

Methodological Shadowboxing in Marxist Aesthetics : Lukacs and Adorno

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The supreme criterion of [Lukács] aesthetics . . . rests on the assumption that reconciliation has been accomplished, that all is well with society But the cleavage, the antagonism persists, and it is a sheer lie to assert that it has been overcome . . . in the states of the Eastern bloc. The magic spell which holds Lukács in thrall . . . is a re-enactment of that reconciliation under duress he had himself discerned at the heart of absolute idealism.

—Theodor W. Adorno, 1958

A considerable part of the leading German intelligentsia, including Adorno, have taken up residence in the 'Grand Hotel Abyss' which I described in connection with my critique of Schopenhauer as a beautiful hotel, equipped with every comfort, on the edge of the abyss, of nothingness, of absurdity. And the daily contemplation of the abyss between excellent meals or artistic entertainments, can only heighten the enjoyment of the subtle comforts offered.'

—Georg Lukács, 1962

No intellectual wants to be called the dupe of a repressive political system. No social critic wishes to be known as a self-serving nihilist. Yet, beneath the sophisticated rhetoric, those are the names being called in the passages quoted above. The polemical tone of this exchange characterizes much of the discussion surrounding Lukács' *Realism in Our Time*.¹ Soon after its publication

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in German (1958) and English (1962) the book became a lightning rod for hostile criticism. Thirty years later one wonders why. Fifteen years after the leading antagonists died—Theodor W. Adorno in 1969 and Georg Lukács in 1971—one asks whether substantive issues were at stake. And a hundred years after Lukács was born (1885), one wonders whether his literary-critical positions deserve to be reconsidered.²

This article attempts to reassess *Realism in Our Time*. More specifically, the article tries to uncover philosophical dimensions that have been buried by partisan polemics. First the English-language reception of Lukács's book will be reviewed. Then I shall summarize disagreements between Lukács and Adorno about the relative merits of modernist and realist literature. Next I shall locate some bases for the disagreements summarized. My focus will be on the methodological categories of "worldview" (*Weltanschauung*—often translated as "ideology") and "technique" (*Technik*). The concluding section will propose ways to handle problems in Lukács's methodology without abandoning his larger project of literary criticism.

Polemics and Dialogue

Lukács's work in aesthetics and literary criticism has had a gradual but limited reception in English-speaking countries. Most of his writings first appeared in German. By the time of his death in 1971, however, wholesale condemnations had become politically correct in East Germany and politically fashionable among West Germany's New Left. During this time Ehrhard Bahr noted a "Lukács-Renaissance" in English-speaking countries.³ It began with interest in Lukács's writings on literature, several of which were translated in the 1960s.⁴ In the early 1970s attention shifted to his political and philosophical writings, although the literary and aesthetic works continued to play a role.⁵ Publication of Lukács's *werke* since 1963 and further translations into English⁶ have fed a steady trickle of scholarly studies.⁷ It remains to be seen whether these studies will find their way into the mainstreams of English-language aesthetics and literary criticism.

The prospects for a broad reception do not look promising.⁸ Many factors have contributed to this situation. Perhaps the most obvious

is narrow partisanship, which has been especially prominent in responses to *Realism in Our Time*. One of the first reviews in English, for example, dismisses the book in Cold War language. Donald Davie identifies Lukács with "the communist world" and says he is not "wholly frank" with "us." After objecting to unsubstantiated literary judgments, Davie concludes without evidence that many of these judgments "are surely just."⁹ With this apparently unwarranted concession the book has been written off. Comparing such a review with the noncommittal comments of Max Rieser¹⁰ or the enthusiastic endorsement of Raymond Williams,¹¹ one soon wonders whether hidden agendas are blocking fruitful dialogue.

The hazards of narrow partisanship are clear from an exchange in *Encounter* in 1963. Much of the exchange concerns Lukács' person and politics. *Ad hominem* arguments occur on all sides. The exchange began with George Lichtheim's harsh criticisms of *Realism in Our Time*,¹² Lichtheim claims that habitual accommodation to Marxist-Leninism has ruined Lukács' early promise and created an "intellectual disaster." Lukács has provided neither "a genuine critique of modernity" nor "authentic dialectical Marxism." In fact, "he has failed altogether as a responsible writer, and ultimately as a man."¹³ Lichtheim's criticisms are arrogant, insensitive, and incorrect, according to George Steiner: "Lukács is one of the great literary critics of the 20th century," one who refused to "compromise with his aesthetic standards" despite the Party line.¹⁴ In Alasdair MacIntyre's opinion, both Lichtheim and Steiner fail to see Lukács as a "tragic figure, the tragedy springing from the forms of his own thought."¹⁵ The rest of this exchange continues in a similar vein. The result is that readers confront conflicting and ill-founded pronouncements about Lukács himself but learn little about the book under review and even less about the central issues in it.

Example of partisan readings or misreadings are easily multiplied. Harold Rosenberg suggests that much in *Realism in Our Time* "cannot be taken seriously." He consigns Lukács to the camp of reactionary critics.¹⁶ Although seeming to take the book seriously, Susan Sontag finds in it little more than an objectionable "coarseness" and a "reactionary aesthetic sensibility." Her postscript declares Lukács incapable of "an intelligent involvement with the problems and objectives of 'modernism' in the arts."¹⁷ Peter Demetz goes even farther, calling Lukács a "literary terrorist" whose Stalinist ideology blinds him to the nuances of literary

texts. *Realism in our Time* is little more than a "rearguard action" against the desires of younger writers in Communist countries.¹⁸

Reviews such as these might raise important points. Their tone and manner suggest however, that discussion would hardly be worthwhile. At the same time one wonders why so many prominent intellectuals have bothered to review the book if it is as bad as some of them have suggested. Lukács seems to have hit raw nerves, eliciting partisan polemics rather than genuine dialogue. This is not to say that dialogue must be strictly nonpartisan in order to be genuine. Lukács' own writings provide some eloquent examples to the contrary. There are instances, however, where partisanship becomes so narrow that dialogue is cut off. Several instances occur in the reception of *Realism in Our Time*.

Fortunately more favorable comments have countered these instances.¹⁹ In addition several articles have taken the book seriously enough to test its methodology on specific literary works,²⁰ examine its categories,²¹ or note its corrective contributions.²² Objections raised in such articles tend to be discussable criticisms rather than polemical pronouncements. Furthermore such criticisms provide important clues to philosophical issues beneath partisan polemics. What is needed now, it seems, is an attempt to follow those clues and to uncover philosophical dimensions of Lukács' controversial book.

My strategy is to enter this book through "Reconciliation under Duress," the well-known review by Adorno from which I quoted earlier. Although highly polemical, Adorno's review does provide discussable criticisms, and it highlights philosophical issues. Having been read widely in German and in English translation, "Reconciliation under Duress" has become an important document in Western Marxist aesthetics.²³ Perhaps it will help us recover philosophical dimensions of *Realism in Our Time*. To recover them, however, we must avoid merely using Adorno to attack Lukács or using Lukács to refute Adorno. Each text must be used to read the other. In this way we shall be able to note methodological bases for their obvious disagreements and hidden agreements. Philosophical issues will begin to emerge, and a philosophical reassessment will become possible.

Two objections could be raised to this strategy. One is that we need to examine major philosophical texts in order to understand fully

the philosophical issues in Adorno's review. We should be discussing Lukács' two-volume *Aesthetik*²⁴ and Adorno's unfinished *Aesthetic Theory*.²⁵ There is something to this objection. Yet an initial grasp of philosophical issues can be gained from comparing more topical writings where philosophers are addressing contentious questions. A second objection might challenge the assumption that Adorno's review and Lukács' book contain "hidden agreements" and "philosophical issues." In reply let me say that this assumption is no wild guess. Instead it is an hypothesis informed both by the texts themselves and by several instructive comparisons of Lukácsian and Adornian aesthetics.²⁶ Such comparisons suggest that beneath the heated rhetoric there is considerable philosophical agreement, and that the actual disagreements are themselves anchored in philosophical considerations. Our next step is to examine the most obvious disagreement, one concerning "modernism" and "realism" in literature.

Modernism and Realism

Adorno's review expresses forcefully his disagreement with Lukács about the relative merits of modernist and realist literature. Yet the nature and the extent of this disagreement are not easily determined. According to Fredric Jameson, the dispute has tangled historical roots extending to the Seventeenth-century *Querelle des anciens et des modernes*. Furthermore "modernism" and "realism" are incommensurable categories.²⁷ Such complexity, both historical and categorical, make it hard to discover exactly what is under dispute and precisely where the disagreement begins and ends. One could propose that Lukács sets realism against modernism, whereas Adorno endorses modernism as realism. Given the complexity just mentioned, however, such a proposal would be abstract. It would need considerable elaboration to help us understand Adorno's disagreement. Let's begin instead with a summary of the two authors' conflicting descriptions of modernist and realist literature.

Lukács distinguishes three main streams in twentieth-century literature; modernism, critical realism, and socialist realism. Representatives of the three streams would be Franz Kafka, Thomas Mann, and Maxim Gorky, respectively. We may simplify Lukács' descriptions of these streams as follows. Modernist literature is bourgeois literature that is characterized by ahistorical angst in the face of monopoly capitalism.

critical realism, although ideologically bourgeois, is a literature of historical, sober optimism that does not reject socialism. Socialist realism is similarly historical and optimistic. Unlike critical realism, however, it uses a socialist perspective "to describe the forces working towards socialism *from the inside*" (RT 93/551). Whereas critical and socialist realism can form a common front against the cold War, modernism inadvertently supports the forces of destruction.

Adorno makes no secret of his hostility toward this mode of classification: "Operating reductively, imperiously distributing labels..., Lukács still behaves like a cultural commissar... No bearded Privy Councillor could pontificate about art in a manner more alien to it" (RD 153/253-254). Instead of exposing Lukács' system at its foundations, Adorno subverts it case by case, with the following results. Works called "modernist" by Lukács are touted by Adorno as genuinely realistic works, in the sense that they provide "negative knowledge" of sociohistorical reality (RD 158-161/259-262). The supposed "worldlessness" of modern art, for example, is the dialectical truth about socially induced alienation (RD 160-161/262). Works classified as "critical realist" Adorno claims to be less "realist" and more "modernist" than Lukács thinks (RD 163/265, 171-172/273-274). Adorno's comments on Thomas Mann are a case in point. Rather than rejecting the subjectivizing of time, as Lukács argues, Mann's *The Magic Mountain* maintains ambivalence between objective and subjective concepts of time, according to Adorno. Towards so-called "socialist realism" Adorno's tactic is less indirect. He says socialist realist works are historically out of date and technically regressive. Their regressiveness originates in backward social forces of production (RD 163-164/265-266). Indeed, the procedures of socialist realism, like those of Lukács' book, are ideological coverings for oppressive features in Soviet society (RD 175-176/278-279). In effect Adorno is declaring socialist realist works to be not only less modern but also less realistic than the "modernist" works that Lukács seems to reject. Adorno arrives at this dramatically different assessment not so much by challenging Lukács' classifications as by subverting the system of classification. He retains Lukácsian labels but shifts their usage and meaning.

This subversion adds semantic complications to the historical and categorical complexity described earlier. Lukács' tidy system seems shattered, his three labels replaced by Adorno's ever shifting usages.

Beneath the surface, however, we can find a consistent pattern to Adorno's disagreement over the relative merits of modernism and realism. He consistently refuses to address matters of worldview, and he repeatedly emphasizes formal or technical considerations. Before discussing the methodological bases for this pattern, let me illustrate its presence in Adorno's review. The illustration will expand our picture of the two authors' conflicting assessments of twentieth-century literature.

Adorno takes Lukács to task for misinterpreting modernist literature and, more broadly, modern art. Adorno rejects the claim, supposedly made by Lukács, that style, form, and technique are overemphasized in modernist works—that these are “formalist” works. Adorno replies that such features are constitutive of art as art. They are the means through which artistic objectivity is achieved. Lukács' mistake is this: “Instead of recognizing the objective function of formal elements in the aesthetic import (*Gehalt*) of modern art, Lukács deliberately misinterprets them as accidents, as arbitrary ingredients added by the over-inflated subject” (RD 153/253). And just as in general Lukács misinterprets the formal elements in modern art, so in his specific evaluations Lukács ignores formal elements in favor of the “content” (*Stoff*) and the “message” of individual works (RD 172/274).

Although Adorno's comments on Lukács' methods are often astute, one wonders whether Lukács' claim about “formalisms” has been fully understood. Adorno fails to distinguish sufficiently between Lukács' opposition to formalist literary criticism and Lukács' actual assessment of formal features in modernist works of literature. The passage cited from *Realism in Our Time* (see RD 153/253) concerns formalist criticism. The passage says little about formalism in the works themselves. Lukács is insisting here that the literary critic's mode of classification not be derived from purely formal problems. By giving primary attention to purely formal problems the literary critic will ignore the specific character of the works and writers to be classified. The stylistic differences, say, between James Joyce and Thomas Mann, both of whom use *monologue interieur*, are ones not merely of form or technique but fundamentally of literary worldviews. The literary critic must begin with the basic worldview (*weltanschauliche Grundlage*) rather than the formal or technical features of modernist literature (see RT 17-19/467-469). Given what this passage actually says, Adorno's objection seems wide of the mark.

Perhaps it is Lukács' emphasis on worldview that provokes Adorno's subsequent charge of "subjectivism". Adorno says Lukács looks for meaning (*Sinn*) that has been "arbitrarily superimposed" on literary works instead of the meaning that emerges through their formal elements (RD 153/253). Yet it is not clear that this charge is accurate. In keeping with a methodological emphasis on worldview, Lukács opens his assessment of modernism by describing and attacking its views of human beings, society, and history. These views have drastic consequences, some of which are formal. As a tendency unified at the level of worldview, modernism leads to the destruction of traditional forms and of "literary forms as such" (RT 45-46/499). Does this account look for meaning that has been arbitrarily superimposed on literary works? It is hard to say, partly, because Adorno has ignored the concept of "worldview". Instead of elaborating his charge by examining this concept and its function in Lukács' book, Adorno simply repeats the charge under different guises. For example, according to Adorno, Lukács fails to see that modernist works have moved beyond their alleged solipsism (RD 160/262). Such blindness arises from Lukács' low esteem for literary technique and his emphasis on "perspective," which Lukács wishes to impose on works from outside (RD 161-164/263-265). A later passage on realism shows that Adorno's charge of "subjectivism" addresses Lukács' entire book, not merely the sections on modernism. Part of Adorno's cure for Lukácsian subjectivism would be a heavier emphasis on objective... technical factors governing artistic production" (RD 173/275-276).

I think the pattern to Adorno's disagreement has been sufficiently illustrated. The pattern rests on at least two methodological categories, namely Lukács' concept of "worldview," which Adorno seems to ignore, and Adorno's concept of "technique," which Lukács seems not to share. Whereas Lukács dismisses modernism primarily because of its despairing worldview, Adorno dismisses socialist realism primarily because of its technical backwardness. Where as Lukács' key to realism is the worldview presented, Adorno's key is the technique employed. Neither author wishes to divorce what is presented from how it is presented. Both authors think that literary works perform cognitive and ideological roles in society. Nevertheless their assessments of twentieth-century literature conflict. A difference in methodological categories seems central to this

conflict. Examining the categories of worldview and technique should shed further light on the conflict, despite the complexities already noted in the concepts of "modernism" and "realism".

Worldview

There can be no mistaking the centrality of "worldview" (*Weltanschauung*) in Lukács' book. It is a concept he explains, continually uses, and repeatedly emphasizes. There can also be no mistaking Adorno's distaste for this concept. His review not only ignores Lukács' explanations but also mocks "perspective" (*Perspektive*), a concept closely related to "worldview" (RD 153/253, 162-163/263-265). To understand the meaning and function of Lukács' concept we need to examine his own writings. Initially Adorno's review will be of little help.

It has been claimed, sometimes as a criticism, that in principle Lukács' approach to literature is that of German *Geistesgeschichte*.²⁸ With respect to his emphasis on worldview this claim is surely correct, and it indicates fundamental continuities from *The Theory of the Novel to Realism in Our Time*.²⁹ Yet the precise contours of Lukács' concept have a more recent history. They were forged in the 1930s when Lukács was developing a Marxist-Leninist aesthetic amid debates about expressionism and socialist realism. In this context "worldview" became what Nichols describes as "a concept underlying almost all of Lukács' prescriptive, evaluative, and theoretical statements about literature."³⁰ "Worldview" turned into a central and complex category. It has three kinds of complexity in *Realism in Our Time*.

In the first place Lukács finds evidence of worldviews in many different literary contexts. Not only do authors, readers, and critics have worldviews, but also the worldview within the work need not coincide with that of the author or recipients. Even characters within a novel may have diverse worldviews; having a distinct worldview is a mark of profound characterization.³¹ Because worldviews can be found on so many sides of the literary situation, the concept's meaning becomes multivalent and its usage complicated.

In the second place Lukács does not clearly specify the meaning of "worldview". He proposes to use the term not in a "strictly philosophical sense," which he does not define, but in a broad way

to indicate widely shared reactions to the main trends in recent world history. In this way he can speak of one worldview underlying the peace movement or underlying all contemporary realism, even though he also notices many different worldviews in both movements.³² Such a broad description allows for multiple meanings. At times "worldview" seems to indicate a philosophical ontology or anthropology (RT 19—21 / 469—472, 30—33 / 482—485). At other times basic experiences, attitudes towards life, or socio-political stances are intended (RT 34—37 / 486—490, 47—53 / 500—507, 70—82 / 526—541). At still other times "worldview" is nearly equated with the import (*Gehalt*) of a literary work (RT 47—53 / 500—507, 72—74 / 529—531, 82—92 / 541—550). Because the concept's general meaning is not clearly specified, several different definitions are possible. These may be incompatible with one another.

Consequently, in the third place, Lukács's usage of the concept is complicated. Variety of occurrences and multivalence of meaning make it difficult to detect reliable criteria of application. Three problems here are 1) how worldviews align themselves with literary works; 2) how worldviews are connected with other sociohistorical phenomena; and 3) what is being criticized, the absence or the incorrectness of a particular worldview. In view of such complexity, I now propose to reconstruct parts of the book's argument. Doing this will enable us to determine the methodological significance of "worldview" while observing it in limited operation.

Lukács's stated aim is to criticize modernism in order to uncover contemporary possibilities for critical realism. His method is to contrast these literary trends with respect to decisive "worldview-artistic problems" (RT 17/467). The hyphenated adjective (*weltanschaulich-kuenstlerisch*) already indicates that, no matter how worldview and artistry are related, in this book they belong together. For the Lukácsian critic formal considerations must flow from worldview concerns. The fundamental principles at stake in contemporary bourgeois literature are ones of worldview, not of mere technique. In a proper contrast between modernism and critical realism, questions of worldview must take precedence over ones of form (RT 17-19/467-469).

Much later Lukács proposes a method for analyzing the perspective in bourgeois literature (RT 59-71 / 514-528). First he claims that the crucial difference in perspective is whether or not socialism is rejected. Then he provides brief analyses of several works. The method of such analyses depends, he says, on examining "the mutual relation between world view and artistic configuration (*Gestaltung*)."
Here "worldview" signifies both 1) how the writer "consciously formulates" a stance toward problems of life and society and 2) how the writer gives these matters configuration (*gestaltet*) "instinctively and with artistic consciousness." Lukács adds that "profound contradictions" can obtain between the conscious formulation and the artistic expression (RT 71/528). For convenience let me label these two matters "worldview-1" and "worldview-2". Worldview-1 is the writer's consciously formulated views, for example a writer's opinions on an upcoming election as these are stated in a letter to the editor of *The New York Times*. Worldview-2 is the stance artistically presented in the literary work, such as a novel's general attitude toward current electoral processes. Presumably Lukács' method would involve careful comparisons among worldview-1, worldview-2, and the total work under study.

Similar distinctions support Lukács' earlier claim that the fundamental differences between Joycean and Mannian styles lie in the "literary worldview" intended. The fundamental differences are ones of "intention," he writes (RT 19/469). Lukács says an intention is what takes shape in a literary work. The work's intention need not coincide with the author's conscious intent or with the author's opinion about the work. The distinction implied here between intention and intent seems to resemble the one between worldview-2 and worldview-1. This resemblance becomes clearer in Lukács' subsequent elaboration of "literary worldview" (*dichterrische Weltanschauung*). He describes this concept with three cumulative phrases. The first phrase, "the world picture (*Weitbild*) in the work," corresponds to the intention that takes shape or worldview-2. Let's call this the worldview in the work. The second phrase, "the writer's position toward this vision...about reality", covers the author's intent and conscious views and corresponds to worldview-1. Let's call this the worldview of the writer. To these phrases Lukács adds a third: "the evaluation of the world picture grasped in this manner" (RT 19/469). Whose evaluation we are not told. It could be the writer's evaluation, in which case the second

and third descriptive phrases overlap. Or the evaluation could be the critic's stance toward the work, the critic's effort at bringing out the worldview of the work. In this case we could distinguish "worldview-3," the critic's stance. The most likely possibility, in my opinion, is that the evaluation in question includes both the writer's and the critics. This possibility would help explain the ease with which Lukács uses non-literary statements by authors and critics alike to support his analyses of the worldview in modernist works. In any case a "literary worldview" includes all the elements indicated by Lukács three phrases.

In addition, a literary worldview is the "essence" of a Work's "final import" (*Wesen des letzten Gehalts*), and a work's form is "the specific form of this specific import" (RT 19/469). Lukács' emphasis on worldview rather than on form or technique is a matter of priority rather than exclusion. Critics must not ignore form or technique, but they cannot properly understand a form unless they grasp it as the form of a literary import whose crux is a literary worldview. For Lukács the contrast between modernism and critical realism rests on literary worldviews. These contain both the worldview in literary works and the worldview of literary authors. The worldview of literary critics might also be included.

Adorno's review does not directly challenge Lukács' concept of a literary worldview. Nor does Adorno explicitly criticize Lukács' account of relations among worldview, import, and form. Instead, as we have seen, Adorno repeatedly charges Lukács with ignoring form or technique, overemphasizing the message or subject-matter, imposing meaning on literary works, and failing to reach their true import (*Wahrheitsgehalt*). Adorno does not argue that "worldview" should not be methodologically central, or that making it central must entail inattention to formal features, or that Lukács methods are inconsistent with his methodology. Although Adorno hits some of Lukács actual interpretations, he fails to reach the central category in which they are anchored.

This failure puts Adorno in an awkward position, for his own categories look rather Lukácsian. Simply by inserting the category of worldview Lukács could easily endorse many points that Adorno intends as criticisms. Adorno insists that the critic recognize

the "objective function" of formal elements in a work's "aesthetic import" (RD 153/253), Lukács would agree, provided one sees a literary worldview as the crux of the work's import. Adorno says this import is not real in the same sense as social reality is; art's task is to image the essence (*Wesen*) of social realities (RD 159-160/260-261). Again Lukács could concur: literary import is specifically literary, and a work's "reflection" (*Wiederspiegelung*) is of social reality's essence (*Wesen*), not of surface phenomena (*Erscheinungen*); but of course, Lukács would add, a literary worldview should guide the interpretation of a work's reflection. Furthermore, just as Adorno thinks formal artistic laws are crucial to art's imaging, so Lukács sees them as crucial to art's reflecting. Adorno seems to be shadowboxing at the methodological level,

At this point we might decide that the entire dispute hinges on different literary preferences, which have their own ideological and political-economic supports. Yet such a decision would be premature. What Lukács means by "import" conflicts with Adorno's meaning, and Adorno's understanding of artistic forms does not match Lukács' understanding. Let me begin to indicate these differences by reconstructing another part of Lukács' argument.

We have seen that for Lukács a literary worldview comprises the worldview in a literary work, the worldview of the writer, and perhaps that of the critic. A literary worldview is the crux of the import of a literary work. At the center of such import in contemporary literature, he continues, lies a view of humanity (RT 19-21/469-472). Are human beings essentially social and historical beings, as Aristotle suggests? Or are they essentially asocial, ahistorical, solitary individuals thrown into being, as Heidegger supposedly claims? The contrast between realism and modernism boils down to a contrast between these two views, according to Lukács. The second view characterizes modernist writers and works. This view of humanity "must make itself felt in a special way in all areas of artistic configuration, and it must profoundly influence all principles of literary form" (RT 21/472). The rest of Chapter One describes the ramifications of existentialist anthropology in modernist works: dissolution of personality and of reality (RT 21-28/472-479); emphasis on pathology and distortion (28-33/479-485); a lack of perspective (33-40/485-492); and the prevalence of a allegory (40-46/492-499).

The three features just described help deflect some of Adorno's objections. Adorno says, for example, that Lukács should not expect individuals to overcome social isolation by adopting a different stance (RD 162/263-264, 165/267). Here Adorno ignores not only Lukács' attempt to locate the emphasis on isolation in a literary worldview but also his claim that such isolation arises from sociohistorical conditions, and his specific worry that modernist import and forms fail to expose these conditions. At the same time the three features of Lukács' argument serve to indicate differences between Lukácsian and Adornian categories. For Lukács the import of modernist works has at its heart an incorrect view of humanity. This literary worldview has profound formal ramifications. But for Adorno the import of modernist works does not have any worldview at its heart. Nor does he consider import to be "form-determinative" (RT 19/469). Part of the dispute about the merits of modernism stems from incompatible methodologies. Although seeming to share categories such as import and form, Lukács and Adorno construe these categories differently because of contrasting emphases on worldview and technique. The contrast can be made clearer by considering Adorno's concept of "technique," which informs his charges of Lukácsian blindness to formal considerations.

Technique

According to Adorno's book on Wagner, "the key to any and every artistic import lies in artistic technique,"³³ Adorno elaborates this claim in his *Aesthetic Theory*. After positing a "dialectical relation" between import (*Gehalt*) and technique (*Technik*), Adorno writes that technique is of "key importance" for interpreting art. "Technique alone guides the reflective person into the inner core of art works, provided of course he also speaks their language." Although there is more to art than technique, "substance (*Gehalt*) can (*only*) be extrapolated from the concrete application of technique."³⁴ Adorno conceives of literary technique as something from which critics must elicit the import of a work. Technique is a central category in his literary-critical methodology.

Lukács shares neither Adorno's concept of technique nor his emphasis on it. Lukács' own approach to "technique" is implicit in his parenthetical distinction between "inner artistic form" and "technical

form" (RT 53/507). An explicit statement occurs in his 1954 article on "Art and Objective Truth."³⁵ There Lukács objects to the tendency to identify technique and form, a tendency which he considers bourgeois and subjectivistic. Technique is the artist's acquired ability to realize artistic ends. It is *merely* "a means for expressing the reflection of reality through the alternating conversion (*gegenseitige Umschlagen ineinander*) of content (*Inhalt*) and form." Far from giving the critic a key to artistic import, technique itself can be correctly understood only in its dependence on the dialectical nexus of reality, content, and form. Interpreters who isolate technique remove it from the "objective problems of art." Interpreters who emphasize technique obscure the more profound problems of artistic form.³⁶ Perhaps, then, we may summarize as follows. Whereas an Adornian critic would try to elicit a work's import from its technique a Lukácsian critic would try to explain how a technique is determined by the work's import and by problems of content and form. The Lukácsian critic would give lower priority to technical matters. In fact Lukács easily draws lines between "essential problems of art" and "technical details of artistic technique."³⁷

Lukács' approach to "technique" helps clarify the contrast he finds between two uses of *monologue interieur*. For James Joyce, says Lukács, this is not merely a literary technique but the "inner form" of his work. For Thomas Mann, however, *monologue interieur* is a mere technique, one whose use is governed by formal principles of the traditional epic (RT 17-18/467-468). For Lukács himself, Mann's use is of the proper kind, since Mann does not inflate a mere technique into an essential form. Lukács seems to assume that what is proper for the Lukácsian critic is also proper for the literary artist. For Adorno, however, Lukács' approach to technique is reactionary. It amounts to "nullifying the development of the technical forces of production and canonically reinstating older forms that are intrinsically outdated" (RD 162/264).

Adorno's objection here implies not only a different approach to technique but also a non-Lukácsian concept of "form". Two traits of this concept bear directly on the question of technique. In the first place, Adorno views artistic forms as techniques that have solidified at a certain stage in the development of artistic materials. Form, he says, is "the imprint of the human hand in an art work." Form is "the mark of social

labour.³⁸ Although Adorno distinguishes form from technique, he sees much greater continuity between them than Lukács does. In the second place, Adorno thinks problems of form inhere in artistic materials as these develop, and he discusses such problems in terms of the "logic" of individual works.³⁹ Lukács, by contrast, thinks problems of form are inherited from traditional genres and styles, and he discusses such problems in terms of the real "lawfulness" (*Gesetzmaessigkeit*) that is reflected by forms. Consequently Lukács has much less enthusiasm for formal experimentation. Adorno calls form a "sedimentation" of content, thus implying that as society changes so artistic materials, techniques, and forms must also change. Lukács calls form the "highest abstraction" of content, thus implying that as the laws of reality remain valid over long stretches of history so do the appropriate artistic forms, which must govern the use of techniques.⁴⁰ For Adorno formal innovation is a liberating productive force in critique of the dominant mode of production. For Lukács traditional forms are valid ways of reflecting the dominant mode of production.

Such differences concerning technique and form spill over into the category of "import". The critic who elicits literary import from a work's technique is doing something different from the critic who shows that a work's import essentially determines the work's form and thereby also its technique. This difference in literary-critical methods is anchored in two different concepts of "import". Both concepts concern the manner in which works present social reality, and both concepts provide overarching standards of literary criticism. Yet the two concepts are incompatible. Perhaps their incompatibility can best be seen by describing the theory of artistic production that each concept implies. Adorno's category of "import" implies that the artist's social experience, which is primarily unconscious, interacts with artistic materials and techniques. If the experience is sufficiently deep, and if the materials and techniques are sufficiently advanced, then works will result whose import penetrates the reified facades of contemporary society.⁴¹ Lukács' category implies that the artist's social consciousness avails itself of various forms. If this consciousness is sufficiently correct, and if the forms are sufficiently lawful and appropriate, then works will result whose import properly reflects the essence of reified life in contemporary society. Adorno's category of "import" implies very little about the conscious ideology of

the author. Lukács, however, leaves little doubt that the correctness of in correctness of social consciousness is a matter of explicit stances. Even though he emphasizes the worldview in the work, his entire approach makes central to import the writer's conscious views—"worldview-1" or the worldview of the writer.

Here very few changes occur between Lukács' articles in the 1930s and *Realism in Our Time*. The following passage from "Narrate or Describe?" could easily have been repeated in Lukács' account of contemporary realism:

A writer's worldview is merely the synthesized total of the writer's experiences, raised to a certain level of generalization. For the writer the significance of worldview is ... that, as the basis of correct feelings and correct thinking, a worldview provides the basis for correct writing ...

Without a worldview a writer cannot narrate correctly, cannot construct a correct, well-organized, multifaceted, and comprehensive epic composition.⁴⁸

This emphasis on the writer's worldview helps generate the scarcely veiled threat when Lukács says the persistent use of nonrealistic techniques has deep roots in the lives of certain Soviet writers. Having a correct worldview suddenly becomes a matter of life and death.⁴⁹ For the Lukácsian critic the writer's worldview seems to be the most important component in a literary worldview, which itself is the key to interpreting literary import and all other literary phenomena.

Even if Lukács did not consider the writer's worldview most important, however, his emphasis on literary worldview would generate a problematic approach to literary import. Adorno registers some of the problems without pinpointing their source. By eliciting import from technique in his own literary criticism, Adorno offers a partial correction to Lukácsian methods. By emphasizing technique in his critique of Lukács, however, Adorno obscures the methodological source of problems in Lukács' approach to literary import. These problems do not result from Lukácsian blindness to form or technique. Instead they stem from what Adorno vaguely identifies as inadvertent subjectivism (RD 153/253). More precisely put, the main difficulties arise from a double expectation that literary import originates in the knowing subject and that this subject

provides the key to interpreting literary import. We could label this expectation a version of epistemic subjectivism. By "epistemic subjectivism" is meant a position that locates the ultimate source of "meaning," literary or otherwise, in the human knower. This knower, this epistemic subject, may be either individual or collective. In literary theory this subject may be the author, the reader, or the critic.

It is not entirely clear which of these epistemic subjects is central for Lukács. I have suggested that the central subject might be the writer's correct or incorrect social consciousness, but Steven Nichols claims that the critic has been made central. He faults Lukács for abandoning "all attempt to recapture any meaning other than what the critic's perspective brings to the work."⁴⁴ Adorno's change of "subjectivism" seems to imply that Lukács overemphasizes both the critic's perspective and the writers's social consciousness. Despite unclarity about which epistemic subject is central, however, it does seem clear that Lukács locates the ultimate source of literary import in the human knower. Literary import originates in subjective worldviews, and mediated by literary works, subjective worldviews provide the key to interpreting literary import.

A methodology centered on the category of "worldview" probably cannot avoid problems connected with epistemic subjectivism. The history and meaning of this category make such a supposition plausible.⁴⁵ The notion of worldview is a nineteenth-century concept. First coined in passing by Immanuel Kant, it gained currency among German Idealists and Romantics. By the 1840s it had become common in the vocabulary of educated Germans. In the two decades surrounding the turn of the century "worldview" became the topic of widespread philosophical debate, with Windelband, Dilthey, Rickert, and Husserl participating. The concept had already figured on both sides of the debate between Eugen Dühring and Friedrich Engels. Later it became part of the standard vocabulary among Marxist-Leninists. Despite historical variations, "worldview" has generally meant a global outlook providing orientation for life and thought. This meaning reflects an age in search of integrality and purpose such as were no longer provided either by science or by art, religion, and philosophy, the erstwhile "forms of absolute spirit" (Hegel). Lukács pre-Marxist life and writings belonged

to this age, Marxist-Leninism's emphasis on worldview made it easy for Lukács to transfer connotations of the nineteenth-century search into his Marxist-Leninist aesthetics. The category of worldview aided this transfer. The category embodies a nineteenth-century expectation that meaning can ultimately be found in the epistemic subject, specifically in the subject's global outlook.

Adorno does not share this expectation. In fact his concept of technique can be seen as a typical twentieth-century concept, and his emphasis on technique can be read as a rejection of any attempt to locate the ultimate source of meaning in the epistemic subject. Thus it is surprising that Adorno's own aesthetics displays problems similar to those in Lukács' approach to literary import. This fact should make us wary of straightforward solutions. Nevertheless I should like to describe some problems in Lukács' methodology and propose solutions that respect the main concerns of *Realism in Our Time*.

Problems and Proposals

Three problems stand out in Lukács' emphasis on literary worldviews and his approach to literary import. 1) Insufficient attention is given to how a work's import is connected with its actual social functions. 2) Historiographic judgments become schematic and vague. 3) Diverse criteria of evaluation are reduced to mere marks of subjective worldviews. Admittedly this list is itself schematic and vague; it should be documented in detail. Given the uneven reception of *Realism in Our Time*, however, I think a related task is more urgent, namely a critical appropriation of Lukács' methodology. I intend to propose the beginnings of such an appropriation. My proposals will address the three problems just listed, but I hope to avoid similar problems in Adorno's aesthetics.

As I have tried to show, there is a methodological basis to the dispute between Lukács and Adorno, over the relative merits of realism and modernism. This basis can be seen in conflicting emphases on worldview and technique, emphases that entail different approaches to import and form. At bottom the dispute and its basis concern the ways

in which authentic, autonomous works of literature give us knowledge of the sociohistorical totality. That some works provide this knowledge, and that doing so is a primary task of art, are not points of disagreement between Lukács and Adorno. Nor are several related assumptions: that artistic autonomy is a precondition for such knowledge; that some works are authentic; and that there is a sociohistorical totality, however fragmentary its surface may seem. A complete assessment of the dispute would have to examine these shared assumptions and their links to a questionable totalizing of reification.⁴⁶ My own assessment will be more modest. It will focus first on the limits of ideology critique in the manner of Lukács and Adorno.

According to Dieter Kliche and Peter Bürger, the assumptions shared by Lukács and Adorno lead them to emphasize ideology critique at the expense of functional analysis. Both Lukács and Adorno look for import but overlook how literary works actually function in their institutional settings. Kliche argues that both authors restrict their attention to how supposedly authentic autonomous works disclose alienation and (possible) disalienation. This restriction does injustice to art's own "functional process of renewal and expansion."⁴⁷ Bürger makes a similar point. He claims that neither author says much about the functions of art works in the bourgeois institution of art. By "institution of art" Bürger means the conditions regulating commerce with works of a certain kind in a given society or social class. During the nineteenth century, he argues, the relative independence of bourgeois art from other social subsystems went hand in hand with the increasingly apolitical import of individual works. In the twentieth century, however, a "self-criticism" of bourgeois art has been provided by the historical avantgarde (primarily Dadaism, early Surrealism, and the Russian avant-garde after 1917). This self-criticism has shown bourgeois art to be a social institution whose principle has become the social ineffectualness of autonomous works. Lukács and Adorno say little about functions because the doctrine of autonomy, which was central to the bourgeois institution of art, is also central to their aesthetic theories. Instead of analyzing institutional functions that decide a work's social effects or lack of effect, both authors are led by the doctrine of autonomy to derive such effects from the import of works in themselves. Ideology critique comes at the expense of functional analysis.⁴⁸

