century. It will seem daring to treat these three important theoreticians of culture in just one chapter, especially as many laudable analyses have been dedicated to them. Here I mean to focus on one particular aspect characterizing their evolving literary criticism which seems to coincide with Michael Brown's research into a dialectical critical approach: the intention to grasp the production of literary form and theory as the reflection of incessant social change. Ideally, Brown argues, in a theory "the idea of society is preserved by reading each ostensible part as moment of a course of activity and, therefore, of becoming, as it were, nonidentical with itself" (2014, p. 291). With great sensitivity, Lukács, Goldmann, and Adorno respond to society as a multiple moving entity, which causes them to shy away from elaborating new theories but rather motivates them to experiment with a preliminary approach to cultural production in the shape of an estimate: the essay form. The insight into a necessary historicization of cultural theory is—in different ways—common to all three of them, notwithstanding important differences in their perception of historical development.

### THE ESSAY FORM

Georg Lukács (1885–1975), one of the most influential and controversial marxist critics of European literature, is less well known for his early work in the Neo-Kantian and Hegelian mode, *Soul and Form* (1911; Lukács, 1974) and *Theory of the Novel* (1916/2020; Lukács, 1971a). After becoming a marxist and joining the Hungarian revolution in 1919, Lukács abandoned aesthetic questions in the 1920s in an attempt to play a role as a theoretician in the Communist Party—with the important essay collection *History and Class Consciousness* (1923) and *Blum Theses* (1928)—and only returned to literary criticism in the 1930s. It is Lucien Goldmann, who in the 1940s recognized the importance of the concepts Lukács had developed in his early works for the elaboration of a theory of cultural creation under the conditions of the twentieth century. The studies united in *Soul and Form* are a "synthesis between a more or less phenomenological structuralism and Kantian tragedy" (Goldmann, 1976, p. 228) where form is understood with Husserl as an ahistorical entity. *Soul and Form* opens with the essay on the essay, defining the essay as critique, situated mid-way between literary criticism and philosophy. The essay is a metaart, which uses literary works as a means to ask philosophical questions "à l'occasion de", by way of literary or philosophical works in an unsystematic manner. Both *Soul and Form* and *Theory of the Novel*, tragedy and the novelistic epic, situate form as essences outside time. In *Soul and Form*, various essays, signifying structures of a "non genetic character" (Goldmann, 1976, p. 229) stand side by side, judged by the young Lukács as inauthentic positions, the only form of authenticity being tragedy. As Goldmann never tired to point out, his theory is heavily indebted to Lukács's early writings, *Soul and Form*, *Theory of the Novel*, and *History and Class Consciousness*, from which he derived the concepts of the tragic vision; the novel as

“the story of a *degraded* . . . search (. . .) for authentic values in a world itself degraded” (Goldmann, 1975, p. 1); as well as the concept of “maximum consciousness” of a social class shaping cultural creation.

Analyzing Lukács’s early works, Goldmann stresses the importance of the essay as an open form of critique, an approach which distinguishes his own writing (Leenhardt, 1976, p. 103; Goldmann, 1959a, 1959b, p. 250). Characterizing Lukács as a “great essayist, and not a systematic thinker” (Goldmann, 1971, p. 17), he seems to speak of his own searching relation to marxism. Remarking that “*essayist*, by its very definition, means precursor, one who announces a system but does not construct it”, he alludes to Lukács’s abandoning this open questioning attitude (Goldmann, 1971, p. 17). In his study on the “Philosophy of the Enlightenment,” Goldmann credits Rousseau, and especially Diderot, with having recognized the contradiction lying within bourgeois society and Enlightenment philosophy itself. That is why they were greatly appreciated by those thinkers, who have overcome Enlightenment philosophy: Kant, Hegel, and Goethe (Goldmann, 1970, pp. 60–70). Rousseau acknowledged the contradiction between private person and citizen (Goldmann, 1970, p. 62); whereas Diderot, “one of the greatest essayists in the history of Western thought,” as the organizer and “spiritual director” (“*directeur spirituel*” (Goldmann, 1970, p. 63) of the Encyclopedia, staunchly defending its central values against any critique, in *Rameau’s Nephew* and *Jacques le fataliste*, published posthumously, judges unacceptable to base the universal character of truth in individual consciousness and private property in human nature (Goldmann, 1970, pp. 66–69). A hybrid form, the essay has in common with philosophy to especially ask fundamental questions about human existence, however, contrary to the philosopher, the essayist cannot—and does not set out to—answer them. It has in common with literature to avoid posing these questions in a conceptual and abstract form but rather chooses a literary figure or an example from life to do so (Goldmann, 1970, p. 66).

In the following pages, I will explore how this way of serious probing into the modalities of literary creation as handled by Lukács, Goldmann, and Adorno can contribute to a literary critique of becoming and, given the philosophical convictions of these three authors, to what extent it is possible to avoid making it into an instrument of or an appendix to those convictions.

## GEORG LUKÁCS

### *From Kantianism and Lebensphilosophie to Marxism*

Lukács became a marxist during World War I and took part in the ill-fated Hungarian Revolution in 1919 where he was People’s Commissar of Education. His commitment to marxism as an interpretation of unalterable historical laws deeply marked his life and subsequently his intellectual work. In 1923, he published a collection of essays, *History and Class Consciousness* which caused an uproar among influential theoreticians in the Comintern for grasping revolution not as a concrete historical force, but in idealist terms. He was denounced as a

revisionist and idealist philosopher for criticizing Engels's concept of the dialectic of nature and reinterpreting Marx's sociological theory of capitalism through the categories of alienation and reification. In *History and Class Consciousness*, Lukács made totality the central concept of marxism, hereby linking Marx with Hegelian philosophy and separating him clearly from the theoreticians of the Second International, Kautsky, Bernstein, and Plekhanov. With the concept of maximum possible consciousness defining the proletariat on the point of gaining revolutionary self-awareness, he purportedly introduced an idealist notion into marxism. Lukács subsequently distanced himself from this work by writing a short tribute to Lenin after the leader's death in 1924. In the 1920s, Trotsky and the left opposition elaborated a critique of the increasing bureaucratic and nationalist tendencies in the Soviet Union; in this conflict, Lukács sided with Stalin adopting the doctrine of "socialism in one country", accepting the necessity to liquidate the "kulaks" and the elite of the bolshevik party in the 1930s, in order to "save" the ideals of socialism (Lukács, 1971b, p. XXXVIII.) Lukács never made an attempt to analyze the evolution of stalinism, even though in the 1950s he supported efforts to overcome the stalinist system via reforms, nor had he any sympathy for the left opposition which he considered rather to be "anarchic" (Lukács, 1971b, p. XXIX). As Lukács wanted to stay within the Communist Party, in 1933 he finally decided to officially repudiate *History and Class Consciousness*. In the face of the worst crises in capitalism during the 1920s and 30s, Lukács insisted on "the relative stability of Western capitalism" (Lukács, 1971b, p. XXIX). Confronted with the rise of national socialism; he accepted to repudiate his "Blum-Theses" where, in 1928, under his Hungarian pseudonym, he analyzed the Hungarian social democratic party as fascist and suggested the Communist Party engage in reformist politics. This position lead him to accept Stalin's characterization of the social-democrats as twin brothers of the fascists. In the 1967 preface to *History and Class Consciousness*, when he relativized certain earlier loyalties to Stalin, he nevertheless states: "I agreed with Stalin on the necessity of socialism in one country and that showed clearly the beginning of a new period in my thinking" (Lukács, 1971b, p. XXVIII).

It is this unwavering ethicopolitical commitment to the Communist Party as the indispensable tool to bring about socialism which—notwithstanding its various expressions from the Russian revolution through stalinism and Hungarian reform communism—Lukács never abandoned, and to which he largely adapted his philosophical writings and literary criticism. In the 1960s, he intended to write a marxist aesthetics focusing on "dealienation" (Entverdinglichung) with the collaboration of his students, the Budapest School, who eventually could not identify anymore with the idea of contributing to a renaissance of marxism with a marxist ontology (Dannemann, 1998, pp. 114–121). As Agnes Heller explains, Lukács wanted his own "school" of marxist thought, a return to the "authentic Marx", a project made impossible by the differing marxist visions within the Budapest group (Hauptfeld, 2018, pp. 102, 106).

After his problems with party politics, Lukács returned to literary criticism and philosophy in the 1930s, areas where he eventually left an impressive oeuvre. He was undoubtedly one of the best-read scholars in European literature of the

eighteenth to the twentieth century, with a special emphasis on the nineteenth-century novel and German classical philosophy and became an authority for developing the concept of critical realism<sup>1</sup>. Lukács survived the most terrible years of stalinist dictatorship in Moscow—1933–1944—writing for a party paper and teaching on proletarian literature (Lichtheim, 1970). What will be argued here is that his political choices eventually translate into cultural conservatism. True, in his studies on European literature, Lukács maintained the essay style, exploring particular aspects of the work of a writer, however, in contradiction to the open investigative form, his studies turn out to be elements of a theory of literature based on the assumption of a progressive and organic cultural development that has rather to do with rationalism and eclecticism than with a subtle dialectical approach (Swingewood & Sonolet, 1972).

Two important elements which keep Lukács's approach within the stalinist framework are the importance accorded to ethics and the redefinition of the concept of totality. In *History and Class Consciousness*, Lukács had criticized the social democrats and the mechanistic thought of vulgar marxism for separating the concept of totality from that of reification, thus making it into a tool for bourgeois thought (Swingewood & Sonolet, 1972, p. 23). Dialectics, the essential category of historical evolution, a synthesis of contradictory elements provoking qualitative change, now becomes a sum of choices, whereas the concepts of dialectic totality and reification, necessary to understand the profoundly historical character of bourgeois society, disappear from Lukács's work, mostly by a change of definition, e.g., by opposing reality and postrevolutionary society not as reality and possibility but as reality and ideal. The category of mediation is not praxis but morality, that what should be. As he understood the Russian Revolution as a *fait accompli*, there was no need for further revolutionary activity: it was now the task of the party, not that of the people, to construct the future. Thus, in his analysis of Sholokhov's novel *Virgin Soil Uplifted* (1935), Lukács promotes the moral role of the Communist Party, called upon to transcend the opposition of egotism and morale in a system of popular education (Swingewood & Sonolet, 1972, p. 24). As George Lichtheim put it in his fine study of Lukács's tortuous relations with marxism: in the 1930s, Lukács was "condemned to the dreary task of producing hack work for semi-literate audiences." (Lichtheim, 1970, pp. 79–80). Thus, he could trace the development of Russian literary criticism from its beginnings with Belinsky's and Herzen's method culminating with the names of the leaders Lenin and Stalin (Lichtheim, 1970, p. 76). As he sees society in terms of reason and nonreason, it becomes evident that the social contradiction could only be surmounted by the supremacy of rationalist elements embodied by the party. However, after the years of terror, when it became possible again, he was looking for allies in all educated, "enlightened" people, appealing to socialists and bourgeois alike.

In Lukács's historical perspective, the defeat of feudalism in the French revolution brought to power the bourgeois class which eventually is to be overthrown in a proletarian revolution inaugurating socialism. As, apart from Russia, this had not happened in any country, the bourgeois class in western and central Europe became responsible for upholding the values of bourgeois democracy, in

philosophy as well as the epic forms of novel and novella. In his *Studies in European realism*, Lukács shows that the bourgeoisie, a genuine revolutionary class in 1789–1830, thereafter has to tackle the “central problem of the nineteenth-century world-view and style: the attitude to romanticism” (Lukács, 1978, p. 67), which Balzac and Stendhal solve with the creation of the critical realist novel. Critical of developing capitalism like the romanticists, both writers are superior to them by espousing the forward movement of history, the progress of society. Depicting “the essential and nothing but the essential” in rapidly developing bourgeois society, with “passionate contempt for all trivial realism” (Lukács, 1978, p. 69), Stendhal and Balzac regard “the portrayal of the great types of social evolution as their main task” (Lukács, 1978, p. 71). Creations such as *Red and Black*, *The Charter House of Parma*, *The Peasants*, and *Père Goriot*, translating the historical impetus, are due to the personal honesty of these great writers. Lukács explains how Balzac, against his well-known personal sympathies for the aristocracy, honestly portrays the social and economic ruin of that class wrought by the French Revolution with capitalism imposing itself; how Stendhal’s hero, Julien Sorel, self-confidently moves up in society under the Bourbon Restoration, satirizing the rigid legalistic longings of Mathilde de la Mole; while Fabrice del Dongo lives in the regret of the heroic Napoleonic reign. The difference between the two writers lies in their social vision: Stendhal is a realist, even though his worldview is characterized as “an extension of the ideology of pre-revolutionary Enlightenment” (Lukács, 1978, p. 77), whereas to Lukács Balzac’s worldview was influenced by all the “newer trends” in society, including incipient socialist ideas and working class unrest, which made Balzac the better realist. Notwithstanding “his confused and often quite reactionary worldview” and his preference for post-revolutionary romantic literature, “mirrored the period between 1789 et 1848 much more completely and profoundly” than Stendhal, who favored Enlightenment literature and was more progressive in his ideas. Lukács praises Balzac for having created capitalist or aristocratic types (Nucingen, Crevel, Goriot, Maufigneuse. . .), without, however, relating them to each other, rather evaluating them with respect to capitalist development as such but never in the context of the novelistic work. Given the absence of social mediation, of situating Balzac and Stendhal concretely within a class or a group, Lukács can only distinguish between them in terms of character or ideology: Stendhal was an optimist in the long run; Balzac was pessimistic. Also Lukács never considers a work as a unity. Thus, he isolates the fantastic in Balzac’s work, e.g., the figure of Vautrin or the story of *La Peau de Chagrin*: “The fantastic element in Balzac derives merely from the fact that he thinks through to the end the necessities of social reality, beyond their normal limits, beyond even their feasibility” (Lukács, 1978, p. 60). Out of fear that Balzac could be taken for a romantic, Lukács explains away a vital aspect in Balzac’s works, thus destroying their unity.

According to Lukács, after the defeat of constitutionalism in 1848, with the bourgeois class accommodating themselves to autocratic rule, writers could no longer wholeheartedly embrace the evolution of their class, they forcibly remained isolated, “simple spectators of the social process” (Lukács, 1978, p. 141, cf. 1979, p. 28f), impartial witnesses who—on their own, without any social

mediation—had to identify those progressive forces carrying social development. In the second half of the nineteenth century, so Lukács, the writer has to take care to make the crucial difference between realism and the “trivial realism” (1978, p. 69) of naturalism, it is after all a question of *Weltanschauung*, worldview, to continue portraying “the great types of social evolution” (1978, p. 71). Lukács outrightly condemns the naturalism of Zola for painting a purely “sociological”, descriptive picture of society, insisting on characteristics such as poverty or dependence, while neglecting the “living forces” at work in all societies. Naturalism tends to replace the full-fledged portrayal of society by small forms, as in Maupassant’s novellas and stories, while existentialist and psychological novels (Joyce, Proust, Kafka) are inward-looking, accentuating the pathological features that come to the fore in the rapidly developing European cities, signaling the defeatism of modernity. *Studies in European realism* was written during the height of stalinism. It is within this historical situation that Lukács sought to define what appeared to him as the highest category of bourgeois humanist literature: the realist novel. The various prefaces Lukács added to later editions made him attenuate the harsh, sometimes simplistic characterizations of writers. In a tireless effort of essay-writing, Lukács forged a theory of bourgeois realism which as a repository of a forward-looking culture, a tool in the fight for the socialist society of the future, to be defended against the dangers of alienation and decadence present in modern capitalism.

#### *Lukács and Thomas Mann*

The preference for bourgeois literature finds a special expression in Lukács’s deep interest in Thomas Mann. In the 1930s and 40s, Lukács, who had profound knowledge of German literature and philosophy, undertook his studies on Mann and German literature in preparation for a program of reeducation after the defeat of national socialism. The longer essays on Mann were written in the 1930s and 40s while in exile in the Soviet Union (Lukács returned to Hungary in 1944). At the Congress of Proletarian Writers in 1934, Zhdanov declared that socialist realism with a positive revolutionary outlook was to be the official style of Soviet culture. It was the time when Lukács chose to present Thomas Mann as the ideal representative of progressive realism: Mann, a celebrated German novelist, Nobel prize of literature 1929, being also a citizen of a country currently engulfed by a dangerous ontology, disdainful of marxism. For this venture to succeed Lukács had to draw Mann potentially towards Marxism, thereby demonstrating his loyalty to the current soviet ideology. Implicitly Lukács was led to oversimplify the development of German literature and its roots in German history.

In Lukács’s theory, German Aufklärung, Enlightenment, had been defeated at the turn of the nineteenth century by a reactionary counter current, when romantic philosophy with Fichte and Schelling took over from Kant’s rationalism and Hegelian dialectics. Goethe and Hegel, despite supporting the French Revolution and the rule of law it brought, had nevertheless hoped that in Germany reforms could achieve these benefits without revolutionary turmoil. As that was not the case, as the Junkers and the reactionary ruling families managed to

stay on and keep reforms to a minimum, a sort of discouragement and fatigue set in among writers and intellectuals. Lukács adheres to a one-sided explanation of German intellectual development by making Goethe and Hegel into unwavering supporters of the French revolution and the German *Aufklärung* into a rationalist movement deeply opposed to romanticism. Thereby he creates the basis of a two-tongued development of German culture in the nineteenth century, one being the basis of rationalism and revolution and the other of obscurantism and reaction. The disaster of the defeated 1848 revolution for constitutional rule was of particular importance, as soon afterward the bourgeoisie found itself in a united Germany under Prussia's highhanded direction and reeling with nationalism. The political passivity of bourgeois Germany, reinforced by a new-found prosperity, deeply affected cultural life, including writers who were far from uncritical of Bismarck's rule. In the second half of the nineteenth century, Lukács finds the democratic ideal submerged by romanticism and nostalgia for a glorious German past. The dominating intellectual figures were Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Wagner. In the period of imperialism, literary concerns focusing on the "great world," society as a whole, were replaced by a preoccupation with the "small world": private life and the predominance of psychology. Pessimism produced introvert and vitalist tendencies, such as *Lebensphilosophie*, a sort of intuitionism informing Georg Simmel's philosophy, to which Lukács had been sensitive in his younger years. Expressionism appeared around World War I. After the defeat in the war and of the 1918 revolution, and with the Weimar Republic never being able to impose itself, Lukács felt that irrationalism had once again become a serious danger to German culture. He used his admiration for Thomas Mann, to make him a stalwart of democratic German culture, to win him for "progress," especially after Hitler's rise to power in 1933. Lukács's essays and notes, written between 1905 and 1955, give the impression that the reader is lead to follow Mann's educational advancement into becoming the one German writer who salvaged the bourgeois cultural heritage.

*Essays on Thomas Mann* is a collection of pieces written over nearly 50 years: three longer essays signed in 1945, 1948, and 1955, with a post scriptum on Mann's death, in 1955. The three longer essays, "In Search of Bourgeois Man," "The Tragedy of Modern Art," and "The Playful Style" were written and first published during the Moscow exile. The publications of various studies published between 1909 and 1955 show that Lukács followed the evolution of Mann's work closely. "In Search of Bourgeois Man" (Lukács, 1979, pp. 13–46), signed in 1945, commenting on the early novel *Buddenbrooks* (1901) and important novellas such as *Tonio Kröger* and *Mario and the Magician*, is more of a panegyric than a critical appraisal. Lukács describes Mann as an "anti-Utopian" realist (Lukács, 1979, p. 32), representing "all that is best in the German bourgeoisie" (Lukács, 1979, p. 15); Mann's "greatness lies in being a 'mirror of the world'" (1979, p. 16); "the deeply and consciously bourgeois Thomas Mann is the conscience for the German middle class"; Mann is in fact the Goethe of the twentieth century (Lukács, 1979, p. 20). Mann could arrive at this point because—coming from a family of bourgeois patricians on the point of losing out to a new kind of ruthless profiteers—he had been bent to study the German burgher ever since

*Buddenbrooks*. Lukács reads the three important novels *Buddenbrooks*, *The Magic Mountain* and *Dr Faustus*, as a demonstration that bourgeois virtues—“fulfillment of duty”, “choosing a career” (Lukács, 1979, p. 21) and the “ethic of composure” (Lukács, 1979, p. 25)—are honorable and necessary, but in the modern world of imperialism, powerless against depression and the onslaught of rightwing politics. For Lukács, Mann had done very well, considering that—contrary to Goethe, who had lived through the progressive times of the *Aufklärung*, and the French revolution—it was “Mann’s fate to be born into the age of decadence” (Lukács, 1979, p. 29). The writer could not totally escape that fate: with *Considerations of an Unpolitical Man* (1915), he succumbed to the nationalist wave engulfing Germany at the outbreak of World War I. Lukács dismisses that diatribe against Western culture as a minor mistake, as in this case the intention was “not subjective and personal” but due to Mann’s “deep involvement with Germany which included the many centuries of political poverty” (Lukács, 1979, p. 29). Thomas Mann did manage his “conversion to democracy” in the postwar years, and from now on, Lukács believes that he regards struggle for democracy as the fight against decadence (Lukács, 1979, p. 31). Education moves to the forefront, “the mature Mann is “an educator *sui generis*”, he becomes “the educator of his people” (Lukács, 1979, p. 32). He “stood alone in the Weimar Republic”, in an “isolated position” (Lukács, 1979, p. 32f). Mann’s conversion to democracy shows that the conflicts between reactionary and progressive positions can be clarified in artistic creation provided the artist struggles honestly, as was the case with Balzac.

There is no attempt to concretely address the deep insecurity that the war has caused among writers and their role in society, to situate Thomas Mann with fellow writers and intellectuals in the politically and socially profoundly disturbed postwar society. Certainly, Thomas Mann, eventually turned into a “rational republican,” backing the Weimar Republic, and during World War II, from his exile in the United States, he regularly admonished his fellow Germans over the BBC. However, Lukács’s explanation of Mann’s development makes it exclusively a moral problem to be solved by the single writer, blending out important intellectuals who, critical of authoritarianism, doubtful of the place of the individual after the terrible war experience, in the 1920s and 1930s became a resonance chamber for democratic ideas and stood up for the Weimar Republic, among them Heinrich Mann, Kurt Tucholsky, Erich Kästner, Alfred Döblin, Hermann Broch, Bert Brecht, and Robert Musil. Mann is favored by Lukács not because he is one among the writers concerned with the fate of German culture, but rather because he is the most genuinely bourgeois, his main theme being supposedly the limits that bourgeois consciousness imposes on the possibilities of action which will inevitably lead him to adopt a socialist perspective. In *Buddenbrooks*, Thomas finds that the value of “composure” reveals itself an insufficient basis for fighting depression and decline. In *The Magic Mountain*, democratic persuasion alone, as exposed by the rationalist Settembrini, cannot withstand the arguments of the proto-fascist Naphta. Lukács draws his conclusion taking this abstract situation at face-value: bourgeois values, as represented

in the person of the average bourgeois Hans Castorp, are defenseless against fascism as they lack a clear perspective beyond bourgeois society.

In “Thomas Mann on the Literary Heritage” (1936), an analysis of Mann’s critical writing from the years 1932/1933, Lukács notes that profound contradictions disturb an unquestionably “antifascist” stance of these pieces. In particular, and differently from Heinrich Heine, Mann is unaware of the necessary connection between bourgeois humanism and bourgeois revolution (Lukács, 1979, p. 146). Lukács points out that Mann accepts the interpretation, current after 1870, of Goethe’s humanism as a typical conservative German patriotic streak, while he judges Schiller’s revolutionary humanitarianism as typically French (Lukács, 1979, p. 147), thereby confirming the prejudice inherent in the nationalism contemporary of Mann. However, explaining German cultural development, Lukács himself operates with opposing notions such as progressive or reactionary, not a tangle of ideas that imply these opposites. He explains that “(t)he great epoch of German literature and philosophy is a period preparatory to bourgeois revolution where the objective conditions of revolution were not yet present” (Lukács, 1979, p. 148). The conservative aims of many great men of that epoch, among them Goethe and Hegel, was to implement the “social and cultural content of the bourgeois revolution in a non-revolutionary way” (Lukács, 1979, p. 148). Lukács concedes that Heinrich Mann, Thomas’s elder brother, goes further in his critique of the German ruling class than Thomas, that Thomas’s “attitude towards the main questions of historical development, determining choice and evaluation of a heritage, is more uncertain and contradictory than Heinrich Mann’s” (Lukács, 1979, p. 148). And yet, in Lukács’s eyes, over the 50 odd years that he followed the development of his work, Thomas Mann, because he has remained a thoroughly bourgeois writer, who has not given in to avant-garde adventures, such as surrealism, psychoanalysis, or stream of consciousness style, but “is characterized by “the complete absence of Utopianism” (Lukács, 1979, p. 13), is thought to be the only genuine bourgeois preserving the bourgeois cultural heritage for an inevitable socialist future. Even though, this evaluation of Mann’s socialist perspective does not flow from the writer’s description of the decline of the bourgeois class nor from his opposition to fascism informing his literary work. Rather it is expressed in some of his non-literary essays and pronouncements. Lukács quotes Mann sincerely desiring “to transcend the bourgeois horizon”, and believing in the advent of “the new, the social world, the organized, planned and unified world in which humanity will be freed from such human, unnecessary burdens, injurious to self-respect and common sense; this world will come.... It will come, for an outward and rational order of things, adequate to the stage which human intelligence has now reached, must be created, or – in the worst case – be established by violent revolution, in order that the things of the soul may once more be justified.” (Lukács, 1979, pp. 149, 1932/1933, no source).

However, to the dismay of Lukács, Mann is not consistent. In his appraisal of the post-1848 cultural development, “a quite different concept of the bourgeois” leads him into “making very serious concessions to the reactionary ideology of the imperialist period” (Lukács, 1979, p. 149). With the capitulation to the

repressive cultural policy under the Hohenzollern monarchy (Lukács, 1979, p. 149f), the bourgeois class settled for cultural creation within the given political framework. To Lukács, resignation and acceptance of the ensuing cultural framework of “power-protected inwardness” (Lukács, 1979, p. 150) restricts cultural heritage to the writers’ inner life, their thoughts, and feelings, and brings cultural creation under the influence of psychology, religion, and myth. Despite noticing the “dubious sides” to Richard Wagner’s character, Thomas Mann defends Wagner’s “compromise” with the Hohenzollern regime, and does not consider the composer’s genius a “tragic victim “of reactionary policy (Lukács, 1979, p. 153), but quite to the contrary goes on to explain the religious character of *Parsifal* as a return to the religious origins of drama. Mann holds that in imperial Germany great art is still possible as the dramatists Friedrich Hebbel, Gerhard Hauptmann, Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Paul Ernst, and others prove. To Lukács this means that Mann had supposed that “metaphysical Germanness and social commitment” could be coupled, as in the case of Hauptmann (Lukács, 1979, p. 55 quoted from *Deutsche Rundschau*, Nov. 1932), which to Lukács, who in literary works only values progressive statements, means accepting “the mythification of social and historical problems, without real criticism” (Lukács, 1979, p. 155).

German culture—in comparison to French or English—was profoundly *bürgerlich*, bourgeois in the sense that it had developed not in competition with the aristocracy but rather by patricians, who limited their striving for independence to their business and cultural pursuits (Lichtheim, 1970, p. 76). Though these burghers were often autonomous in the administration of their cities, the weight of Lutheran protestantism, and its deference to authority, prevented them from seeking political independence. Rather, after 1870, educated Germans were often indifferent to or even contemptuous of democracy, confiding in the nobility to direct politics. German culture was characterized by the so-called “power-protected inwardness”, a paradox of high intellectual achievements and political helplessness. Lukács states with regret that this weakens Mann’s arguments vis-à-vis the fascist myths attached to Wagner and Nietzsche. “In all the essential political, cultural and literary questions he stands firmly opposed to fascism; but his historical outlook and its consequences on his attitude to a realist creative method weakens his polemic in the extreme”, which made it possible that the cycle of the *Joseph* novels be interpreted as “mythical” (Lukács, 1979, p. 156). Indeed, Mann traces German literary development “from Goethe through Schopenhauer to Wagner and Nietzsche” (Lukács, 1979, p. 156), thereby making Wagner and Nietzsche into influential figures in the search for a German cultural renewal escaping the rationalism of Western democracy. He remained under the spell of the importance psychology and myth were given in Wagner’s creations, even though the National Socialists’ use of the ambiguities in the musician’s work opened his eyes.

The point is that Lukács draws the development of German literature and philosophy in the nineteenth century in diametrically opposed strands: progress vs reaction, whereby on the side of progress he could not identify any writer after the failed 1848 revolution, except Heinrich Heine who died in 1856. German

literature became subdued to nationalism, imperialism, and pessimism, fleeing into provincialism or minor literary forms such as the novella or the short story. Aware of contradictory figures such as Theodor Fontane, Gerhard Hauptmann, or the Swiss author Gottfried Keller, Lukács situates their work within the sociopolitical conditions of their time. Critical of Fontane's journalism and his war books contributing to the glorification of the Hohenzollern, Lukács gives credit to his late novel, *Effie Briest*, a fine study of the destruction of a young woman by the upper-class Prussian inhuman code of honor. Despite very perceptive observations, what remains contradictory in Lukács's approach is that it is informed by the idea of "progress", and literature at the turn of the twentieth century, dominated by expressionism or psychology, is written off for "progress" and thus judged defeatist. However, to many intellectuals of Mann's generation, Nietzsche had been first and foremost a European withstanding German nationalism, a critic of the utilitarianism spreading with the bourgeois age. With them Mann holds that the falsifications of Nietzsche's work date from before the philosopher's death, and were perfected by the nazis. Likewise, Lukács does not want to see that Mann never denied the fascination Wagner's music had for him but remained until his last days under the spell especially of *Tristan*, and *Lohengrin*. Lukács concedes that the Wagnerian technique of *leitmotiv* is employed in the repetitive description of secondary characters in Mann's novels. However, Mann himself, e.g., in "Leiden und Grösse Richard Wagners" ('Sufferings and Greatness of R.W.'), an essay published in 1933 to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Wagner's death, confesses the enduring "passion", "love", and "fascination" Wagner's work was to him (Vaget, 2010, pp. 87–143), to the point that the rhythm of his music, determined by *leitmotifs*, inspired all his major works, beginning with *Tonio Kröger*. This "technique (...) was applied in *The Magic Mountain* (...) in the most complex and insistent manner" (Vaget, 2010, p. 181). Mann points out that the German motives in Wagner, the defense of German history and art, date from early conceptions in the 1840s, when the country was downtrodden and longed to be united, a cause for which Wagner took to the barricades in 1848 and had to suffer a "twelve-year excruciating exile" (Vaget, 2010, p. 136). The question of Wagner's Germanness is a complex matter, and so is Mann's. To save Mann for "progress", Lukács seeks to minimize all that is "irrational" in his art. This also applies to themes such as the death wish, homoeroticism, depression, or incest, an integral part of Mann's writing, though spelt out more clearly in the novellas. They are ignored by Lukács or excused, because of the novels *The Magic Mountain* and *Doctor Faustus*.

In the analyses of *The Magic Mountain* and *Dr. Faustus*, Lukács, seeking to build up Thomas Mann as a model not only for future German literature after the defeat of Germany, but also for young soviet literature, condenses his critical framework to a schematic analysis. Focusing on "positive" features, he does not situate the different parts of a work in relation to one another, nor does he analyze language or typified character. *The Magic Mountain* is considered to have been built around an ingenious idea concentrating the tendencies agitating society in a small space, a sanatorium, where people meet who in "normal" life would never have met. The writer does not transpose the view of a social class or

group but rather the forces of progress or reaction (Swingewood & Sonolet, 1972, p. 30). The gist of the novel is the battle for Hans Castorp's mind fought by Ludovico Settembrini, the democrat, likable but weak, and Leo Naphta a fanatic potential fascist—or communist—revolutionary (supposedly a portrait of Lukács, as a zealot for the one or the other extremism). Lukács sees the conflict comprised in a reflection made by Castorp, characterizing Settembrini: “You are a windbag and a handorgan man to be sure. But you mean well, you mean much better, and more to my mind than that knife-edged little Jesuit and terrorist, apologist of the Inquisition and the knout, with his round eye-glasses—tough he is nearly always right when you and he come to grips over my paltry soul, like God and the Devil in the medieval legends . . .” (Lukács, 1979, p. 37f). The structure of the novel is not analyzed, the parallel with “real” society never questioned.

Lukács's analysis of *Doctor Faustus* carries the title “The Tragedy of Modern Art” (Lukács, 1979, pp. 47–97), explaining the novel as the history of a composer who takes upon himself the vicissitudes of the fascist ideology in art. Published in 1947, the story is set in Germany between shortly before the World War I and 1930. Lukács underlines that the dual time in the novel, that of Serenus Zeitblom, Leverkühn's friend and biographer—Zeitblom's comment ends in 1945—and that of Adrian Leverkühn, the composer, is by no means a concession to the modernist device of multiple, subjective time, but it is objective, a “unity” given by “the relationship between Adrian Leverkühn's work and the tragedy of the German people in the imperialist age” (Lukács, 1979, p. 84). This tragedy plays itself out in German art. Lukács sees himself confirmed in his animosity toward modernity and avant-gardism—expressionism, dadaism, surrealism—perceived as individualistic, arbitrary, and thus superficial responses to serious social and artistic crises. He rejects the idea that Leverkühn's compositions could have been lifted from Arnold Schönberg, as “the originality of the Faustus music is not its atonality as such, but the general character of contemporary music as the concentrated expression of intellectual and moral decadence” (Lukács, 1979, p. 68). In the novel, the composer is characterized by his aloofness from human society: he is indifferent, cold, and loveless, not only toward his surroundings but more importantly toward his art. Contrary to Goethe's Faust who sells his soul to the devil in order to know and enjoy the “great world”, the whole of society and life, Adrian Leverkühn suffers, living like a monk, lonely in the “small world” of his study. Lukács points out that the social function of art is not only musical technique but it also comprises enjoyment, taking pleasure in art and giving pleasure through art, which is not the case with the artists created by Mann: Tonio Kröger, Aschenbach, and especially Leverkühn, signaling the crisis of modern art. For Leverkühn, the avant-gardiste, art is deadly serious; it cannot be joyful but only parodistic, a mockery of human sentiment and endeavor. Lukács sees Leverkühn as an honest but tragic victim of society: “but this cannot alter the objective character of his development, which leads to fascism as inevitably as the society whose product he is” (Lukács, 1979, p. 121). In his eyes it is the *avant-garde* circles after World War I, who are the nourishing soil for an inhuman art; who with their haughty intellectualism and frivolousness create a milieu of

“deliberate barbarization” (Lukács, 1979, p. 90). One sign is the paradox that the functions of dissonance and harmony are inverse: in classical music enjoyment is expressed through harmony and pain through dissonance; it is the other way around in avant-garde compositions. So, Leverkühn’s music is a matter of the mind; it is formally revolutionary, overwhelming, but empty of feeling, detached from human concerns. Lukács explains that Leverkühn’s “tragic end expresses the logical conclusion, the insolubility of these tendencies” (Lukács, 1979, p. 68). Interestingly, Lukács notes that “By a remarkable coincidence (if coincidence it be) I had just finished reading *Dr Faustus* when the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union published its decree on modern music. In Thomas Mann’s novel this decree finds its fullest intellectual and artistic confirmation, particularly in those parts which so brilliantly describe modern music as such. For *Dr Faustus* encompasses the whole of modern art, its problems of style (down to the most technical) and its human and social foundations” (Lukács, 1979, p. 71f). The decree in question, released in 1948, was followed by an antiformalist campaign, denouncing Shostakovich, Prokofiev, and Khachaturian among others. Shostakovich lost his position at the Conservatory, and thus his livelihood; several of his compositions were banned from performance. This remark not only confirms that Lukács took great care never to deviate from the party line but also that he was uncompromisingly hostile to any modernist development.

Lukács again draws the well-known parallel between Goethe and Mann: “It is thus the moments of destiny in bourgeois society which determine the creative path of Germany’s greatest bourgeois writers. Goethe’s *Faust* ends with the scenes in Heaven, which are tangible because they spring from Utopian hope in a renewal and liberation of man based on economic foundations and a social morality. Mann’s *Faustus* is tragic in atmosphere precisely because these foundations have been undermined and shattered” (Lukács, 1979, p. 50). George Lichtheim counters this “platitudinous judgment” with a comment by Thomas Mann who, though conceding that the “pact with the devil is an ancient Germanic temptation”, rejects the idea that it could characterize the whole of German history. Even in Goethe’s poem the devil was in the end cheated out of Faust’s soul. “Far be it from us to think that Germany has gone permanently to the devil.... Let us have no more of this talk about the end of German history! Germany is not identical with the brief and sinister historical episode which bears the name of Hitler.” (Lichtheim, 1970, p. 89).

In *Dr. Faustus*, Mann paints with a broad brush: haughtiness and deliberateness characterize Leverkühn’s being and behavior, a willful alienation of his persona is the prize for creation. The musician seeks out a prostitute to knowingly contract syphilis so that his creativity would profit from the heightened sensitivity with the illness slowly unfolding. He communicates sparsely, using an antiquated language reminiscent of Luther’s German; he concludes a pact with the devil. At the end of his endeavor are the *Apocalypse* and *Dr. Fausti Weheklage*, powerful musical testimonies of decline. All that creates a stark, somewhat forced picture of the conditions of contemporary creation. In Mann’s novel, German society in the imperialist period and under the Weimar Republic is encapsulated in a

chronicle of bohemian Munich, right wing, or politically indifferent circles. Leverkühn's biographer, Serenus Zeitbloom is disconcerted by them but keeps silent; there are neither dedicated democrats nor socialists and, importantly, no antisemites.

Published in 1947, the book spans the years between 1912 and 1945, commenting shortly on World War II. In Serenus Zeitbloom's chronicle, there is no mention of the exclusion, persecution, and extermination of the Jews. Indeed, a point Lukács does not make in his evaluation of Mann's major novels is the role of the Jews. There is Naptha, in *The Magic Mountain*, and in *Dr Faustus*, a Dr Breisacher, an intellectual charlatan spreading outrageous avant-garde theories; or Saul Fitelberg, the caricature of a shrewd impresario, who tempts Leverkühn with the perspective of a place among avant-garde composers in Paris. These Jews are portrayed as intermediaries, peddlers of extremist and modernist persuasion, uprooting humanism. The devil himself, though not Jewish, resembles them in his flippancy and various disguises, selling 24 years of creativity to Leverkühn, a defrocked Lutheran believing in magic, in exchange for his soul and for a life without love and warmth. Thomas Mann's work expresses a strong interest in races and their characteristics, in eugenics wide-spread at the time: e.g., the Southern races, the "Welsh"—Italian and French—and the Jews, are markedly non-German. In *Dr Faustus*, atonality contradicts Leverkühn's nature; the composer, though successful, in the end considers himself a sinner and sinks into madness. The novel may translate Mann's own misgivings about modern music, which—in the French context with Debussy, "Les Six", Eric Satie—is merely superficial, while it spells disaster when handled by a German. Mann's ironical style makes a definitive judgment difficult. One has to keep in mind that in the novel *Lotte in Weimar*, published in 1939 by Bermann Fischer, then in Stockholm exile, Mann—through the venerated figure of Goethe challenging his prejudiced dinner guests—not only deplores the vicious pogroms to which Jews have been exposed all along their existence in German lands but also points out that the talent of this people for literature and music greatly enriched German culture (Mann, 1947, pp. 310–315).

To designate right-wing dictatorships in the 1920s–1940s in Italy, Spain, and Germany, Lukács nearly exclusively uses the term "fascism", which is common in the communist terminology. However, the essential difference between Italian, Spanish, and German fascism is the deep-seated racism, antisemitism, at the very center of German national socialism which Lukács eliminates from his discussion and with it the ambiguity in Mann's position vis-a-vis the Jews in his work. To Lukács, the important thing is that Mann is genuinely bourgeois and, lacking "perspective", "was pulled along by the current of the First World War." The ideological struggle against "fascism" persuaded him that the "mere rejection of fascist inhumanity . . . is powerless and foredoomed". He goes on to say: "His grasp of social life, his active participation in social struggles led Thomas Mann to see this perspective in socialism. Not that he was ever a socialist; Thomas Mann was and remained a bourgeois. But as a great man and a great writer he realized that the contradictions of bourgeois society could only be solved by socialism; that only socialism could prevent mankind from sinking into

barbarism” (Lukács, 1979, p. 161f). Though there is indeed such a pronouncement by Thomas Mann, the conclusion Lukács draws is hardly based on Mann’s literary work: exploring the contradictions of bourgeois culture in the imperialist age, it is not written in a socialist perspective but take a melancholic and ironical account of the disintegration of the bourgeois age. Lukács believes that the slow organic plant-like development of Mann’s talents will constellate one day around the socialist idea (Lukács, 1979, p. 159 passim).

In the Foreword to the essay collection, Lukács expresses his regret that, given that he can’t hope anymore to publish a systematic treatment of Mann’s work and resigns himself to publish “these essays, despite their incompleteness and essayistic character” (Lukács, 1979, p. 9). There is, however, nothing tentative or open in Lukács’s presentation of his favorite author: his theory of literature relying on the writer’s intentionality and choice of perspective which do not arise out the structure of a work; comparing distinct novelistic features with social and historical events, these procedures make Lukács’s explanations into an arbitrary choice. He restricts himself to pointing out the moral qualities of the writer but does not contribute to understand how Thomas Mann’s work emerges out of the debate with the various intellectual and artistic currents of his time.

#### *Lukács on Alexander Solzhenitsyn*

After the 20th Congress of the Russian CP in 1956, when Khrushchev denounced Stalin’s crimes, Lukács launched himself into the analysis of Solzhenitsyn’s work. The “thaw” after Stalin’s death had encouraged a short-lived but vivid literary activity in the Soviet Union, in the course of which Solzhenitsyn’s novella *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* could be published. The novels *Cancer Ward* and *The First Circle* appeared in the West in 1964 and 1968. In the analysis of these three works, Lukács seeks to detect signs announcing the renaissance of socialist realism. He remarks that in the novels Solzhenitsyn uses the same technique as Thomas Mann in *The Magic Mountain* by condensing contradictory forces within soviet society into one space thus allowing them to confront each other in a way which in normal life would not have been possible: i.e., in a hospital in *Cancer Ward*, and in the laboratory of a concentration camp in *The First Circle*.

Aware of the brutality of the labor camps, of deportation and the arbitrary of stalinist bureaucracy, Lukács ponders that bureaucratic rule which completely subordinates people, “even inwardly”, is a situation where “no truly objective norms of action can arise” (Lukács, 1971c, p. 55), as bureaucrats dictate the norms of good and evil according to their tactical considerations. In Lukács’s analysis, however, this political problem becomes one of moral deficiency. In the total absence of a possibility to realize their aspirations, individuals in a labor camp necessarily become eccentrics. Lukács’s tortuous explanation shows his discomfort: “For eccentricity is a certain attitude on the part of the subject which arises from the specific nature of reality and the potentiality of his own social *praxis*. More precisely, it arises from the fact that a character may well be inwardly capable of denying certain forms of the society in which he is forced to

live, and indeed those very forms which are decisive for the conduct of his personal and moral life, in such a way that his inner integrity (which they threaten) remains intact; however, the conversion of this rejection into really individual *praxis* (which has now become necessary for his humanity) is rendered impossible by society and therefore he must remain enmeshed in more or less abstractly distorted inwardness. In this process his character acquires crotchety eccentricity” (Lukács, 1971c, p. 61).

Though Lukács understands Solzhenitsyn’s critique of the stalinist regime, he is critical of Nerzhin and Kostoglotov, the main protagonists of the novels, for not showing the political maturity to strive for the democratization of stalinism from within and—in Kostoglotov’s case—for not embracing rewon freedom with the desire for personal happiness. Nor does he comprehend why these men are seeking out the contact and wisdom of simple peasants. The comparison of this “populism” with that of Tolstoy’s characters Pierre Bezukhov in *War and Peace* or Nekhliudov in *Resurrection* indicates that Lukács misunderstands Solzhenitsyn. The relation that Nerzhin establishes with Spiridon is not his final position, as Nerzhin finally decides that the problems with stalinism lie in the derailment of the original Leninist principles, and instead of accepting a measure of alienation by repairing the stalinist system, finally believes that only a revolution could create a new society. In both the essays on Mann and on Solzhenitsyn, the essay form has been employed in the wake of a preconceived analysis: to salvage the realist, positive novel. Thereby theorizing has been replaced with theory, it has not been given a serious chance.

## LUCIEN GOLDMANN

### *Rediscovering the Early Lukács*

When Goldmann met Lukács in the 1950s, he had hoped that after the 20th Congress of the Russian CP Lukács would return to philosophy, taking up the thread where he had left it in the early 1920s with *History and Class Consciousness* (Goldmann, 1970b). Lukács did not and rather accommodated his didactic theory of great realism to the relative leeway now accorded by the Communist Party. By contrast, Lucien Goldmann’s work testifies to an ever-renewed attempt to grasp the complex relations between cultural creation and changing social conditions, as dialogical exchange between writer and social environment. A marxist, Goldmann, never abandoned his longing for a socialism that would overcome the gross materialism and social inequalities of capitalist society. However, he experienced contemporary marxism not as a living popular force but rather as a petrified or totalitarian doctrine interpreted by party ideologists. For all that, Goldmann’s is not a desperate world vision, as it is coupled with a strong belief in meaningful human activity. At the very center of Goldmann’s thought lies the method of genetic structuralism with the dialectical concept of totality. To understand Goldmann’s theory and method, it is necessary to trace their grounding in the philosophies of Kant and Marx. In the 1940s (Goldmann, 1945), Goldmann had set out to explore the development of classical

German philosophy leading from Kant to Hegel and Marx, from tragedy to dialectics, therewith to affirm—against totalitarian thought absorbing the individual and rational philosophies separating individual and society—a world vision which would take into account both individual and society. Goldmann found inspiration precisely in those early writings abandoned by Lukács, in the concepts of the tragic worldview and of totality. In the last essay of Lukács's *Soul and Form*, "Metaphysics of the tragedy", Goldmann recognized the tragic vision as the key to Kant's philosophy: man's quest for absolute values, should their realization remain forever impossible.

In *Immanuel Kant* (Goldmann, 1971), Goldmann develops Lukács's concept of totality, which structures the humanism of Kant, Hegel, Marx, Goethe, and Nietzsche, "where the *autonomy* of the parts and the *reality* of the whole are not only reconciled but constitute reciprocal conditions" (Goldmann, 1971, p. 53). He insists that "in place of the partial and one-sided solutions of the individual or the collective there appears the only total solution: that of the *person and the human community*" (Goldmann, 1971, p. 53). This philosophy is still in the process of formation, Goldmann writes, full of hope at the end of the 1940s, considering its development as the principal task of modern thought (Goldmann, 1971, p. 53). The conviction that the individual is an integral part of society, of a social group, of a collective, remained the basis of Goldmann's research. The rediscovery of Lukács's early writings, however, reoriented his research in the sense that by postponing the project to interpret German classical philosophy, literature now moved into the focus. Goldmann retained the concept of "maximum potential consciousness", developed by Lukács in *History and Class Consciousness* to apprehend the highest point of self-awareness a social class could reach, in that case the proletariat who—becoming conscious of their exploitation and reification in capitalist society—turned revolutionary. Goldmann divested the concept of its revolutionary context and employed it effectively in the analysis of the tragic world vision underlying and Pascal's *Pensées* and four of Racine's tragedies: *Andromaque*, *Britannicus*, *Bérénice*, and *Phèdre*. He showed that Pascal and Racine were part of a radical section of the Jansenists in seventeenth century France, the nobility of the cloth, about to lose their social position in the incipient absolute monarchy. In *The Hidden God*, Goldmann recognized the tragic stance in Pascal's quest for absolute values whose certainty is forever denied, in analogy to the tragic worldview of Kant, positing a community of free persons, unrealizable from an individualistic philosophical position.

It is not without reason that Goldmann referred to *The Hidden God* as an essay (Goldmann, 1970a, p. 70): the book is a detailed exploration of the Jansenist rigorous quest for absolute values. Pascal's tragic vision is contained in the paradox which humans cannot overcome: the fact that both sides of opposites are true—man is both good and bad—while God, silent and absent, denies humans the certainty of his existence. Yet, as humans cannot live without hope for clarity, Pascal focused on the wager on God's existence, the wager on the absolute value giving meaning to human life: "on eternity and happiness which God had promised to the faithful" (Goldmann, 1959b, pp. 331–337). The

philosophies of both Pascal and Kant are nongenetic, expressing ahistorical truths of human relation to uncompromising values in general. Thus, to Goldmann, the tragic nature of Kant's philosophy is a consequence of the limitation of reason which can only comprehend virtue, whereas humans are unable to live morally without morale being joined by happiness. If the same need to join virtue and happiness lies at the bottom of marxism, the wager expressing this belief motivating the continued commitment to the human community, then the hiatus in Kant's philosophy, has been filled by the mediation of concrete human relations: social groups and classes. Certain individuals, writers, artists, philosophers, resume their relation with the community in acts of cultural creation. It is the intersubjective, dialogical activity that lies at the bottom of cultural creation, the meaningful activity of social groups, of the transindividual subject. Goldmann was able to prove that Pascal's tragic vision was formed through dialogue: he edited the intense epistolary exchange among the members of a specific group at Port Royal, from which it emerged (Goldmann, 1956). In his detailed biography of Goldmann, Mitchell Cohen describes how elements taken from the theories of Kant, Hegel, Marx, Adler, and Lukács, synthesized with Piaget's genetic epistemology "become a new totality in Goldmann's hands – the theory of the trans-individual subject" (Cohen, 1994, p. 149). It is however Jacques Leenhardt's thoughtful reconstruction of Goldmann's theory and method (Leenhardt, 1976, 1991–1992) that adds an important historical precision placing the origin of the notion of transindividual subject on one hand in Goldmann's fading hope in the revolutionary proletariat and on the other in the strong presence of two opposing intellectual currents in France: existentialist philosophy and the rapidly expanding schools of nongenetic structuralism. Indeed, it is both Sartre's rigorous individualist existentialism resting on the absolute freedom of the individual, and the linguistic structuralism informing the marxism of Althusser, the anthropology of Lévi-Strauss, the historical poststructuralism of Foucault, which caused Goldmann to defend the social group at the heart of his genetic structuralism. With "Dialectical Thought and Transindividual Subject" (Goldmann, 1977, pp. 87–107), he launched himself into an impassioned rebuttal of theories which either take their origin in the individual: philosophy from Descartes via Husserl to Sartre, or in "the linguistic type of structuralism ... the great fashion" in contemporary human sciences, dispensing with the idea of the subject, of functionality (Goldmann, 1977, p. 93). Linguistic structuralism cannot identify the moving force of historical transformation, i.e., humans in their social existence, acting according to their functional needs. Thus, Goldmann explains, taking Genet's plays as one example, that at the individual level the author's libido, his homosexuality, certainly played a role in his writing; however, it is not its defining characteristic. Only the wider social context reveals the meaning of Genet's theater, the perspective of a marginal social world of "outsiders, petty thieves, and prostitutes"; they are nonconformist but not outside society, as friendship, love, courage, risk—values accepted by society—play an important role. In later, sociocritical plays, opposing forces such as the "populace" and "powerful", the "oppressors" and "oppressed", the "dominators" and "dominated" situate the action within concrete social problems and make the

homosexuality of the individual author unimportant. Expressed in the concept of transindividual subject are both the importance of the creative personality and the conviction that the artist is embedded in the social community, precluding that a single artist, whatever his or her status, be considered an extraordinary personality solely responsible for their work. This conviction, which Goldmann never abandoned, assured his continuing curiosity in the various forms of cultural creation, stimulating tentative solutions dispensed in the essay form.

### *Novel Form and Society*

In analyzing Pascal's tragic vision and the wager, Goldmann was faced with a well-defined group of a section of the Jansenist persuasion (Arnauld, Nicole, Mère Angélique, Barcos, Pascal, Racine), whose belief in a demanding yet forever silent and absent God could be convincingly connected to their critical social status. In the analysis of the twentieth century novel, social, economic, and intellectual preconditions of cultural creation are often less clearly defined. *Towards a Sociology of the Novel*, Goldmann's extensive work on the most important literary genre of the bourgeois age, follows Lukács's early work, *Theory of the Novel*, which defines the novel as the modern epic form, structured by the "problematic hero", and the "degraded (...) search for authentic values in a world itself degraded" (Goldmann, 1975, p. 1). The changing relation of society and the novel form go through three phases characterized by liberalism in the nineteenth and beginning twentieth centuries; by a period of severe economic and political crises between 1920 and 1945; and thereafter by "regulated capitalism" where State intervention managed to calm the crises in capitalist production. In contradiction to the later Lukács, the "problematic hero" to Goldmann does not represent the "possible consciousness" of the bourgeois class, as the hero was not a positive character, except maybe in the work of Balzac (Goldmann, 1975, p. 14). The problematic individual disappears from the novel at around 1900–1910, a time when liberal competition was replaced with the capitalism of cartels and monopolies. From the 1920s to the 1940s, between Kafka's works and the "nouveau roman", novelistic figures are characterized by "absence": the absence of shared values in society, evident in signs of reification in Kafka's and Joyce's works (Goldmann, 1975, pp. 132–149). The psychology of the problematic hero was replaced by forms such as the theater of absence and the *nouveau roman*. In distinction to Lukács, these developments are not imputed to "decadence" but considered ways of making sense of an inhospitable social environment.

Goldmann takes a particular interest in the period between the 1920s and 1950s, evident in his close analyses of the novels by André Malraux and of Jean Paul Sartre's theater. These works offer an explanation how the suppression of the liberal market and the subsequent crisis of individual values moved the problem of death to the center of conceptual thought. In the bourgeois age, individualism had suppressed transindividual values, so that with the crisis of individualism philosophy centered on the limit of the human being as an individual, on his/her inevitable disappearance. Around World War I, Lukács rediscovered the tragic vision (1908), whereas Heidegger seeks to solve this

existential crisis by making the individual survive through identification with great figures of the historical past. In Malraux's novels *Les Conquérants* and *La Voie Royale*—the problematic heroes—both of them ill—try to escape death through action. In the 1920s and 30s, when existentialism penetrated France, Paul Nizan, Malraux, and finally Sartre were among those writers on the left deeply marked by it.

I want to briefly evoke the analysis of Malraux's work as it shows genetic structuralism as a "method in progress". Goldmann delivers in fact the basic framework of research interest by elaborating the internal structure of the works, reserving the precise insertion into one or several social groups for a later date. In the case of Malraux's novels Goldmann assumes "on the one hand, the homology between the structure of the classical novel and the structure of exchange in the liberal economy and, on the other hand certain parallels in their later evolutions."

Goldmann situates Malraux's fiction in a "period (...) of *transition* between two novel forms that were in intelligible relation with the whole of the social and economic structure. The first of these, that of the novel with a problematic hero, corresponded to the liberal economy and was bound up with the value, universally recognized and grounded in reality, of every individual life as such. The second form, the novel of a nonbiographical character, corresponded to societies in which the liberal market, and, with it, individualism had already been superseded" (Goldmann, 1975, p. 29).

In Goldmann's analyses, André Malraux's novels, Sartre's theater, and Robbe-Grillet's novels are in each case taken as a whole, in order to comprehend how the different components of the novel—problematic hero, human relations—develop and are reflected in the form. Goldmann explains that his research "is still situated at the first stage, that of internal analysis (...) intended as a rough sketch of the significant structures *immanent in the work*", which will be modified and "filled out by later research into the homologies and significant relations with the intellectual, social, political, or economic structures of the period in which they were elaborated" (Goldmann, 1975, p. 18). There is an important difference between Malraux's early, essayistic writings and the novels: "in this oeuvre, dominated by the crisis of values that characterized Western Europe in the period in which it was written, the creation of the novels in the strict sense of the term corresponds to the period in which the writer believed that he was able against all comers, to safeguard the existence of certain authentic universal values" (Goldmann, 1975, p. 19).

In Malraux's fictional oeuvre, there are the early "essays" or "fantastic and allegorical stories" (Goldmann, 1975, p. 18)—*La Tentation de l'Occident* and *Le Royaume farfelu* and *Lunes en papier* (1920)—followed by the novels *Les Conquérants* (1927), *La Voie royale*, *La Condition Humaine*, *Le Temps du Mépris*, *L'Espoir* (between 1927 and 1939), where "the difference of content led to the formal transformations" (Goldmann, 1975, p. 19). After his five novelistic works, Malraux gradually turned to essayistic writing and art analysis; in this evolution *Les Noyers de l'Altenburg* is "a work midway between literary creation and conceptual reflection", written by "a man who recounts his disillusion and is still seeking a basis for his faith in man" (Goldmann, 1975, p. 29). In his later,

conceptual writings, mostly art analyses, no hope in human values is expressed anymore. There is a “qualitative leap” (Goldmann, 1975, p. 28) between Malraux’s earlier writings and the three novels: “the possibility of his creating concrete imaginary worlds in a realistic way, was closely bound up with a faith in human values that were universally accessible to all men, the conceptual writings corresponding on the contrary to the *absence* of such a faith” (Goldmann, 1975, p. 28f). According to Goldmann, through his novels, André Malraux traced the search of Western intellectuals in the 1920s and 30s for a meaningful cause. “Between *Les Conquérants* and *La Condition humaine*, Malraux the novelist is a man who *believes in universal if problematic values*. The Malraux of *Le Temps du Mépris* and *L’Espoir* is a man who believes in universal, *transparent*, but highly *threatened* values” (Goldmann, 1975, p. 29). Extensive empirical research would be needed to clarify “to what extent Malraux’s fairly complex relations with communist ideology between 1925 and 1933 is an individual phenomenon or, on the contrary, expresses a more general fact resulting from the meeting of pre-occupations that dominated certain groups of French intellectuals with the reality of the Russian revolution and the world revolutionary movement.” (Goldmann, 1975, p. 35).

Thus, Goldmann states that “*Les Conquérants* and *La Voie royale* are among the last great attempts to write a novel with a *problematic hero*” (Goldmann, 1975, p. 30). In times of the existential crisis of individual values, it is impossible to recreate fictional characters of the type of Julien Sorel or Emma Bovary, “interesting by virtue of their own psychology” (Goldmann, 1975, p. 30). Because of the crisis of individualism, the heroes of Malraux’s novels have to be “action men”, “the crisis of individualism had brought the (...) problems of action and death to the center of the philosophical problematic” (Goldmann, 1975, p. 31). Garine and Perken, the heroes of Malraux’s first two novels, engaged in the Canton episodes of the ongoing Chinese revolution are men of action by “a structural necessity of their characters” (Goldmann, 1975, p. 30). They are neither tragic nor romantic but “nonconformists, revolutionary, *problematic* and *sick* men of action” (Goldmann, 1975, p. 34), a completely original type of protagonist Malraux has created here. They are individualists, foreigners to the Chinese cause, their strength sapped by illness, their commitment is in order to prove themselves, their action is serious. Yet their inevitable death retroactively completely eradicates their engagement, whereas in *La Condition humaine*, the heroes—Kyo, May, Katow—are Chinese, part of a tightly knit revolutionary community in Shanghai who sacrifice themselves to the cause and to each other. In their case death does not extinguish their engagement which lives on in the community. In all three novels the main figures engaged in the revolution are proper problematic heroes in the sense that they commit themselves to fight for freedom and justice in an uncertain cause, in order to realize their lives, to prove themselves. In *La Condition humaine*, the priorities of the Communist Party and those of commitment of the revolutionaries do not coincide; this clash condemns them to a sacrificial death. In the following novels, *Le Temps du Mépris* and *L’Espoir*, there are no problematic heroes as the protagonists identify themselves unconditionally with the Communist Party. Goldmann makes clear that,

throughout his novelistic oeuvre, Malraux remains the observer: he never became a communist, though the struggles of his heroes are shown with great sympathy. That he remained the novelist becomes clear in Trotsky's reaction to *Les Conquérants*, criticizing Malraux's standpoint (Goldmann, 1975, p. 62).

In both *Towards a Sociology of the Novel* and the important *Structures Mentales et création culturelle* (1970), Goldmann addresses the problems arising for the novel form by contemporary reified society. He claims "the need to constitute a serious, rigorous, and positive science of the life of the mind in general and of cultural creation in particular", affirming that—notwithstanding appearances—"the true subjects of cultural creation are social groups and not isolated individuals" (Goldmann, 1975, p. 14–15). Cultural works have "the tendency to coherence that constitute the essence of the work", not only "at the level of the individual creator, but already at that of the group" (Goldmann, 1975, p. IX), i.e. this tendency exists already at the level of the consciousness of the social group the writer refers to, and is concentrated in the work. Marxist sociology, differently from theory of reflection, "sees the key concept not in the *real* collective consciousness, but in the "constructed (*zugerechnet*) concept of *possible consciousness* which, alone, makes an understanding of the first possible" (Goldmann, 1975, p. 9). A "worldview", social, collective consciousness is not given but elaborated from group behavior (Goldmann, 1975, p. 9). Aware of a changing class structure, and, far from opposing capitalism, the working class has "become integrated into it to a large degree" (Goldmann, 1975, p. 10), though Goldmann insists that integration is far from complete: there is still room for cultural creation, and he sets out to examine those new ways of writing and the conditions of its production. Admitting that "for Western society at least, the Marxist analysis has proved inadequate" (Goldmann, 1975, p. 10) and has to be adjusted to the new conditions, authentic literary forms keep being produced "even though they cannot be attached to the consciousness—even a potential one—of a particular social group." (Goldmann, 1975, p. 10). Goldmann goes so far as to speak of a "direct transposition of the economic life into the literary life", conceding that while this is contradicting marxist tradition (Goldmann, 1975, p. 10), it does, however, confirm the marxist theory of reification (Goldmann, 1975, p. 45). And yet, he supposes the survival in this society of "a number of individuals who are essentially *problematic* in so far as their thinking and behavior remain dominated by qualitative values" (Goldmann, 1975, p. 11). While existing in degrading mediation, these people are active in the cultural field as "writers, artists, philosophers, theologians, 'men of action' etc." (Goldmann, 1975, p. 11). Goldmann supposes that at the bottom of their activity probably lies a "*non-conceptualized*, affective discontent" either within the whole of society "or perhaps solely among the middle strata from which most novelists have come" (Goldmann, 1975, p. 12). There exist multiple forms of resistance to dominating ideology though diffuse, not readily to be associated with precise social groups, rather lingering on in the transindividual values which still subsist in liberal societies, such as the ideals of "liberty, equality, and property" in France, the "*Bildungsideal*" (ideal of being cultured) in Germany, with their derivatives, "tolerance, the rights of man, development of the personality, etc" (Goldmann,

1975, p. 12). To repeat, Goldmann excludes individual creation in bourgeois society, or automatized intellectual production in reified capitalism; on the contrary, there is always mediation by a group or other social elements that offer resistance.

### *Structures Mentales et Création Culturelle*

This publication somehow concentrates Goldmann's work, with the essay on the Enlightenment and an analysis of Genet's plays and the experiment with "microstructures" on the positive side, the attempt to do justice to Sartre's theater, and a critical look at the avant-garde revealing profound preoccupations. "Les Deux Avant-gardes" (Goldmann, 1970, pp. 179–208), written in 1961, is haunted by the idea that it might be impossible to ever organize a differentiated society again. Contemporary Western culture, represented by the avant-garde, appears above all as a culture of deficiency: Ionesco, Beckett, Adamov, Sarraute, Duras, and Robbe-Grillet, are writers who are part of what Goldmann calls an "avant-garde de l'absence . . . de l'essentiel, de tout ce qui pourrait être important pour la vie et l'existence des hommes" (Goldmann, 1970, p. 179f). Are we witnessing a sort of leveling of all qualitative relations, given the relative independence the economic sector has gained in contemporary capitalism? Are there social forces left strong enough to provoke a break-through towards new social forms, to overcome the present social stalemate (Goldmann, 1970, p. 184f)? Most of the great avant-garde writers in the first half of the twentieth century have above all found it impossible to formulate positive values that would allow them to criticize society (Goldmann, 1970, p. 185). Those values do exist neither in *Nausea* nor in *The Stranger*... As for Kafka, anguish and absurdity dominate his writings; action figures dominate two of Malraux's three real novels. Robbe-Grillet is a "realist writer" (Goldmann, 1970, p. 185), who gives to objects an autonomous and disproportionate place, justified by the growing importance of objects in market-oriented capitalist production. Goldmann defends as realistic "the boring world" of Robbe-Grillet's novels, where things take over from humans. In *Les Gomme*s (The Erasers), the plot unfolds with "unescapable necessity" (Goldmann, 1970, p. 189), which parallels economical, mechanical auto-regulations. What is the signification of these books? In both *Les Gomme*s and *Le Voyeur*, crimes are committed to the total indifference of the public, crime is integrated into social order by "auto-regulations of social life and increasing passivity", leading to "apolitisation, amoralisation, desacrilisation, dehumanization" (Goldmann, 1970, p. 195). In *La Jalousie*, where the story of jealousy is told through the presence or absence of objects protagonists use, characters are assimilated to objects (Goldmann, 1975, p. 316). In his later works, Robbe-Grillet introduces feeling: in *Labyrinth*, a feeling of anguish dominates, and in his film *Last Year in Marienbad*, there is a possibly unfounded sentiment of hope for a humane relationship. In the sense that "the structure of Robbe-Grillet's work parallels that of social reality it is realistic and the author is one of the profoundly realist writers in contemporary French literature" (Goldmann, 1970, pp. 201–202). To Goldmann, the "avant-garde de l'absence" presents a realistic

perspective on Western industrial society characterized by passivity, autoregulations, progressive disappearance of qualitative aspects of existence and thus of the driving forces of historical transformation... In this respect, Robbe-Grillet pushes to its utmost limits the *avant-garde de l'absence*: a glacial cold characterizes his society. Yet Goldmann notes with satisfaction, that Robbe-Grillet has resisted attempts to assimilate his world with marxist protestations against society, arguing that marxists take position, whereas he, Robbe-Grillet, considers himself an objective realist writer who does not judge (Goldmann, 1970a, p. 197). Goldmann's dismissive comment that with the exception of a few orthodox communists, nobody in the West believes in revolution (Goldmann, 1970a, p. 187), clearly indicates the depression and despair the seemingly uniform society causes him.

The long analysis which Goldmann dedicates to the theater of Jean Paul Sartre is presented as a provisional result. Hardly any other contemporary philosophy has intrigued Goldmann more than Sartre's existentialism at the opposite side of his own convictions. Upon penetrating France in the 1920s and 30s, existentialism suffered modifications: A philosophy of limit and failure, which centers on the impossibility of founding an authentic relation between individual and society, it is associated in France with the political left under the influence of the Popular Front, the German occupation and the *résistance*. Sartre's theater is a theater based on philosophical theses, an "artificially transposed philosophical dissertation" (Goldmann, 1970a, p. 230f). In the analysis of *Les Mouches* (*The Flies*, 1943), a play based on Euripides, Orestes kills Clytemnestra and Aegisthus in order to affirm his liberty rather than to revenge his father. In certain of his plays, however, Sartre softens this individualistic position by the introduction of Kantian morale—e.g., where the freedom of the city means the freedom of all. He reaches a position mid-way between Cartesian concern with efficiency and the Kantian universal moral norm which is, however, doomed to fail. In the second cycle of plays: *Les Mains sales*, *Le Diable et le Bon Dieu*, *Les Séquestrés d'Altona*, commitment is rigorously individual; in each case it is impossible to reconcile the demand for efficiency and morale, the reason being not "the impossibility to choose but the illusionary and insufficient character of all choice" (Goldmann, 1970a, p. 236). However, failure does not spell tragedy: It is the strictly individual commitment and the inexorability of choice that distinguishes Sartre's vision from the tragic vision of Kant or Pascal.

The analysis shows that Goldmann is not in sympathy with Sartre's rigorously individualistic philosophy. Incidentally, it is noteworthy that in his analysis of Malraux's work Goldmann includes a remark which springs from his passionate commitment to transindividual values able to accomplish the transformation of society: "individualistic philosophies are potentially amoral, unaesthetic, and areligious in their tendencies" (Goldmann, 1975, p. 31). They are unable to solve the contradiction between efficiency and morale, a philosophy which caused Sartre to silently accept the Communist Party's continuing stalinist politics. Goldmann notes that the revelation of Stalin's crimes at the 20th Congress of the Soviet Communist Party and the following incipient destalinization caused a crisis that touched many leftwing intellectuals who were not members of the CP,

among them Sartre. The shock was all the more astounding as the facts had been accessible for a long time. In *Les Séquestrés d'Altona*, a play which centers on the problem of torture inscribed in the relation between individual and community and in that between morale and politics, most probably echoing the question of responsibility of the torture in Hitler's camps, in Algeria, in Soviet Russia, Goldmann senses a feeling of Sartre's personal responsibility for having approved of stalinist organizations responsible for such deeds (Goldmann, 1970a). However, "individualism, commitment, morale, politics, everything was put into question" (Goldmann, 1970a, pp. 262, cf. 253). And Sartre's very last play, an adaptation of the Trojans by Euripides ends in total nihilism, while being a "refusal", a "negation", i.e., the way he defined the dialectic in *Critique de la raison dialectique*. One of the great figures of the twentieth century, Sartre remained true to himself and his way of defending liberty (Goldmann, 1970a, p. 264).

## THEODOR ADORNO

### *Adorno and the Essay*

The first volume of Adorno's *Notes to Literature* opens with the piece "The Essay as Form", written in the 1950s, launching a biting critique of its rejection in German intellectual life. Adorno seizes on an observation made by the young Lukács, namely that the essay had not yet found its deserved appreciation, pointing out that in Germany, a country which in terms of serious writing only recognizes philosophy and science, and in fiction only accepts the poetic ("Dichtung"), three domains rigorously defined by tradition and norm, a "mixed form", such as the essay, meets with despise. The freedom of the essayist easily makes him into a shallow "writer", a "littérateur", a "dilettante". To Adorno, the sharp distinction between science and philosophy, recognized as "knowledge", from "art", which falls into the domain of the irrational, translates the weakness of German enlightenment. However, with Bacon, Montaigne, Simmel, Benjamin, Adorno defines the essay essentially as a revolt of the independent spirit against doctrine and dogma: the only effective way to intervene in contemporary culture. The essay is interpretation, taking literature or philosophy as point of departure for its reflections, deciding itself where to begin its comments and finishing when enough has been said. Contrary to prejudice, this does not make the essay an arbitrary exercise as the interpretation must be in accordance with the text, and with the essayist's ability to make the elements of the subject talk. "Nothing can be interpreted out of something that is not interpreted into it at the same time. The criteria for such interpretation are its compatibility with the text and with itself, and its power to give voice to the elements of the object in conjunction with one another" (Adorno, 1991, pp. 4–5). Contrary to Lukács, who defined the essay as an art form, Adorno—though conceding that the writing has to be aesthetic—notes that the essay distinguishes itself from art by using concepts "and by its claim to a truth devoid of aesthetic semblance" (Adorno, 1991, p. 5). It sheds new light on certain works, reveals hidden meanings to a contemporary public, as no

work is ever definitively interpreted. This procedure remains a serious exercise able to afford knowledge as long as it does not “decline deriving cultural works from something underlying them”, as has become common in the flood of commercial writing on culture, in fictionalized biographies and the like. On the other hand, though art and science have been irreversibly separated by historical development, it must be admitted that there are insights into human existence that fall into a zone between these compartments (Adorno, 1991, p. 5). The penetrating observations the essay contributes are not necessarily of a kind that can be transformed into scientific knowledge. Adorno cites Proust whose work—like Bergson’s—shows a keen interest in positivist science, and contains undeniable insights into human beings and social contexts, knowledge of a kind produced by “a man of experience like the now extinct *homme de lettres* (. . .) the highest form of the dilettante” (Adorno, 1991, p. 8), in an epoch when the bourgeoisie had still confidence in its abilities. This is one of Adorno’s favorite ideas: the capacities and independent judgment of the nineteenth-century liberal, cultivated bourgeois class which played such an important role in the development of classical music. Two more characteristics distinguish the essay: the nonidentity of form and idea, and freedom from the need for identification. The essay is open and closed at the same time: open, as its intention denies systematics—which the later Lukács ignores as he derives his essays from theory, and closed, because it is concerned with its form of presentation; therein alone lies its similarity with art. The innermost concern of the essay is to uncover the illusion that cultural phenomena are natural, so as to expose the “false society” beneath this illusion.

### *Culture Industry*

With Max Horkheimer (1895–1973) and Herbert Marcuse (1898–1979), Adorno was one of the leading theoreticians of the Frankfurt School. Their work took shape as a response to the marxist utopianism of Ernst Bloch’s *The Spirit of Utopia* (1920) and to Lukács’s *History and Class Consciousness*, two works in which they see an idealistic interpretation of marxism, emphasizing superstructure, owing more to Hegelian philosophy than to Marx’s scientific analysis of the positive laws of capitalist economy. Both Bloch and Lukács privileged cultural critique over socioeconomic analysis and, “influenced by the pessimistic cultural sociology of Georg Simmel (. . .) grounded truth in a supra-historical process and the privileged ontology of the universal class, the proletariat.” (Swingewood, 1998, p. 40), Adorno objected to this idealized view of culture which had its origin not in Marx but in nineteenth-century philosophies of history conceiving of culture as the expression of the whole of society, or in the new science of anthropology which saw in culture “a whole way of life”. In contrast to Lukács, who in *Theory of the Novel*, opposes a mythical, precapitalist culture to its modern, fragmented form of decline, thereby establishing a direct connection between the mode of economic production and cultural form, Adorno argues—most powerfully in his *Sociology of Music*—that in a precapitalist society culture was dependent on aristocratic patronage and the church, on powerful

religious, economic, and political forces, from which it could only gradually free itself with the appearance, in the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, of differentiated social classes and groups and independent social institutions. Culture and cultural production create an autonomous sphere, which expresses humanist universal values rather than the values and interests of patrons or the market. This affirmative culture only develops within the framework of modern capitalist societies, in a slow dialectical process in which culture achieves a vast measure of autonomy establishing its own sphere which the Frankfurt theorists called “the public sphere”. In this particular sphere, values are no longer dependent on political, economic, or religious hierarchies but take on a universal importance; they are part of an emancipatory thinking, encompassing the whole of mankind (Swingewood, 1998, p. 41).

In their seminal work, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1973), written during the American exile, Horkheimer and Adorno describe how the same forces that created the structural basis enabling culture to emancipate itself are part of a dialectical relation in which social inequalities, hierarchies, power, and social status eventually challenge the autonomy of culture. Culture and society are in a conflictual relation, where the forces which furthered the autonomy of culture, creating the public sphere, are also simultaneously challenging it. Parallel with the rise of monopoly capitalism and the disappearance of free competition, a new system arises which Horkheimer and Adorno term “culture industry”, a concept describing a highly rationalized cultural production which furthers the passive integration of individuals. As atomized social structure replaces the structured pluralism of bourgeois affirmative culture, science takes on a new importance as an antihumanist force permeating the whole of society, shaping a new mode of domination through bureaucracy and technology. Instrumental and “formal rationality”—according to Weber concerned with matter of fact efficiency—now tend to eclipse the importance of “substantive rationality” primarily concerned with “ultimate questions”, focusing on the realization of values such as autonomy and freedom. The notion of “culture industry” describes the denial of the substantive rationality now characterizing cultural production: movies, literature, papers, and leisure activities. Culture industry describes the alienation of consciousness from self-determined purposive action and critical values and give relations between individuals the character of commodities. Adorno concludes that, in the realm of culture industry, untruth permeates every form of cultural communication.

#### *Culture Industry and Music*

In contemporary capitalism, culture loses its critical function, with cultural production separated in mass culture, the products of culture industry, and the higher spheres of culture, the avant-garde and modernism. *Dialectic of Enlightenment* associating contemporary cultural production with American mass culture, with popular music, film, magazines distributing entertainment for the masses, has been taken for a pessimistic analysis of the inevitable future of Western culture: the Americanization awaiting European culture. However, in

early studies on Wagner's music (Adorno, 2005), Adorno situates the beginnings of mass culture in "high culture" itself, in the second half of the nineteenth century (*Versuch über Wagner* 1964). Wagner destined his operas as artworks for the future, overcoming bourgeois art as entertainment, with the creation of "Gesamtkunstwerke", total works of art, integrating drama, musical performance, and the visual arts. As Alan Swingewood pointed out (Swingewood, 1998, pp. 44–47), he conceived his music at a time of rapid urbanization, where popular entertainment became increasingly available, e.g., in cheap fiction and popular music shows. Wagner aimed at creating a totally new culture for a public to be lured away from pleasurable operatic entertainment and educated to become entirely dedicated to his music. Adorno makes clear that Wagner was mistaken to imagine his operas as the alternative to commercialized art, as they already show essential features of what will become the culture industry: The idea of the unification of the arts is necessarily "dilettantism" (Adorno, 2005, pp. 18–19); a passive public lacking in concentration is fed endless repetition of "leitmotifs", similar to publicity; Wagner's flight from the real social world into an unhistoric mythical one, where life is at a standstill, and capitalistic exploitation is transposed into a world of myth; his music does not represent a development of musical history but rather has a patchwork-tendency toward "phantasmagorias", as Schopenhauer called shoddy wares (Adorno, 2005, pp. 74–75).

Adorno's point of departure is the undeniable collusion of science and material reality, permeating the economy, society, and contemporary culture, which leads him to certain peremptory pronouncements and comparisons lacking precise historical analysis, as for example the analogy of the coercion imposed by American consumer society and those imposed by national socialism. In the analysis of totalitarianism—and modern mass democracy is a form of it—politics and culture are defined by uniform rationalism. What is missing in the culture industry argument is a sociology of reception to distinguish between different forms of society. Adorno has been rightly criticized for establishing a strictly homologous relation between art object and public, lacking a sense of an active diversified public: for instance, the fact that art has become commodified does not mean that it is experienced as a commodity (Swingewood, 1998). Nevertheless, recently it has been shown that Adorno's essays, far from being a simple statement on all-pervasive rationalism, offer a challenge to uncover it, thus opening a new view on cultural production and behavior. In *After Adorno* (DeNora, 2003), her impressive highly original study of the importance of music in Adorno's thinking, Tia DeNora undertakes the task to show the critical possibilities encapsulated in Adorno's reflections on music. Contrary to classical sociology which did not study the effects of music, where music only appeared as a passive by-product of sociocultural development, DeNora sees in Adorno's writings on music a "sociomusical project". Adorno, to whom music was "a living, dynamic medium", used music "to think with" (DeNora, 2003, p. 3), similar to what Thomas Mann said of his relation to Wagner's music. The failure of reason as independent acumen, as critical faculty vis-a-vis the categories it creates, and the ensuing material production fostered authoritarian modes of ruling with catastrophic consequences visible in the twentieth century dictatorships and crimes.

This same junction of reason and reality upholds the continuing domination of science and technology, making reason conformist and authoritarian, eliminating “its critical edge” (DeNora, 2003, p. 4), eventually perpetuating itself as there are no concepts available anymore for perceiving material life in a different way. DeNora has pointed out that instead of building a new coherent theory of culture, it has rather been Adorno’s endeavor “to illuminate difference and contradiction—the residual, (...) non-sense, (...) anything that did not ‘fit’ within existing categories of thought” (DeNora, 2003, pp. 4–5). We need to seek ways of “reconfiguring reason ... as continuous moments of non-recognition between reason and reality” (DeNora, 2003, p. 5), of which music and literature are important examples. DeNora concludes that “the idea of negative dialectics was thus a mandate for reason to engage in self-critique”, encapsulated in “Adorno’s famous aphorism, ‘the whole is untrue’” (DeNora, 2003, p. 5). In his critique of the development of science, the dichotomy of art and science in postenlightenment society, Adorno laid the groundwork for the cognitive function of art and music. He states that the strict division of art and science caused humans to be doubly dispossessed of knowledge: Science was transformed into an instrument of ruling, and at the same time art was used to promote emotional reactions through the “production of ‘effect’”. Thus a loss of dialectical tension is made evident in Adorno’s analysis of Wagner’s music. In musical composition, so Adorno, “‘good harmonization’ is attentive to the needs of all voices”; to establish a ‘whole’ depends on a judicious arrangement of parts, it corresponds to the collective ideal.

DeNora insists that “Adorno focused on music’s role in relation to consciousness” and saw in music “a constitutive ingredient of social life”. Much more important than a contribution to the sociology of music was “the much greater project of thinking about how we operate as human social beings” (DeNora, 2003, p. 151f.). Adorno was not concerned with the meaning of music, but rather with “musical procedures and musical formal patterns” (DeNora, 2003, p. 152). In the analysis of Schoenberg’s work, music reveals its “almost allegorical function”; “Schoenberg’s music (...) shot through with dissonance was exemplary for a conception of reality revealed through contradiction” (DeNora, 2003, p. 152). Thus the importance of Adorno’s work lies in the fact that it reveals the dynamic relationship of music with extramusical matters: “for example, the interrelationship between voice and parts is inevitably a moral medium: that morality is made manifest in and through music’s handling of material” (DeNora, 2003, p. 152).

### *Literary Criticism*

In his literary criticism Adorno shows the same sensitivity to the means and ways of expression, focusing as much on form as on language and style seeking out and encouraging the independence of literature from the dictates of mass production or of socialist realism. Adorno’s critique of Lukács is concerned with the latter: an exercise in refuting a critical concept that sacrifices good writing to ideology. In an administered world, characterized by culture industry, cultural production

won't escape commercialization unless it refuses to give in to the laws governing advanced capitalist society, as "art is the negative knowledge of the actual world" (Adorno, Benjamin, Bloch, Brecht, & Lukacs, 1994, p. 146). To Adorno, in literary, artistic, and musical creation, this refusal articulates itself in seeking new, uncompromising forms and means of expression. By the creative critique it effects through formal innovation art manages to remain open and to uphold hope for change. Therein lies the "outstanding merit of the works of Beckett, Kafka and Schönberg", as "a successful work . . . is not one which resolves objective contradictions in a spurious harmony, but one which expresses the idea of harmony negatively by embodying the contradictions, pure and uncompromising, in its innermost structure" (Adorno et al., 1994, p. 146). Thus, Lukács's theory of literature as expounded in *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism* is discarded as it holds on to critical realism and the traditional novel form only for the sake of a possible socialist perspective, while rejecting modernism as solipsistic and irrational, the style and introspection of Kafka and Joyce, Beckett's reduction of society to "nothingness" (Adorno et al., 1994, p. 146).

Contrary to the classical avant-garde movements, Adorno did not aim for the destruction of all previous art, the so-called "Art Institution" (*Institution Kunst*), Dada, Surrealism, and Bert Brecht sought to destroy and replace. Following Hegel's aesthetic, Adorno has in common with Lukács the historicizing of art periods, with Greek classicism as the unsurpassed period where form and content of an artwork converge into an harmonious whole. In the postclassical, Romantic period, in the bourgeois age, individual perception forbids the spontaneous harmony, but an organic realist form can still achieve its illusion. Lukács holds on to it, seeking to perpetuate it, while Adorno, without attacking realist art works of the past, argues that in late capitalism art risks being engulfed by alienating commodity production unless it constantly renews itself.

Here I want to dwell in some detail on Adorno's "Notes on Kafka", the modern writer whom he most appreciated. Themes of the modern condition, of man confronting overwhelming and inscrutable powers, at the center of *The Trial* and *The Castle*, were given a religious interpretation by Max Brod, a friend of Kafka's, editor of his work and author of a widely read biography from 1937. Adorno objects by specifying that Kafka is a *modern* writer whose works rather critically exemplify the condition of modernity by thematizing social exclusion and bureaucratic power, with its abstract notion of the subject, and its tendency to unify, to level and to decree. This primary significance of Kafka has been obscured by the "kafkomania" that swept through Europe and the United States in the 1940s, in the wake of existentialist philosophy, with its inherent idea of man's inadequacy and potentially guilty nature.

Adorno's account of Kafka's novels celebrates the accuracy of his social analysis expressed in the formal renewal of the novel through the use of expressionist devices, subversive and antithetical to the administered world. Kafka's work, without precisely reflecting modern society, indicates clearly enough the breakdown of liberal class structure and public space, and signals the advent of a uniform, mechanized society. Adorno sees in Kafka's work the historical moment when rationality turns against itself into a new mythology, at the

moment of transition from liberal to monopoly capitalism: “Kafka unmasks monopolization by focusing on the waste-products of the liberal era that it liquidates” (Adorno, 1981, p. 257). Far from dealing with an ontology, as existentialist interpreters would have it, Adorno stresses that Kafka’s work records experiences; it is a reaction to unlimited power that resents strangers and loners. Its main theme is the representation of decomposing bourgeois subjectivity, the moment when the *individuum*, cornered by economic, political, and social forces, retreats into himself so as to ward off the danger of his own collectivization. The disintegration of individuality is the fault of “the bourgeoisie who was unable to find a successor” to carry on the enlightenment tradition (Adorno, 1981, p. 260). Kafka’s œuvre confronts the reader with a world full of “doubles,” a foreboding of a future where humankind will consist of “mechanically reproduced copies, Huxleyian Epsilons”. Furthermore, Adorno recognizes in the violence practiced by subaltern and *déclassés* figures—“types such as non-commissioned officers, prisoners-of-war, and concierges”—an analogy with the rise of national socialism and with the latest phase of “myth”—that of “bureaucratic control” (Adorno, 1981, p. 260). Yet Kafka’s characters defy fatalistic submission. Kafka reacts in the spirit of enlightenment against its retreat into mythology. Like Sade, who showed how pure reason turned into objective madness (Adorno, 1981, p. 265), Kafka demonstrates how demythification turned into demonology: “He remains true to the enlightenment spirit as he seeks to rectify the myth [. . .] Thus, the *Trial* novel is itself the trial of the trial” (Adorno, 1981, p. 268). Kafka, so Adorno, describes the procedures of the court that sits in judgment over men in order to render the law the guilty party.

Kafka’s narrative cannot be called a realistic description of society; the mimetic model cannot be applied to him, as his concern is not reality, in the sense of a mirror image of society, but its “truth”. This quest for truth explains the abstractness of Kafka’s literary figures, which makes it impossible to identify with them: they are nameless and lack distinguishing individual traits (Adorno, 1981, p. 254). The whole oeuvre is regarded as an indicator of modern anti-Semitism, an insight produced by and entrusted to the avant-garde quality of Kafka’s writing: it destroys the contemplative relation between reader and work and produce a shock effect through not one that emanates from the outrageous but from the fact that the outrageous appears as a matter of course. Kafka’s work is not symbolic because the symbols do not interrelate or merge into a totality of meaning. And while it evokes “a parabolic system the key to which has been stolen” (Adorno, 1981, p. 246), it would be wrong to see in it a statement about the obscurity of existence. Rather Kafka’s work constantly confronts the reader with sedimented experiences, with a *déjà vu* that won’t allow interpretation, and with a permanent aggression toward the reader that thwarts character identification. There is no coherent “philosophy” in Kafka, Adorno maintains, and if one is reminded of the Jewish tradition, then it is rather in the sense that “the principle of literalness” can be the only safe basis of interpretation: one must “take everything literally and cover up nothing with concepts invoked from above” (Adorno, 1981, p. 247).

Like with Georg Trakl, Adorno sees Kafka's achievement in the successful renewal of literary devices: with the formal means of expressionism, the author has created a "totally estranged subjectivity," expressed in an "objectless inwardness" and "in absolute subjective space and in absolute subjective time" and has thereby destroyed the "space-time continuum of 'empirical realism'" (Adorno, 1981, p. 261). In Kafka's three novels, time is no longer the unifying, meaning-endowing factor of realism; indeed, the fragmentary form of the novels, which results from an inner necessity, can hardly be called a novel form anymore. In the writer's quaint and outmoded object world, in its transient aspect, Adorno recognizes a future-oriented historical dimension: "Kafka depicts everything historical as condemned" because "what would truly be history has not yet begun." Or in Kafka's own words: "Progress has not yet taken place" (Adorno, 1981, p. 265). Also, Kafka uses the "technique" of adventure novels whose episodes are strung up and not related anymore by a coherent experience of time; he takes over from the detective story the device of the "universally suspicious" (Adorno, 1981, p. 265). In his critique of Lukács's rejection of contemporary realism, he points out that Kafka's merits do not lie in resuscitating realist literary forms, such as the fable, but rather in the elaboration of particular formal laws capable of describing alienation as personal experience. On these devices hinges literature as a form of knowledge and truth. That is why Adorno defends stark images and nightmarish descriptions, even at the risk of certain "defects" like "monotony" and "a preponderance of the abstract idea." It all serves the breaking up of the smooth surface of myth and the production of truth. "If there is hope in Kafka's work, it is in those extremes rather than in the milder phases: in the capacity to stand up to the worst by making it into language" (Adorno, 1981, p. 254). Adorno goes even further in his defense of the writer. Whereas Günther Anders deplores the willing submission of Kafka's characters to the law of the land as lack of moral backbone (Sonolet, 2010, p. 51), Adorno sees in their compliance not self-humiliation but ruse: to prevent "the world from being all-triumphant, was to concede it the victory from the beginning" (Adorno, 1981, p. 269). From Homer to Hegel and Marx, freedom meant to act in the spirit of the objective tendency (Adorno, 1981, p. 340); in other words only by not offering resistance can one oppose power, and in the process power reveals itself for what it is. To Adorno, the heroes in *The Trial* and *The Castle* are not guilty because they have done wrong but they become guilty "because they try to get justice on their side" (Adorno, 1981, p. 270). Therefore, Kafka is to be regarded as an innovative, modern artist in the same category as the avant-garde writing of Proust, Joyce, and Beckett, and the "new music" of Schönberg and Berg.

Peter Bürger, in his *Theory of the Avant-garde*, presents an interesting explanation of the theory of the Lukács—Adorno controversy historicizing their materialistic avant-garde art theories. Contrary to politically engaged avant-garde movements like Dada, Surrealism or the German debate on expressionism, neither Lukács nor Adorno are interested in the destruction of bourgeois art. What opposes them is a diametrically contrasting political outlook that, however, does not translate into the condemnation of traditional art. With late capitalism definitively stabilized and the hope in socialist revolution revealed

to have been vain, Adorno believes that any false reconciliation with this system must be avoided. It can only be defied at the level of cultural creation by its cultural antithesis: the aesthetic avant-garde creating unassimilable newness. While acknowledging its protest character, Lukács condemns the avant-garde for its abstractness due to lack of historical perspective and thus its blindness to the forces of change (Bürger, 1981, pp. 121–128). To him the absence of a socialist perspective is the reason for the humorless description of human relations in avant-garde literature. Lukács pays tribute to Thomas Mann's famous irony in his analysis of the unfinished novel *Felix Krull Confidence Man*, where an ironic distancing from his persona and his activity as a writer, an inventor of stories, in a way makes himself into a confidence man. Mann's "irony, self-irony, humor, the music of reservation" (Lukács, 1979, p. 107), "an ingrained skepticism towards contemporary bourgeois society", (Lukács, 1979, p. 108) the description of the bourgeois world with "an unprejudiced eye" (Lukács, 1979, p. 114) are due to the security the view onto the future socialist society grants him. Mann is indeed the only modern writer able to grasp the "discrepancy between a subjective reflection of reality . . . and the actual objective world itself"! (Lukács, 1979, p. 107).

Commenting on Adorno's controversy with Lukács's *Against Misunderstood Realism*, Frederic Jameson rightly points out that "fundamental categories of Adorno's aesthetics remain opaque", such as "autonomous art" or the unexplained "laws" and "logic" of artistic form (Adorno et al., 1994, p. 146). The avant-garde appears as an isolated practice, outside society. Art and culture, though they do have their own criteria, are produced in exchange, in dialogue with society. It is the dialogic element in cultural production, the exchange between cultural institutions and social groups that is missing in Adorno's concept of culture industry, that would explain new, diversified cultural practices, as for instance the important revival of renaissance and baroque music, cross-cultural exchanges, the experimentation with new media, etc. which marked the last decades. Culture is not centrally dictated but the outcome of ideological struggles and thus inevitably affected by people's interpretation and intervention.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter is an attempt to capture Lukács's, Goldmann's, and Adorno's approach to literature under the conditions of modernity, perceived by each of them as gradual but distinct changes from liberal bourgeois society to integrated capitalism or soviet socialism. In each case, the critical apparatus to grasp literary production has to be adjusted. Goldmann holds on to Marxist theory of the embedment of the writer in a social class or group to whose consciousness he/she gives voice, even though the erosion of clear class structures makes it often difficult to define a concrete relation between a work and group identity. The essay is the form expressing Goldmann's ever renewed attempts at probing into the social nature of art. Lukács and Adorno have in common to entrust the individual writer with the correct critical attitude toward the bourgeoisie and capitalism, in a society degrading human values. Following Hegel, Lukács seeks

to perpetuate the ideal of the realist novel: characterized by a positive perspective and the integration of hero and society in late capitalist or soviet socialism, societies that do not offer any conditions necessary for it. In Adorno's writings one senses the regret of the ideal eighteenth and nineteenth century bourgeois class, forward-looking and cultivated—at the origin of the public sphere, a diversified, largely independent domain destroyed by monopoly capitalism and the culture industry. Similar to Lukács, Adorno entrusts each individual writer with reacting to adverse circumstances: by adopting avant-garde stylistic means to defy integration into commercialized culture. Though he shares with Lukács the periodization of literary styles, it does not mean that he seeks to destroy traditional art. By employing expressionist devices, Kafka's fragmented novels reveal the nature of capitalist society dissolving identity and excluding the other.

All three critics are keenly aware of the essay as a modern open approach exploring distinct aspects of cultural phenomena. Even though the essay is meant to be unsystematic, in each critic's endeavor the passionate intention to make sense of present day conditions of cultural creation and of defying them brings to the fore underlying philosophical convictions: marxist cultural pluralism in Goldmann's case, a perpetuation of traditional humanist socialism for Lukács, and the vividly imaginative, continued defiance of a seemingly closed society for Adorno. Michael Brown is quite right to presume that there is no end to diversified sociological and philosophical devices: the sociocultural sciences are united.

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