

“DU MUSST DEIN LEBEN ÄNDERN”¹

The categorial continuity of Lukácsian thought from *History and Class Consciousness* to *The Specificity of the Aesthetic*

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ABSTRACT

Nowadays, there is a prevalent opinion, although not well-supported, that the late Marxist Lukács's work is essentially different from his early Marxist writings. This article claims precisely the opposite. Namely, that there is a categorial continuity between *History and Class Consciousness* and *The Specificity of the Aesthetic*, despite the changes in Lukács's theoretical thought and political stance during the almost half-century period between the two works. More specifically, this article attempts to designate how the central categories of *History and Class Consciousness* (e.g. totality, reification, rationalization, imputed consciousness) appear in *The Specificity of the*

¹ “You must change your life”.

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“Du musst dein Leben ändern”

Aesthetic and how these categories intertwine organically with Lukács's main aesthetic categories (e.g. the particular, poetic choice, catharsis, evocation).

KEYWORDS

totality; reification; social consciousness; mediation; imputed consciousness

“DU MUSST DEIN LEBEN ÄNDERN”

A continuidade categorial do pensamento lukácsiano desde *História e consciência de classe* até *A peculiaridade do estético*

RESUMO

Atualmente, existe uma opinião predominante, embora não bem fundamentada, de que a obra tardia do Lukács marxista é essencialmente diferente de seus primeiros escritos marxistas. Este artigo afirma precisamente o contrário. Ou seja, que existe uma continuidade categorial entre *História e consciência de classe* e *A peculiaridade do estético*, apesar das mudanças no pensamento teórico e na postura política de Lukács durante o período de quase meio século entre as duas obras. Mais especificamente, este artigo procura indicar como as categorias centrais de *História e consciência de classe* (totalidade, reificação, racionalização, consciência imputada) aparecem em *A peculiaridade do estético* e como essas categorias se entrelaçam organicamente com as principais categorias estéticas de Lukács (p. ex. o particular, escolha poética, catarse, evocação).

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

totalidade; reificação; consciência social; mediação; consciência imputada

Introduction

In *Conversations with Georg Lukács*, the Hungarian thinker states: “I consider that my conclusions in *History and Class Consciousness* have nothing to do with the problems raised in the *Aesthetic*” (Lukács 1971: 84, my trans). Around the same time, G. Lukács expresses a diametrically opposite assessment of his intellectual path: “For me, everything is a continuation of something. I believe that in my own development there are no non-organic elements” (Lukács 1981: 132, my trans). Comparing these two quotations, it is reasonable to ask whether Lukács’s intellectual path as a Marxist is characterized by continuity or discontinuity. In other words, whether there is a turning point that radically separates the writings of the young Marxist Lukács from his late work.

Lukács himself identifies the year 1930 as the moment that brought a crucial change in his thinking. That year, he became an associate of the Marx-Engels Institute based in Moscow and thus came into contact with both Marx’s already fully restored *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* (1844) and V.I. Lenin’s recently published *Philosophical Notebooks*. The study of these two works led Lukács, firstly, to understand that in *History and Class Consciousness* (*HCC*) “the purview of economics is narrowed down because its basic Marxist category, labour as the mediator of the metabolic interaction between society and nature, is missing” (Lukács 1971: xvii). Hence, in 1930, Lukács acknowledges that he had failed to provide “a genuine economic grounding” to the categories of *HCC* and considers this to have been due to an essential error on his part, i.e. the identification

of “alienation with objectification [*Vergegenständlichung*]” (ibid.: xxiv). This caused a disregard of the dialectic relation between the reified and liberating aspects of objectification in capitalism. Put differently, it caused the conception even of the liberating, objectively revolutionary sides of the capitalist mode of production to be presented as reified and reifying and, as a result, it led to the magnification of its horrible, distorting consequences. He would subsequently strive to correct this crude error, so that his categories may acquire a more concrete economic basis and thus become more coherent and dialectical. Furthermore, through the study of the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, Lukács arrived at the central role that the young Marx attributed to the concept of species-being (*Gattungswesen*) and, as a result, to the adoption of the perspective that “class cannot take the place of species” (Heller 1979: 148).

The question, then, is whether the year 1930 marks “a turn which completely changes his previous relationship with Marxism” (Oldrini 2006: 306, my trans.), or whether it simply marks the beginning of an attempt to further elaborate, refine and expand – through a thorough immersion in the work of Marx and Lenin – the socio-political and philosophical categories he had already established in *HCC*. In other words, if we accept that Lukács’s intellectual development is governed by a dialectical continuity-discontinuity relationship, the question is which is its fundamental determinant, i.e., the dominant pole. After all, as Lukács underscores frequently in his work, “the basic fact of the materialistic dialectic element [is that] there is no real interac-

tion without a dominant moment” (Lukács cited in Parkinson 1977: 149).

In this paper I will attempt to answer this question by analyzing whether the crucial Lukácsian categories of *HCC* (totality, reification, mediation, choice, praxis, imputed consciousness, proletariat, consciousness crisis) are transformed wholly or partially in *The Specificity of the Aesthetic (TSA)*. First, as a result of Lukács’s immersion in the work of the young Marx and of Lenin and, second, due to their interaction with aesthetic categories (the typical and the particular, catharsis, anthropomorphization, *Er-Innerung*, humanity’s self-consciousness).

The paper, it must be noted, will also refer often to another late work of Georg Lukács, *The Ontology of Social Being (OSB)*, as I concur with Guido Oldrini that the “*Aesthetics* is based on a framework of conceptions derived from a fundamentally ontological matrix” (Oldrini 2006: 309, my trans.). Put differently, *TSA* extends certain basic ontological theorems into the sphere of the philosophy of art,² the most important of which is the notion that labour constitutes the primary form and model of every conscious and purposeful human activity and, therefore, of every form of reflection.³

² See also Oldrini 1990.

³ The main aim of the late Lukács’s work is the foundation of all the categories of social being on labour – labour as creator of use-values. In this context, all the mediations between subject and object are also founded on labour: praxis, language, abstract (symmetry, rhythm, analogy etc.) and concrete (magic, religion, art, science) forms of reflection. In *HCC*, by contrast, only praxis is documented explicitly as mediation, without, however, being grounded on labour.

The category of totality

According to the late Lukács, “one of the great achievements of *History and Class Consciousness* is that it reinstated the category of totality in the central position it had occupied throughout Marx’s works” (1971: xx); in other words, it brought back to the fore the conception of bourgeois society as a well-tempered whole, as a concrete dialectical subject-object unity. In other words, the virtue of *HCC* is attributed by the late Lukács to the fact that it grasps bourgeois society as the entirety of concrete, internal and necessary human relations; relations of negation, contrast and, simultaneously, interdependency and mutual completion that develop constantly through the interaction between the totality (society in its whole), its individual discrete parts (the economy, politics, law, ideology etc.) and human praxis. The unity of these relations is approached as relative, whereas their struggle, their conflict, as absolute, since the innermost property of these relations is the contrast, the inner difference rather than inner harmony.

A crucial characteristic of bourgeois society as a whole, the feature that lends it concrete substance, is the fact that the state of being of the whole, of its individual parts, of human praxis and of the entirety of their interrelations is determined by a specific universal organizing principle, i.e., the economy (Lukács 1972: 230). This means that the mode of existence and the interrelations of all the aforementioned entities are constituted on the basis of this determination; which is not to say that they do not counteract the economy within the framework of bourgeois society as a whole. The latter, in addition, is conceived

by Lukács in *HCC* as bearing a historical, transient character, in the sense that it is constantly changing under the weight of the interaction of its internal contradictions, grounded on the economy, with human praxis (Mészáros 1971: 63).

However, totality does not only constitute a fundamental category of *HCC*, but also represents “a constant theme throughout *TSA*” (Parkinson 1977: 128). More specifically, in *TSA*, the totality is conceived as a concrete dialectical subject-object unity,⁴ as the sum of human-made internal relations, relations of interdependence and contrast – with the emphasis on contrast – that are developed between the whole, its individual parts and human praxis.

Here, though, there are three noteworthy differences: one that stems from the specificity of the aesthetic field and two that stem from Lukács’s effort to further refine the category of totality. The first difference lies in the fact that, in *HCC*, what is presented as a dialectical subject-object unity, as a human and concrete whole, is bourgeois society. That is, in *HCC*, the dialectical subject-object unity is presented from the aspect of “its objective being per se, eliminating, as far as possible, human subjectivity from the process of research, selection and classification of data” (Lukács 1981a: 204, my trans.). Eliminating, that is, the way in which this unity is experienced and faced by

4 In our view, this subject-object unity is not absolute in either of the two works under consideration. In *HCC*, Lukács comments that by the unity of subject-object he does not mean their identification, but that subject and object constitute “aspects of one and the same real historical and dialectical process” (Lukács 1972: 204). In the same spirit, in *TSA*, aware of the misinterpretations caused by the above formulation, he notes, quoting Lenin, that, “although it has its limits, a difference between subject and object is always present” (Lukács 1981a: 526, my trans.).

human beings; resulting, in Lukács’s words, in a disanthropomorphizing reflection of totality.

On the contrary, in *TSA*, it is human beings themselves who are exposed as a dialectical subject-object unity. In other words, in *TSA* the subject-object unity is presented from the point of view of its subjective being; that is, from the aspect of the subject’s self, the total sum of the subject’s essential – sensory, physical, affective and intellectual – powers. Along these lines, aesthetic reflection exposes totality by setting the subject, “the immediate singularity of the subject” (Lukács 1981a: 565, my trans.), as the center of reference. It exposes totality as something that “constitutes, to a certain extent, an extension of the personality” (Lukács 1981a: 448, my trans.); a fact that renders aesthetic reflection an anthropomorphizing and anthropocentric mode of reflection.⁵

The second difference lies in the fact that, in *TSA*, great importance is put on the highlighting of the whole, of each individual part and of human praxis as entities that are governed by their own “various collaborating forces and relations” (Lukács 1978: 30), and which bear highly peculiar qualitative properties, i.e., “retain their ontological specificity” (Lukács 1978: 60), their high relative autonomy. The more the capitalist division of labour deepens, the more these spheres are determined by their own peculiar laws, their own dynamics and their own rate of development, i.e., the more they acquire a relative autonomy.

5 From now on, with the term totality I will mean, depending on the work to which I refer, either the conception of bourgeois society as a whole (*HCC*) or of man as a whole (*TSA*).

That, naturally, does not mean that they cease interacting with each other and being determined by their mutual internal relations. Hence, in *TSA*, the whole, its individual parts and human praxis are conceived as being inter-mediated in a more complex and multidimensional way than in *HCC*, since each consists of a “differently constituted, highly differentiated, historically emerging and changing” entity (Browne 1990: 195).⁶

In addition, in *TSA*, the cohesion of the totality, the internal mutual bond between the whole, its individual parts and human praxis, is ensured by the fact that they constitute varied expressions of the essence of the same foundation – the economy; that is, by the fact that their specific content constitutes an individualization, a transformed and differentiated expression of the universal essence of this foundation. This does not, of course, mean that these are reduced entirely and directly to the latter, that they lose their high degree of relative autonomy, their peculiar character. Lukács in his late work, as in *HCC*, considers totality as hierarchically and causally arranged, hence constituted and developing on the basis of the primacy of the economic sphere. However, what is absent from *HCC* – and here lies the third difference – is both the thorough clarification of how this primacy operates – something that is achieved in his late work through recourse to the Hegelian dialectics of the fundamental-foundational – and the grounding of the economy on the human’s ontological feature, i.e., labour. Hence, while Lukács foregrounded the category of totality throughout his

6 In *The Ontology of Social Being* Lukács, in order to emphasize the great relative autonomy of all the elements of the totality, he will rename the latter as a *complex of complexes*.

intellectual development, he gave it ever greater depth, complexity and clarity with the evolution of his work.

The reason for Lukács’s insistence on the category of totality is none other than his complete rejection – already in *HCC* – of the base-superstructure interpretative scheme, i.e., that interpretative model, according to which there is a mechanical and predetermined parallel relationship between the economy and society, or which attributes every trait and transformation in social life to the economy, in a one-dimensional, automatic and unmediated way. Lukács, thus, adopts the category of totality, because he holds that the whole, its individual parts and human praxis bear their relative autonomy, are “endowed with their own immanent legality” (Gargani 2018: 188), constitute peculiar and highly complex entities, which only ultimately and in a multiply mediated way are determined by the economy.⁷

In *TSA*, this is particularly evident in the passages where Lukács discusses the art-economy relationship, claiming, in agreement with Marx, that the flourishing of art does not necessarily go hand in hand with the general development of society. In other words, not all economic and social developments are automatically accompanied by the creation of significant works of art. The fact that the, according to Marx, *unattainable standard* of the art of classical antiquity is created during the “childhood of mankind”, i.e., at a time when humanity was less economically and socially developed, emphatically confirms, as

7 In this context, the category of totality allows Lukács to give prominence to mankind’s active role in the formation of the economy and avoid a Kautskian inspired presentation of the human like a passive being, which adapts itself automatically with every economic change.

Lukács argues, the correctness of the concept of relative autonomy.

Another point of convergence between *HCC* and *TSA*, relevant to the category of totality, is to be found in the Lukácsian thesis that the category in question constitutes not only a basic and objective determination of reality and of human beings, an objective form of their being, but also a subjective, logical method of cognition of the latter in their wholeness. This is because Lukács adopts the Marxian viewpoint of forms of thought as forms of being; in other words, he understands that the categories of cognition emerge from the objective categories of reality itself and are transformed in accordance with them.

In this context, as Lukács argues in both *HCC* and *TSA*, the objective totality, although historically and genetically prior to the subjective totality, is never – especially in the context of bourgeois society – directly accessible to social consciousness. The conception of objective totality, therefore, emerges as an aim or a possibility of social consciousness, rather than an automatic function of it. In that regard, not only do both works argue that bourgeois society and human beings are totalities not directly perceivable by social consciousness, they converge on the phenomenon of reification as the root of this obfuscation.

The category of reification

In *TSA*, Lukács systematically avoids the term reification, rooted in G. Simmel’s work, using instead the term fetishism, drawn from Marx’s categorial vocabulary. Moreover, the term *everyday life* takes precedence over that of *immediacy*. Nevertheless, the meaning he gives to fetishism and everyday life in *TSA* is, in our view, similar to the meaning given, respectively, to reification and immediacy in *HCC*. In other words, fetishism and reification are presented to perform the same social function. They appear to constitute a false mediation which, by presenting the Marxian *inverted world* as if it were real, traps social consciousness at the level of everyday life (or immediacy) and thus prevents it from grasping totality.

This entrapment of consciousness at the level of immediacy or of everyday life entails the same consequences in both Lukácsian works. More specifically, it implies that social consciousness perceives: (a.) concrete social relations among people like abstract and quantified relations among things; (b.) the subject and the object like two formally rationalized, absolutely measurable entities, which are only externally, quantitatively, related to each other; like entities that, hence, do not develop a qualitative bond and whose internal connections appear like external and accidental relations between things; (c.) the object like the product of formal and purely quantitative relations that develop among its individual elements; (d.) all the individual elements of the object like independent things governed and developing exclusively on the basis of their own indissoluble laws, and which are, therefore, related to each other only externally

and formally; (e.) the object like an alien and hostile force to the subject, with the latter unable to recognize itself in the object; (f.) the subject like a passive spectator of the production process of the object, like a mere predicate of the object that, at most, mediates the relations between objects-things; (g.) human labour like a simple natural process, unmediated by productive and social relations; (h.) the evolution of social reality, of human history, like a constantly recurring, unchanging, measurable and, therefore, universally predictable process; and, finally, (i.) the reified or fetishized condition of human beings' existence like something eternal, unchangeable and natural.

Nevertheless, some relevant collateral differences arise concerning Lukács's use of the categories of reification vis-à-vis fetishism in the two works under consideration. In *TSA*, Lukács does not analyze in detail, as he does in *HCC*, all the consequences that reification brings about in social consciousness, taking them for granted to a certain extent. Also, in *TSA*, the Hungarian thinker eliminates any direct reference to Max Weber's theory of formal rationality and, more generally, any Weberian term. Yet, the most important difference consists in Lukács's introduction into *TSA* of a further consequence of reification, to which he attaches central importance. This concerns the separation, the alienation of the individual from the human species as well as the consequent conception of "individuality as the ruling principle of human existence" (Johnson 1986: loc. 849); according to Lukács, this is mainly a result of the modern

division of labour.⁸ The central role that Lukács attributes to this aspect of reification explains why, in *TSA*, reification is discussed directly only in relation to the – capitalist or socialist – division of labour, while its relation to the law of value and the Weberian principle of calculability is never approached explicitly. In contrast, in *HCC*, reification is discussed and analyzed directly and rigorously in relation not only to the capitalist division of labour but also to the law of value and the principle of calculability; i.e., all the three of its sources, according to *HCC*.

Another essential similarity that underlies these two Lukácsian works is the fact that social consciousness is not considered as entirely reified, or, as Bertolt Brecht frames it, as “learned, for centuries, only to cover true human relations” (Brecht 1977: 119–120, my trans.). In other words, modern human beings are not presented as having become familiar with their reified state in such a degree as to regard it as something natural and eternal, i.e., as something “too obvious [...] to bother to understand it” (Brecht 1964: 192).

In *HCC*, reification is not absolute because it is impossible, according to Lukács, for the working class to treat its labour exclusively as a quantitative value. Instead, it always attributes to it – as well as to its product – qualitative aspects to some degree, since it recognizes – despite its reified consciousness –

8 In *TSA*, the modern division of labour is not confronted, as in *HCC*, as something exclusively negative, responsible for the fragmentation and atrophy of human beings due to their one-sided specialization; but as something that, along with the dehumanizing, destructive and debasing consequences it produces, also develops in them abilities that “expand and enrich the concept of their wholeness [*Ganzheit*]” (Lukács 1981a: 505, my trans.).

that, ultimately, it is not the abstract, quantified laws of the economy, but itself – as a class – who produce the objects (commodities) that surround it; put differently, the working class recognizes that commodities are nothing else than a form of crystallization of the commodified qualitative characteristics of its labor. Thus, it conceives – in the world of immediacy, in and from its own everyday labour experience, which means directly, without mediation – that it is the real, yet reified, motivating force of the production process. It grasps, within immediacy and in an unreified manner, a crucial element of its existence; crucial in the sense that it enables its consciousness to move – through, of course, the appropriate mediations – towards de-reification, towards grasping bourgeois society as a totality.

In *TSA*, in turn, reification is not absolute, because everyday life always includes an underlying “longing for totality [...] as a general social need” (Lukács 1981a: 505, my trans.), an “unconscious tendency to rise above the immediacy of everyday thought” (Lukács 1981a: 81, my trans.); something which is emphatically reflected, according to Lukács, in the fact that people, in the context of their everyday life, often act dialectically-totalizingly, even if without realizing it. This longing for totality smoldering in everyday life emerges from the “increasing visibility of social ties” (Johnson 1984: loc. 886) caused by the ever-greater integration of society under capitalism. Capitalism, being the most fully developed and coherent objective totality to date, both produces a tendency towards subjective totality and prevents, through the fetishism of consciousness, the fulfillment of this tendency. Thus, within everyday life lies a latent and poten-

tial consciousness of totality which must dialectically overcome its distortions through appropriate mediations, if it is to manifest itself in its most developed form.

The fact, therefore, that the world of immediacy or everyday life is not absolutely reified implies that this world is not, as Walter Benjamin claims, “incapable of emanating any meaning or significance on its own” (Benjamin 2003: 184); it has not, in fact, lost every trace of truth for humans. It implies, in other words, that this world carries an intrinsic meaning for social consciousness, which is none other than that it constitutes the starting point of the course of social consciousness towards its final destination, the conception of totality. Hence, in this reified or fetishized world it is possible to discover those crucial elements from which the mediations derive; these mediations, which lead social consciousness from the level of immediacy to that of totality, from its reified state to that state that allows it to mentally appropriate either bourgeois society or human being as wholes.

The category of mediation

In both Lukácsian works under consideration, the transition of social consciousness from the reified or fetishized level of immediacy to that of totality takes place exclusively through the appropriate subjective mediations. Appropriate, in the sense that they intellectually reproduce the multiple and complex mediations constitutive of reality, i.e., that they highlight the objective mediations that consist in the “structural principles and the real

tendencies of the objects themselves” (Lukács 1972: 155). For the Lukács of both *HCC* and *TSA*, the category of mediation constitutes an objective characteristic of social being, which social consciousness is called upon to recognize so that it is able to move from immediacy to totality. In other words, subjective mediation constitutes a logical form, which is identical with neither reified consciousness nor subjective totality; it functions as that intermediary factor which, by detecting the objective mediations, leads consciousness to the negation of immediacy, to the removal of its one-sided determinations and, through the various increasingly concrete levels of cognition, to the conception of totality. Provided, that is, that consciousness fulfills its movement towards totality and does “not freeze [...] in a new immediacy” (Lukács 1972: 170).

In both works, Lukács emphasizes that the starting operation of mediations presupposes a subjective evaluation of the world of immediacy and the selection of those moments, those aspects of everyday life, that can provoke the unfolding of the mediations that lead social consciousness to the conception of totality. It presupposes, namely, that “the subject selects from the infinite complexity of the given phenomenon those elements which are really important” (Királyfalvi 1975: 57) for the transition of social consciousness from immediacy to totality. Or, as Lukács stressed: every overall reflection of reality requires the selection, the indicating as important – important because they are the starting points of the mediations – of certain moments of human beings’ interdependence with their everyday environ-

ment (Lukács 1981a: 334, my trans.).⁹ This subjective evaluation and selection, in turn, presupposes an active subject. A subject, either individual or collective, which participates actively, practically in the shaping of social reality and, therefore, manages to evaluate everyday events and discover within them the real, objective mediations of totality.

Nevertheless, although the general function of the category of mediation is common to the two works under discussion, the way it is performed is quite different. In *HCC*, without being analytically examined, the category of mediation constitutes a third, intermediate factor, which does not have any determination of its own and is “not in any case a final form or goal” (Királyfalvi 1975: 73); it is also temporary, in the sense that it is self-abolishing once it has performed its function. In short, in *HCC*, mediation is understood as a dialectical moment of the movement of social consciousness from immediacy to totality and vice versa.

In *TSA*, on the other hand, the category of mediation is studied in detail and conceived in a much more elaborate way. Here, mediation – the category of the particular – undertakes the dialectical unification of the *sensibly individual* with the *intellectually universal* (Lukács 1967: 751); of the individual and the universal dimension of man as a whole.¹⁰ In other words, the

9 As I have already noted, the most crucial of such moments is, in *HCC*, the conception of the fact that the working class is the real subject of the production process, whereas in *TSA* it is the *longing for totality*.

10 The universal dimension (*Allgemeinheit*) of man as a whole refers to the way in which, in a given historical era, humanity creates and experiences, with the entirety of its essential powers, the whole objective reality as the externalization of itself and, also, as something that re-acts upon it and shapes it. The individual dimension (*Einzel-*

category of the particular, the “structural essence of the aesthetic” (Lukács 1981b: 193, my trans.), is the third factor, which, by unifying the individual with the universal, mediates the transition of social consciousness from immediacy to totality, to the conceiving of man as a concrete whole.

However, the particular is not conceived as a moment, but as an always present “field of mediations” (Lukács 1981b: 191, my trans.), an organizing center of centripetal and centrifugal movements, a mediating center that organizes and coordinates a continuous and simultaneous movement with many intermediate stages, from the particular to the individual and back again as well as from the particular to the universal and back again. Rather than a moment, the particular emerges as a centralizing “linking field of mediations” (Parkinson 1977: 138) since the work of art must never leave human beings’ everyday life, the *hic et nunc* of the human being and their environment, the work of art must never reduce the individual to a mere dialectical *moment* of the universal, to something that is dialectically transcended within the universal. On the contrary, it must always focus – without ever denying the universal – on the individual, since only in this way does it become possible for the totality to be exposed in a direct, sensible manner, in a manner which aims at human beings’ essential powers in their entirety.

Thus, the particular as mediating center permits the individual to maintain its character “as intact as possible” (Lukács

heit) of man as a whole refers, in turn, to the way in which the subject-object unity is actualized and internalized by the individual human beings of a given era in the context of their everyday, personal lives.

1981a: 586, my trans.), its relatively autonomous existence in its multiply mediated interweaving with the universal. In this regard, in aesthetic reflection, as Lukács observes, the individual “cannot be overcome to actual universality [which means that] there is no emergence of any universal in the true sense” (Lukács 1981b: 215, 216, my trans.). In aesthetic reflection we have “only a tendency to universalization, not a transcendence to universality” (Lukács 1981b: 245, my trans.).

The category of imputed consciousness

Thus, through appropriate mediations, social consciousness is led to its de-reification, to the conception of totality. In *HCC*, human beings or, more concretely, the proletariat conceives totality exclusively through its intellectual powers; in *TSA*, in turn, totality is conceived through the entirety of human beings’ essential powers. Moreover, if in *HCC* the de-reification of social consciousness means the cognition of society as a whole, in *TSA* de-reification means the cognition of *man as a whole* (*der Mensch ganz*), i.e., the human being conceives its own self as a “complete human” (Morawski 1968: 32), a concrete and historical dialectical subject-object unity; this self-awareness constitutes the Lukácsian specificity of the aesthetic.¹¹

11 Another difference that exists between the two Lukácsian works concerning the totality is the following: in *HCC*, totality has an extensive character; whereas, in *TSA*, it has an intensive character. That is, in the first case, totality seeks to include, to relate essentially as many parts of bourgeois society as possible; without, of course, this meaning that totality manifests itself only when “the whole multiplicity of objects can be illuminated by it” (Lukács 1972: 175). In *TSA*, in contrast, totality refers only to a

With the reference to human beings' self-knowledge, the Hungarian thinker introduces in *TSA* an element which, as mentioned previously, is completely absent from *HCC*, i.e., the overcoming of the individual's alienation from the human species. According to the Lukács of *TSA*, the cognition – both on the part of the perceiving subject and through the artwork – of man as a whole and the consequent conceiving of the world as humanity's collective product, implies that the perceiving subject gains consciousness of its own self as species; it becomes aware of itself as that species which through its conscious, purposeful and cooperative praxis creates the world. This implies that the perceiving subject “rises to the level of the species-character (*gat-tungsmäßig*)” (Heller 1979: 156), to the level of the general human; to that level at which the human being becomes aware that “the realization of the species-character in the individual is inseparable from the real relations in which the individual produces and reproduces its own existence, and thus inseparable from the development of individuality itself” (Lukács 1978: 140). That is, to the level at which the individual treats itself as a species-being and species as its own essence, where it “learns to experience the present as a member of humanity” (Lukács 1981a: 493, my trans.). The individual, Lukács continues, as far as it understands itself as a member of humanity, begins to participate in the *cause of humanity*, in humanity's need to create an authentically human society, whose main purpose will be the limited but characteristic slice of human beings' lives; “limited” in the sense that it has relatively narrow and clear – i.e., historically-determined – spatial and temporal boundaries; “characteristic” in the sense that humanity is presented in this slice of life in its fully developed form “in its true essentiality, in its contradictoriness, in its real movement and perspective” (Lukács cited in Vranitsky 2008: 3, my trans.).

cultivation of the integrity of human, the realization of the “longing for the unified and whole man (*einheitlichen und ganzen Mensch*)” (Lukács 1981a: 54, my trans.).

Now, the fact that art, by overcoming reification, bears the knowledge of man as a whole in a specific historical time implies that it also bears the concrete knowledge of its potential being, the knowledge of the entirety of human being’s objective potentialities, hence, of the perspectives that open up to the species and the individual; it bears the knowledge about how human beings can shape themselves in the future on the basis of their present being. Hence, we could claim that art bears – always anthropomorphically and appealing to the entirety of human essential powers – humanity’s imputed consciousness: by providing human beings with the knowledge of man as a whole, of their way of being as a subject-object unity in the present, of the potential ways of unitary being as such in the future and also of the way of human’s unitary being as such in the past (*Er-Innerung*).

Lukács perceives imputed consciousness in a similar manner in *HCC*. Namely, he perceives it as that consciousness which knows the state of being of a collective subject in a specific historical time as a dialectic and undivided unity of the existing and the possible, as a – in Hegel’s sense – dialectic unity of necessity (past), actuality (present) and possibility (future). The difference is that in *HCC* the collective subject is the proletariat and not humanity and that what the proletariat knows in its totality is not humanity but bourgeois society. In addition, in *HCC*,

imputed consciousness is *non-anthropomorphic* and appeals mainly to human being's intellectual powers.

Lukács stresses in *TSA* that he does not oppose humanity to the proletariat. On the contrary, humanity is employed as a broader category which contains class as its dialectical moment. Indeed, humanity includes not only class but also the nation, the family, the small social group etc. as its dialectical moments. Humanity contains these social groupings, because its character, its essence, is constantly shaped and evolving both on the basis of the essential links between them and on the basis of the socio-historical conflicts that take place among these social groupings; conflicts that, at the same time, “reveal the objective internal contradictions of the evolution of humanity” (Lukács 1981a: 571, my trans.). Thus, for the Lukács of *TSA*, the “imputed consciousness” of humanity, since it contains the sum of these social bonds and conflicts, is qualitatively higher, more comprehensive than that of the proletariat; it conceives human beings' objective needs and purposes from a broader point of view.

The categories of the crisis of consciousness, *Er- Innerung* and nature

Two other similarities and one difference between the two works under consideration merit reference. First, in both *HCC* and *TSA*, a crisis of consciousness appears to accelerate the movement from immediacy to totality. In the earlier work, it is the economic crisis that, by sharpening all the internal contradictions of the proletariat's economic and social being, provokes

in it an intense crisis of consciousness, which demands a resolution. The need for resolution to the consciousness crisis gives the proletariat an additional impulse to discover the appropriate mediations leading to totality. In *TSA*, on the other hand, the moment of catharsis, the moment of the manifestation within the work of art of man as a whole, shocks the subject of perception into a crisis of consciousness.¹² Here, the crisis lies in the fact that the perceiving subject – under the influence of the artwork’s exposition of the “true unity and totality of the whole man” (Lukács cited in Johnson 1984: loc. 1005) – questions the reified way in which it conceives humanity and itself in the context of its everyday life and wonders whether and how it could comprehend these as a whole. Thus, this crisis, by summoning the subject of perception (evocation) to comprehend, in the context of its daily experience, the human and itself as wholes, intensifies the *longing for totality*.

The second similarity concerns the question of memory. In *TSA*, art provides humanity the possibility of knowing essentially its past, of knowing itself as a concrete whole in the various great stages of its historical development. Hence, the Hungarian thinker argues that art constitutes the internalized memory (*Er-Innerung*) of humanity, the memory of its historical trajectory up to now. In his own words, art constitutes “that form of internalization in which the individual human being – and in them humanity – can appropriate the past [...] as humanity’s own work” (Lukács 1981a: 563, my trans.). In *HCC*, in turn,

12 In *TSA*, the crisis is not only one of consciousness, but also a moral, a mental and an emotional crisis.

the communist party, by ensuring the historical continuity of the class struggle of the proletariat, is presented as the bearer of the memory of this struggle's development.

Finally, an important difference between the two works regards the approach to nature. Put briefly, in *TSA*, Lukács considers nature as an element beyond human consciousness, which is in constant interaction with humanity. In *HCC*, in turn, he grasps nature as a *social category*, i.e., as something that exists only through its utilization and cognition by human beings rather than independently of them, “in itself”. The late Lukács will refer to this approach of nature as a social category as a key impediment to the conception of the nature-society metabolism in all its depth.

Conclusion

Lukács's observation in the Preface to *TSA* that an “entirely different worldview and method [...] and completely new contents” (Lukács 1981a: 25, my trans.) distinguish *TSA* from his first – initially neo-Kantian and then Hegelian – attempts to deal with the philosophy of art, does not at all apply to the relationship between *TSA* and *HCC* – even though the latter was written at a period much closer to Lukács's early aesthetic writings than to *TSA*. This is because a thread runs through and unifies these two works, or, in other words, because “one of the functions inherent in the construction of *HCC* was wholly identical with that of the later Aesthetics” (Heller 1979:

“Du musst dein Leben ändern”

155); notwithstanding any minor difference between the two works, which is due, as already mentioned, both to Lukács’s immersion in the work of Marx and Lenin and to the specificity of the aesthetic field. This *identical inherent function* consists in the fact that the Hungarian thinker sought to answer the same question in both works: how can a de-reified or de-fetishized social consciousness emerge within a reified and reifying social reality, and what are the forces – proletariat, party, artwork – that can bring such a project to fruition?

In line with Frederic Jameson, therefore, I consider that these two Lukácsian works constitute “a progressive exploration and enlargement of a single complex of problems” (Jameson 1971: 163) whose origin is located in the phenomenon of reification and whose various aspects are illuminated. They are illuminated, however, from the perspective of Marx’s and Lenin’s work, the Enlightenment tradition and classical humanism, and always in a spirit of hope. In general, I consider that there is a permeating and unifying *leitmotiv* in Lukács’s entire Marxist intellectual trajectory: the Lukácsian phrase “*Du musst dein Leben ändern*”, you must change your life; you must, in other words, participate in society as an active subject if life is to be full of meaning.

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