

**An Aesthetic between Utopia and Reality: The Idea of
Realism in Western Marxism**

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Faculty of Art at the School of
English, The University of Sheffield

July 2004

Thou art a scholar, speak to it Horatio.

William Shakespeare

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to acknowledge help in writing this thesis. I am deeply indebted to Sean Homer, my supervisor. His encouragement and criticism have guided me when I faced difficulties in the course of my research. I would like to thank to Robin, Jamie, D. Kim, who have always been patient to discuss quite boring theoretical issues with me. Their hospitality and friendship have been invaluable. I should like to give my gratitude to my wife, Eun-Sook, and my daughter, San-Joo, for their unwavering faith in my competence to finish this thesis. I am also grateful to my mother and my brother who helped me continue the study. Finally, I wish to thank the members of Philosophy and Architecture Reading Group, T. Kang, H. Kim, and Y. Kim. Their fascinating attitudes towards the knowledge of humanities have motivated me to enjoy completing my thesis at the hardest moment.

ABSTRACT

The aim of this thesis is to examine the idea of realism in Western Marxism through the comparative approaches of Georg Lukács, Walter Benjamin, Theodor W. Adorno, Bertolt Brecht, Jean-Paul Sartre and Fredric Jameson in relation to non-Marxist theorists such as Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault. The issue of realism suffers from the controversial terminology of realism and reality. This is the reason why realism can be better viewed by Marxist perspectives that are firmly based on the category of the subject-object dialectic. This Marxian principle, thereby pertaining to the reality existing outside of subjectivity, substantiates the issue of realism as a continuing social and aesthetic project. By focusing on the category of reality in relation to the idea of realism in Western Marxist debates, this study explores the way in which the Marxist theorists understand the relationship between culture and society, and respond to the change of socio-economic conditions in each historical moment. These various discourses revolving around the issue of realism produce a similar agenda to explain the place of the artwork in the realm of culture. Such a similarity arises from their attempt to retain the idea of realism, even when they argue for an aesthetic of anti-realism. In this respect, my thesis questions the distinction between realism and modernism in Western Marxist discourses, and argues that such differentiation had been articulated by a political intention to sever Western Marxism from Stalinism. Their idea of realism is paradoxical in the sense that their formulations of realism aspire to a utopian project. This is the very way in which their idea of realism can be grasped as another facet of their political programme.

INTRODUCTION

In this thesis I would like to examine the idea of realism and anti-realism in the development of Western Marxism. This involves an analysis and critique of Marxist theorists such as Lukács, Benjamin, Adorno, Brecht, Sartre and Jameson as well as non-Marxist theorists such as Barthes and Foucault. My contention is that Lukács is a symbolic figure centred in the Marxian idea of realism and prompts a series of debates revolving around the problem of representation.

Descriptions of realism in the field of aesthetic discourse are notoriously slippery. The difficulty describing the whole contour of realism is a consequence of its ambiguity: realism has both an aesthetic and an epistemological dimension all at once. The simplest way to define realism is to describe it as a historical mode of representation mainly belonging to the nineteenth century. However, my initial intention in this study does not reside in a historically oriented approach. This study rather aims at revitalising the category of realism not as 'a form or period that we rightly if also repeatedly put behind us' but as 'a continuing social project that (in some form) one might still want to sign onto'.¹ This is the reason why my discussion focuses on the ideas of realism in Western Marxism that produced influential debates about the social function of realism in the field of aesthetic and cultural production. Needless to say, this aim can be achieved through a presentation and a reformulation of Marxist aesthetics.

My presupposition is that realism is not so much a specific method or style of a work of art, but the fundamental problem of aesthetic and cultural production in

¹ Bruce Robbins, 'Modernism and Literary Realism: Response', in *Realism and Representation: Essays on the Problem of Realism in Relation to Science, Literature, and Culture*, ed. by George Levine (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1993), p. 225.

general; realism is not only a representational system but also an ongoing epistemological claim to the real. What must be stressed is that the possibility of realism designates not the name of an aesthetic object, but a problem. Realism is an aesthetic striving to push our perception beyond the conventional code system of reality. In this way, realism can be said to be a continuing aesthetic project to realise utopian imaginations towards an alternative social system by changing the category of reality.

The Marxian idea of realism is necessarily related to the concept of ideology, in the sense that it always demands the dialectic between the epistemological and the aesthetic: the aesthetic is the living experience that produces criticism of the given category of reality. According to the classical Marxist understanding of ideology, ideology is the result of alienation in the material dimension. This means that, as Terry Eagleton puts it, ideology is ‘a *text*, woven of a whole tissue of different conceptual strands’.² In other words, ideology is nothing other than the problem of representation, the main issue of realism revolving around the dialectic between the epistemological and the aesthetic. However, I would like to formulate ideology as necessary for cognition and activity; ideology is not empirical representation, but rather active relations. As Eagleton says, ‘ideology cannot be substantially transformed by offering individuals true descriptions in place of false ones’.³ In this sense, ideology is crucially related to collective practice; the problem is not to

² Terry Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction* (London: Verso, 1991), p. 1. Eagleton recounts the ambivalent notions of ideology as follows: ‘(a) the process of production of meanings, signs and values in social life; (b) a body of ideas characteristic of a particular social group or class; (c) ideas which help to legitimate a dominant political power; (d) false ideas which help to legitimate a dominant political power; (e) systematically distorted communication; (f) that which offers a position for a subject; (g) forms of thought motivated by social interests; (h) identity thinking; (i) socially necessary illusion; (j) the conjuncture of discourse and power; (k) the medium in which conscious social actors make sense of their world; (l) action-oriented sets of beliefs; (m) the confusion of linguistic and phenomenal reality; (n) semiotic closure; (o) the indispensable medium in which individuals live out their relations to a social structure; (p) the process whereby social life is converted to a natural reality’.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

straighten the ideological distortion so as to restore the original truth, but rather to analyse the logic of ideological form dialectically. From this perspective, I formulate the notion of ideology as an imaginary form in which the truth of the material world is symptomatically inscribed. It does not mean that ideology is fallacy, but rather false understanding; just as Marx defines ideology as false consciousness with his well-known metaphor of *camera obscura*. Considering ideology as a necessary consequence of the subject-object dialectic, my thesis reformulates the aesthetic of representation through reconsidering the Marxian idea of realism.

My approach is twofold: first, I challenge the widespread inclination that opposes realism to modernism in the discourse of Marxist aesthetics. I maintain that formulations that draw a clear distinction between realism and modernism were constituted by political orientations that strove to separate Western Marxism from Stalinism. My presupposition is that there is an antithetical logic to doctrines in the Western Marxist articulation of anti-realism. It seems to me that this tendency precludes the possibility that there could have been any positive aspect expounding the aesthetic of realism. Second, I revitalise the crucial aspect of realism, the category of mediation in which the subject-object dialectic still retains its usefulness against the postmodern relativistic ideas of culture.

For this purpose, I describe Lukács' aesthetic formulation of realism in the light of his political strategy against Stalinism in Chapter 1. This is accompanied by the reconsideration of Adorno's attack on Lukácsian realism. Alongside this, I put an emphasis on the Hegelian feature of Lukácsian realism, in order to defend the category of mediation in the process of aesthetic production, which is criticised by Althusserian Marxism. This chapter aims at relocating the well-known debates of realism within the historical context of Western Marxism.

The reason why I reformulate the Lukácsian idea of realism is that realism can be better defined by Lukács' conceptualisation of the drive towards totality, or the orientation towards the real. For Lukács, realism is related to an author's perspective on the world. It must be stressed that Lukács distinguishes realism from the representational system: realism is pre-systemic, or pre-reified situation of mediation in which the subject-object dialectic interacts with reality. For Lukács, realism is not mere representation, but rather 'an art which penetrates through the appearances of social life to grasp their inner dynamics and dialectical interrelations'.⁴ This means that 'realism is not simply a description of reality, it is an attainment of the real as significant and essential'.⁵ In this respect, realism is not only epistemological, but also ethical; the more a work of art succeeds in revealing the hidden reality of history, the more it will be beautiful. Lukács' idea of realism is therefore identical in the aesthetic realm to philosophical realism. From this perspective, the chapter contends that, like Adorno's philosophy of music, Lukács' realism is another facet of his politics, a social project of an aesthetic programme, not a supplemental element of his politics.

This is followed in Chapter 2 by a comparison between Adorno and Benjamin and, on the other hand, Lukács. I argue that Adorno's formulation of anti-realism is based on Benjamin's idea of the mimetic faculty, and Adorno divides realism and the mimetic impulse to retain the utopian dimension of aesthetics against the realism of capitalist society. In this sense, Brecht, Benjamin and Adorno all regard the technical experiments of the avant-garde movements as an aesthetic attempt to produce a new category of reality responding to changed socio-economic conditions. The chapter argues that Benjamin's and Adorno's formulations of mimesis are a developed Marxian idea of realism, even though they set out their aesthetic in the guise of anti-

⁴ Terry Eagleton, 'Pork Chops and Pineapples', *London Review of Books*, 23 October 2003, p. 17.

realism. Benjamin and Adorno regard the representational system as the prison-house of instrumental rationalism, while Lukács grasps it as 'the instrument of human memory to tell us who we are'.⁶

As opposed to Benjamin and Adorno, who stress the utopian dimension of sensuous experience, Lukács tries to search for the perfect form thereby mapping out the whole reality in proper proportion. Despite the distinction between their aesthetic principles, what is common in those theorists is the utopian pursuit to step outside of the capitalist totalising system. In this sense, my thesis presupposes that Lukács' conceptualisation of realism and Benjamin's and Adorno's formulations of the aesthetic against the habitual representational system can be compatible. The culture industry is nothing less than the totalising accumulation of late capitalism in which the distinction between capital and culture is dissolved. I contend that this circumstance pushes aesthetic production beyond the traditional mode of representation to an attempt to create a new category of reality.

In this respect, I recount Sartre's criticism of Brecht in Chapter 3. The most significant factor in Brecht's formulation of realism is that he regards realism as the problem of general human interest. This is similar to the way in which Lukács defines realism as an orientation towards the real, even though Brecht does not endorse the Hegelian category of mediation like Lukács. For Brecht, realism does not mean the way in which a work of art represents the world as it actually is, but rather the way in which it deconstructs the conventional mode of representation. This idea leads Brecht to have sympathy for modernism and its technical experiments. More significantly, Brecht also regards realism as cognitive and evaluative: a work of art should serve as

⁵ Galin Tihanov, *The Master and the Slave: Lukács, Bakhtin, and the Ideas of Their Time* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), p. 28.

⁶ Tom Rockmore, 'Lukács, Marxist Aesthetics, and Truth', in *Jahrbuch der internationalen Georg-Lukács-Gesellschaft, 2001*, (Bielefeld: Aisthesis, 2001), p. 142.

an apparatus to lay bare the social reality through its form. For Brecht, aesthetic techniques are no more than functional components to amplify the cognitive effect.

In this chapter, I describe the way in which the practical aspect of realism supported by Lukács and Brecht declined because of the reification of aesthetic production as well as the institutionalisation of aesthetic criticism. I maintain that Sartre is a symptomatic theorist who marks an aesthetic shift from representation to representative. From this standpoint, my discussion delineates Sartre's concept of analogous representatives, which abolishes the Cartesian category of correspondence. It seems to me that Sartre's formulation, thereby replacing the idea of realism with the idea of analogous representatives, influences a seminal idea of structuralist and poststructuralist conceptualisations of representation.

From this perspective, I analyse the way in which Barthes formulates the reality effect and subsequently considers Foucault's understanding of representation in relation to neo-Kantian aesthetics in Chapter 4. The chapter claims that structuralist and poststructuralist theories of representation cannot provide a proper idea of aesthetic production against realism, in the sense that they cannot reject the category of mediation, the kernel of realism formulated by the Marxian idea of the aesthetic. Considering the similarity between neo-Kantianism and poststructuralism, I describe the way in which they blur the distinction between the aesthetic and the epistemological without any possible presupposition of mediation. The neo-Kantian idea of representation is that a particular *Weltanschauung* is correlated to the production of a singular form; neo-Kantianism defines the work of art as a symbolic form associated with the logic of *Weltanschauung*. This formulation is based on the philosophical presumption that 'the object of cognition was actually *produced* by the subject according to a priori categories dwelling in 'consciousness in general'' and

‘the mind could only know what the mind itself produces’.⁷ This presupposition gives rise to the neo-Kantian idea of logical validity which is an autonomous realm against all knowledge of the empirical world.

The problem is that neo-Kantianism does not postulate any category of mediation to explain the interrelationship between an individual artwork and a collective *Weltanschauung*. More significantly, *Weltanschauung* is independent of any potential aesthetic practice; an individual aesthetic practice cannot influence the logic of *Weltanschauung*. The distinction between the neo-Kantian aesthetic and the Marxist aesthetic lies in the way in which neo-Kantianism regards *Weltanschauung* as transcendental, while the Marxist idea of realism considers it as the consequence of the dialectical relationship between the work of art and *Weltanschauung*, as the consequence of class struggle. Endorsing the Althusserian conceptualisation of ideology, I criticise the metaphysical tendency of neo-Kantianism, which is mainly presented in Panofsky’s analysis of “perspective”.

Finally, in closely reading Jameson’s works, Chapter 5 sheds light on the relationship between Jameson’s concept of dialectical criticism and his idea of realism in relation to his analysis of postmodernism. I claim that Jameson’s idea of dialectical criticism is a critical adaptation of the Marxian idea of realism. Throughout this exploration, my discussion attempts to substantiate the possibility of realism as an absolute problem of aesthetic production. This involves both a presentation and investigation of Jameson’s dialectical method in relation to Sartre and Lukács.

My approach operates with a Marxist method for the analysis of Jameson’s work, which also provides the historical context within which the other theories will be accessed in order to understand Jameson’s theoretical position. To situate

⁷ Craig Brandist, *The Bakhtin Circle: Philosophy, Culture and Politics* (London: Pluto Press, 2002), p. 16.

Jameson's texts in their context, the chapter investigates the origins of Jameson's recent thinking by means of reading his early work, *Marxism and Form*. Jameson's early works can lend a clue to understanding his latest work, but a dialectical approach suggests more than this, it argues that the specific problems that arise within these earlier works can only find their resolution through their dialectical transcendence or historicisation.

This is followed by the criticism of Jameson's analysis of pastiche as a postmodern technique. The chapter argues that the way in which an author chooses parody or pastiche is determined by his or her attitude towards reality. I claim that Jameson's theoretical synthesis of aesthetic insights between the Marxian and the non-Marxian ideas of realism can provide realist alternative such as cognitive mapping, which is designed to totalise global reality. Jameson's formulation of cognitive mapping still retains the category of mediation, the subject-object dialectic, to defend the aesthetic principle of realism.

By considering Jameson's concept of cognitive mapping as a new mode of realistic pursuit, I argue that the condition of possibility for realism is still guaranteed by the mimetic impulse towards the utopian category of totality. Even though the totalising system of late capitalism has already dominated the process of cultural production, the problem of realism at an epistemological level incessantly pushes the category of reality beyond the reified code system of late capitalism.

I conclude that the possibility of realism is actually related to the recuperation of a revolutionary collective subjectivity coping with the new reality, the reality of a globalising world. This is the very reason why the Marxian idea of realism still retain its own mediated position between utopia and reality against the totalising capitalist system. The Marxian idea of realism is related to the way in which an author renders

the unforeseeable socio-economic pattern in aesthetic practice. No doubt, this is also accompanied by an attempt to map out the present global reality in the epistemological dimension.

CHAPTER ONE

THE AESTHETIC OF REFLECTION: LUKÁCS

Introduction

Lukács' defence of realism as a literary mode was one of the most controversial features of his aesthetics in the sense that it precipitated the conflict with other Marxist theorists of his time.¹ Today, Lukács' defence of realism is often misunderstood as an obsolete edifice after the advent of Western Marxism and Althusserian Marxism. In spite of intermittent debates about contentious aspects of his politics, there are few theorists who have produced a proper evaluation of his aesthetics of realism. It is my claim that the theoretical rejection of Lukács' realism is quite problematic, in the sense that his opponents such as Adorno and Althusser symbolically used the name of Lukács and perpetuated the suspicion of Lukács' compromise with Stalinism.

I contend that Lukács' model of reflection is not couched in Stalin's socialist realism, a theory that assumes the transparency between aesthetic forms and reality, but rather raises the essential problems of the condition of revolutionary writers in capitalist society. In this sense, Lukács' realism aims at providing a practical strategy to overcome cultural reification, focusing on the mediation between an author and his material condition. An investigation of Lukács' realism reveals that Lukács' way of understanding realism arises from his emphasis on objectivity rather than subjective reflection, as in Kantian philosophy.²

¹ For more details of the debates between them, see Ernst Bloch and others, *Aesthetics and Politics*, trans. by Rodney Livingstone (London: Verso, 1980).

² For Lukács' own criticism of Kantian reflection, see Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, trans. by Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1999), p. 200.

From this perspective, Lukács regards artistic form as “self-containment” in which the totality of the form is more intensively structured than material reality. That is to say, the Lukácsian concept of reflection is not the Kantian correspondence between consciousness and reality, but rather reflection in proper proportion as in a geographical map. This is the kernel of Lukácsian reflection theory, signified by an aesthetics of realism definitively opposed to Stalin’s socialist realism. In this respect, Lukács’ formulation of realism is a method of mapping out the capitalist social reality beyond fragmentation and reification.

Finally, I want to take Althusserian Marxism as the occasion to stage a wide consideration of anti-realism. I propose to elucidate the implicit assumptions behind the decline of Lukács’ realism, and the reification of cultural fields that gradually came to dominate Western literary apparatuses. Therefore, my concern with Althusserian anti-realism leads to the conclusion that cultural reification of Marxist literary theory is symptomatically revealed in the shift of focus from the writer to the reader.

1. Questions for Lukács’ Reflection Theory

Despite the prejudice that his argument is a mere reflection theory, what Lukács’ realism proposes is quite equivocal. At first sight, Lukács’ realism seems to suggest a better method to copy reality, yet, paradoxically, his realism implies another meaning at the level of the practical message. As Galin Tihanov argues, Lukács’ understanding of realism lies in the way in which he conceptualises method as the expression of *Weltanschauung*.³ There is no doubt that Lukács’ formulation of method is partly influenced by the neo-Kantian conceptualisation of the relationship

between an individual artwork and *Weltanschauung*.⁴ Lukács confesses that Georg Simmel, a philosopher of *Lebensphilosophie*, gave him the idea of the social character of art. Yet Lukács also maintains that Simmel's influence was nothing less than 'a basis for the discussion of literature that went well beyond Simmel's own'.⁵ For this reason, it seems to me that it is not the transcendental category of *Weltanschauung* in neo-Kantian aesthetic that is crucial to Lukács' formulation of realism, but rather the subject-object dialectic, responding to both Hegelianism and neo-Kantianism. According to Tihanov, for the early Lukács, who attempted to reformulate the neo-Kantian idea of aesthetics, 'embracing Hegel for the purpose of establishing a systematic aesthetics involves a compromise between historical and a priori category'.⁶

In other words, Lukács endorses the Hegelian category of mediation to substantiate the neo-Kantian conception, adapting the teleological view of totality. In this way, Lukács' idea of realism is inseparable from his early philosophical presupposition of form, which was developed in *Heidelberg Aesthetics* (1916-1918).⁷ Lukács' doctrine of realism contains the tension between 'the Hegelian postulate of the unity of content and form and the neo-Kantian prejudice that only form can upgrade content to essentiality'.⁸ This is the very principle whereby Lukács regards

³ Galin Tihanov, *The Master and the Slave: Lukács, Bakhtin, and the Ideas of Their Time* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), p. 108.

⁴ As a result of the decline of early neo-Kantianism in 1910, Cassirer and Lask reformulated neo-Kantian ideas in bringing about a convergence with *Lebensphilosophie* and phenomenology. For a more detailed discussion about this, see Craig Brandist, *The Bakhtin Circle: Philosophy, Culture and Politics* (London: Pluto, 2002), pp. 16-21.

⁵ Georg Lukács, *Record of a Life: An Autobiographical Sketch*, trans. by Rodney Livingstone (London: Verso, 1983), pp. 37. However, it is undeniable that the influence of neo-Kantianism is still evident throughout Lukács' whole works. Most importantly, Lukács retains the neo-Kantian idea of timeless form and modifies it, so that the form of a great realistic artwork is the eternal achievement of human progress.

⁶ Tihanov, *The Master and the Slave*, p. 42.

⁷ According to Tihanov, in *Heidelberg Aesthetics*, 'Lukács presents a more elaborate, if not completely enthusiastic, case for a Hegelian understanding of culture as a possible alternative to Kantianism'. *Ibid.*, p. 29.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

realism as ‘a perennial trend in literature ... and a specific, historically determined mode of literary production’.⁹ For Lukács, *Weltanschauung* is not *a priori* about artistic creation, but rather the mode of narrative produced by the mediation between an author and his circumstance.¹⁰ This is the reason why, as Tihanov acknowledges, ‘Lukács’s category of method seems more plausible and seamlessly attachable to his discussions of particular schools and movements’.¹¹ That is to say, Lukács’ conception of method, pertaining to the category of *Weltanschauung* can be properly applied for the periodisation of aesthetic ideologies.¹²

From this perspective, Lukács attempts to draw a distinction between the description of naturalism and the narration of realism. It is to be noted that Lukács considers naturalism as “modern realism”, the mode of realism without mediation between subject and object. Lukács’ scathing criticism of the descriptive method in modern realism explicitly challenges the view that such a technique adequately mirrors the inhumanity of capitalism. Lukács does not admit the position that defends a descriptive method as more realistic, but rather reproaches the writers who employ description to dilute the essential capitalist reality. Along with this criticism, Lukács deplores “modern realism” for making the novel lose ‘its capacity to depict the dynamics of life, and thus its representation of capitalist reality is inadequate, diluted

⁹ Ibid., p. 108. In this way, Lukács’ realism has to be subsumed into his later study of Marxist ontology. Explaining the task of Marxist ontology, Lukács argues that ‘its object was the reality existing. And its task is to investigate the existing and trace it back to its being, and thus to discover the various gradations and connections contained within it’. See Georg Lukács, *Conversations with Lukács*, trans. by David Fernbach (London: The Merlin Press, 1974), p. 17.

¹⁰ This idea is even found in Lukács’ non-Marxist criticism of Kantian aesthetics, when Simmel and Weber fully influenced him. At that time, Lukács already criticised the Kantian presupposition of transcendental aesthetic judgement. Lukács says that ‘my view was that aesthetic judgements did not possess such priority, but that priority belonged with being’. See Lukács, *Record of a Life*, pp. 37-38. In a sense, this is a fundamental idea constituting Lukács’ formulation of aesthetics necessarily followed by realism. Lukács still retains such an idea within his formulation of realism, arguing that ‘reality ... has an intrinsic order of priority’. See Lukács, *Conversations with Lukács*, p. 17.

¹¹ Tihanov, *The Master and the Slave*, p. 107.

¹² This is the very point that Brecht attacks Lukácsian realism. I will return to this subject in Chapter 3.

and constrained'.¹³ For Lukács, "modern realism" designates naturalism and, in Jameson's terms, the coded language of socialist realism. In addition, Lukács himself explicitly defined Stalin's socialist realism as socialist naturalism.¹⁴ Lukács also criticised the way in which Stalin's socialist realism simply combines political dogmatism with *factum brutum* without mediation; it represents a configuration of objectivity that is nothing less than inverse subjectivity: Stalinist dogmatism as naturalism.

As Fredric Jameson observes, 'the concept of mediation has traditionally been the way in which dialectical philosophy and Marxism itself have formulated their vocation to break out of the specialized compartments of the (bourgeois) disciplines and to make connections among the seemingly disparate phenomena of social life generally'.¹⁵ The category of mediation is the way in which we actually grasp the heterogeneous relationships between the individual phenomena, which appear to be part of abstract homogeneity. Accordingly, mediation does not so much presuppose the conceptual antagonistic dichotomy, identity versus identity, but rather the pre-reified concrete relationship of particularity as such. In short, identity is not fully constituted in mediation. Hegel utterly argues that mediation is 'a conscious Being [the mediator], for it is an action which mediates consciousness as such; the content of this action is the extinction of its particular individuality which consciousness is undertaking'.¹⁶

A significant philosophical factor in the Hegelian formulation lies in the conceptualisation of the mediator as an "action" resisting "consciousness" in which

¹³ Georg Lukács, 'Narrate or Describe?' in *Writer and Critic*, trans. by Arthur Kahn (London: Merlin Press, 1978), p. 147.

¹⁴ See 'Die Gegenwartsbedeutung des kritischen Realismus', in *Essays über Realismus* (Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1971), p. 590.

¹⁵ Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), p. 40.

all difference is sublimated. Needless to say, Hegel believes in the final triumph of consciousness over the action. Even though Marx arguably draws on enlightenment strategies such as “de-mystification”, more significantly, he seems to indirectly highlight the concept of mediation as an action in his discussion of Hegel.

Obviously focusing on this principle in his explanation of Lukács’ theoretical originality, Jameson argues that ‘the privileged relationship to reality, the privileged mode of knowledge of the world will no longer be a static, contemplative one, will no longer be one of pure reason or abstract thought, but will be the union of thought and action that the Marxists call *praxis*, will be one of activity conscious of itself’.¹⁷

Putting an emphasis on mediation, Lukács distinguished his realism from “mirroring realism”. Lukács plainly argues that writers should take the opportunity to reach a higher aesthetic level by means of realism rather than symbolism. In Lukács’ view, therefore, symbolism is a mirror in which writers’ subjectivity, not external objectivity, reflects itself. Lukács designates this non-aesthetic aspect as “mannerism”, in the sense that this reflection comes to produce repetitively a mirror image as it works. It is in this way that the problem of Lukács’ realism does not arise out of his reflection theory, but rather its pedagogical purpose out of providing a user’s guide to revolutionary literature.

In spite of the practical aspect of Lukács’ realism, the theory of reflection is still the most suspicious element in Lukács’ defence of realism. In particular, Adorno insists that Lukács simply considers the formal and stylistic aspects of an artwork to be reactionary decadence.¹⁸ Adorno’s argument is that form is ‘self-antagonistic and

¹⁶ G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. by A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 136.

¹⁷ Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Form: Twentieth Century Dialectical Theories of Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), p. 188.

¹⁸ See Theodor W. Adorno, ‘Reconciliation under Duress’, in *Aesthetics and Politics*, trans. by Rodney Livingstone (London: Verso, 1980), p. 153. For more details on Adorno’s defence of form against

refracted, through which each and every successful work separates itself from the merely existing'.¹⁹ In short, Adorno's defence of form presupposes the autonomy of the artwork distinguished from reality – the artwork obtains its autonomous totality by rejecting realism. Adorno's anti-realist aesthetics has influenced both the defenders of Lukács as well as his opponents.

Despite their sympathetic reception of Lukács, for instance, Jameson and Michael Löwy are not interested in his formulation of reflection theory. Their focuses are on the early Lukács of *History and Class Consciousness* where he explicitly formulates his theory against the Kantian concept of reflection. What offers a philosophical ground for the Lukácsian formulation of realism is that form is a specific spatiality in which the temporality of reality has been fixed. For Lukács, therefore, form is a spatialisation of time in which the logic of content is structured by mediation between author and reality. In Lukács' terms, that is to say, "content" does not so much designate a monadic unity of reality as rather heterogeneous reality itself – one form does not have one content but many contents. This Lukácsian concept of content is incisively drawn from the way in which Lukács understands reality as the total sum of events.

The issue that Lukács seriously raises in this formulation of realism arises from his disenchantment with Kantian transcendental aesthetics, in which Kant presupposes space and time as *a priori* epistemological conditions. For Kant, space and time do not belong to experience but rather to the *a priori* condition of experience, in the sense that every experience is constituted within a specific combination of spatiality and temporality. In this respect, Kant regards time and space as 'two sources of knowledge, from which bodies of *a priori* synthetic knowledge can

Lukács' stress on content, see Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. by Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p. 142.

be derived'.²⁰ In other words, time and space as the pure form of all intuition make *a priori* synthetic knowledge possible. However, Lukács refutes this Kantian proposition of time and space as *a priori* conditions of knowledge. Lukács presumes that time is not a homogenous medium, in the sense that the world is not constituted by a conglomerate of individual things but by a complex of events.²¹ Largely endorsing the Hegelian dialectic, Lukács understands reality as combinations of essence and appearance – crucially for Lukács these categories of essence and appearance are not merely by-products of consciousness but the effects of the outer world. No doubt, this is where Lukács reverses the Kantian idea of representation.

Explicitly distinguishing reality from fact, Lukács defines reality as the changeability everlasting of essence and appearance. From this perspective, the Lukácsian category of totality comes to exist in its own right – ‘the category of totality ... determines not only the object of knowledge but also the subject’.²² In other words, the subject of totality means the classes in capitalist society. Therefore, Lukács definitely designates the collective subjectivity of classes when he mentions the dialectical relationship between subject and object.

More controversially, what Lukács apparently rejected in *History and Class Consciousness* was the very Kantian concept of reflection; Lukács’ realism seems to betray his early theoretical principle of non-reflection theory. Lukács criticised the Kantian concept of reflection, because in this formulation ‘we find the theoretical embodiment of the duality of thought and existence, consciousness and reality’.²³ According to Lukács, Kant strove to solve this duality by logic; yet, ‘his theory of the

¹⁹ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 142.

²⁰ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. by Norman Kemp Smith (London: Macmillan, 1929), p. 80.

²¹ See Martin Jay, *Downcast eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), p. 196.

synthetic function of consciousness in the creation of the domain of theory could not arrive at any *philosophical* solution to the question',²⁴ in the sense that Kant searched for the answer only in the realm of metaphysics. That is to say, there is the fundamental duality inherent in the Kantian formulation that presumes the dichotomy of phenomenon and the thing-in-itself. Lukács was well acquainted with this philosophical dilemma as follows:

It must be clearly understood that every contemplative stance and thus every kind of 'pure thought' that must undertake the task of knowing an object outside itself raises the problem of subjectivity and objectivity. The object of thought (as something outside) becomes something alien to the subject. This raises the problem of whether thought corresponds to the object!²⁵

Even with a cursory reading, it is clear that Lukács decisively presents the meaning of reflection in this quotation as correspondence, not using the term as in his later conceptualisation of reflection. As Béla Királyfalvi argues, 'in Lukács' system the term "reflection" is a constant reminder of the objectivity of art, but it definitely does not have a passive, mechanical meaning, with implications of copying, photography, or any kind of naturalistic technique'.²⁶ Seemingly, Lukács preserves his criticism of the Kantian concept of reflection even when he attacks naturalism as "mirror realism", adapting Lenin's reflection theory. Therefore, it must be stressed that Lukács depends on a different terminology in his defence of realism from his early theoretical articulation. Lukács regards Kant's philosophical impasse as an inevitable consequence of the "theory" itself – while he defends the positive feature of

²² Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, trans. by Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1999), p. 28.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 200.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*

Kant's epistemology. In other words, Lukács does want to retain the optimistic factor of Kant's philosophical question as to the relationship of subject and object, while minimising a metaphysical aspect innate in Kant's theory. The solution that Lukács alternatively prepares for Kant's theoretical dead-end is to introduce the concept of totality. Even though many theoretical opponents harshly attack Lukács' concept of totality, few properly present an alternative for the concept, much less an acceptable criticism of it.²⁷

Despite the constructive aspect of Lukács' aesthetics, it is interesting that most of his defenders even go so far as to regard Lukács' realism as another version of a vulgar reflection theory. The conspiracy of silence around Lukács' reflection theory, I suggest, arises from Lukács' political career and his compromise with "official Marxism". No doubt, this individual history leads to the prejudice that Lukács' defence of realism is nothing less than a by-product of his politics. Even for Jameson, who has consistently endorsed Lukács, it is the uncomfortable truth that Lukács used a naïve reflection theory to privilege the position of realism over other representational modes. In a rather coy reference to reflection theory, Jameson situates this disturbing aspect of Lukács' realism within the historical condition in which Lukács' theory was constructed. After describing the dichotomy of base and superstructure which is commonly attacked as a vulgar Marxist theory by non-Marxists, Jameson defends this classical Marxist schema in the sense that it can be prolonged into allegorical interpretation.²⁸ In his following discussion, Jameson states

²⁶ Béla Királyfalvi, *The Aesthetics of György Lukács* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), p. 56.

²⁷ Adapting Benjamin's terminology, for instance, Adorno attempts to substitute the concept of totality for that of constellations. A more detailed discussion about the comparison between totality and constellation can be found in Chapter 2.

²⁸ See Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), pp. 32-33.

that 'Lukács' essay on realism may serve as a central example of the way in which the cultural text is taken as an essentially allegorical model of society as a whole'.²⁹

For Jameson, allegory is a rhetorical strategy produced under conditions where one cannot represent something, but, at the same time, one cannot not represent something.³⁰ To put it another way, the represented narrative is essentially allegorical in the sense that form is always less perfect than material reality itself. Jameson's understanding of Lukács comes through an allegorical approach to realism. Jameson suggests the way in which "typification", Lukács' key concept in his conceptualisation of realism, can be grasped as an allegorical method that allows us to read the mode of production in terms of an ultimately determining reality. In short, Jameson depends on allegorical interpretation in order to recuperate Lukács' realism. He then reaches a resolution of criticisms of Lukács' reflection theory by historicising Lukács' work. A direct consequence of this historicisation is the theoretical eclipse of the most political dimension of Lukács' realism.

The hidden impetus behind Lukács' formulation of realism was his own intellectual demand to overcome the subjectivist tendency in *History and Class Consciousness*. The following quotation from 'Preface to the New Edition' elucidates this transition undertaken by Lukács.

My intention, then, was to chart the correct and authentic class consciousness of the proletariat, distinguishing it from 'public opinion surveys' (a term not yet in currency) and to confer upon it an indisputably practical objectivity. I was unable, however, to progress beyond the notion of an 'imputed' [sugerechnet] class consciousness ... Hence, what I had intended subjectively, and what Lenin had arrived at as the result of an authentic Marxist analysis of a practical movement, was transformed in my account into a purely intellectual result and thus into something contemplative. In my presentation it would indeed be a miracle if this 'imputed' consciousness could turn into revolutionary praxis.³¹

²⁹ Ibid., p. 33.

³⁰ For Jameson's own explanation of allegory, see Fredric Jameson, 'Marxism and the Historicity of Theory: An Interview with Fredric Jameson', *New Literary History*, 29 (1998), 353-83 (p. 376).

³¹ Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, pp. xviii -xix.

When considering that Lukács wrote this ‘Preface’ in 1967, we realise that this statement aims to valorise Lenin’s achievement. Lukács drew on Lenin as a symbolic authority in order to attack Stalinism’s legitimacy. When interpreting Lukács’ words, we become aware that his emphasis was not on Lenin as such but rather on a “practical” objectivity analysed by Lenin. In this sense, what Lukács initially intended in his transformation from ‘pure class consciousness’ to a reflection theory was rooted in his political and philosophical resolution that appears to be in opposition to his early theoretical trajectory. It is not difficult to see that Lukács’ way of accepting Lenin’s reflection theory is entirely different from the official Marxist model. Michael Löwy argues that Lukács’ book on Lenin is ‘in complete conformity with Leninist orthodoxy but, curiously enough, immediately enters into conflict with the official interpretation of Leninism in the Soviet Union, which is that of Stalin’.³² In this respect, the original idea of Lukácsian realism has no relation to Stalinist dialectical materialism. Unlike Stalin’s socialist realism, Lukács’ model does not presuppose the transparency of reflection between consciousness and the natural law – “thinking” is not merely a by-product of the mechanical causality outside of human consciousness. According to Stalinist dialectical materialism, “thinking” is nothing less than a cognitive function whereby human consciousness simply obtains knowledge of the natural law.³³ Describing the transitional moment in Lukács, Alex Callinicos states:

³² Eva L. Corredor, *Lukács after Communism: Interviews with Contemporary Intellectuals* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), p. 18. Around this moment, Lukács’ views of Stalinism and USSR became more radical. For a detailed discussion, see Löwy, ‘Lukács and Stalinism’, in *New Left Review*, 91 (1975), 25-45.

³³ See Oskar Negt, ‘Marxismus als Legitimationswissenschaft: Zur Genese der stalinistischen Philosophie’, in *Nikolai Bucharin/Abram Deborin: Kontroversen über dialektischen und mechanistischen Materialismus* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1974).

It must be stressed, however, that *History and Class Consciousness* is a transitional work. The last two essays, 'Critical Observations on Rosa Luxemburg's Critique of the Russian Revolution', and 'Towards a Methodology of the Problem of Organization', form a unity with Lukács's little book, *Lenin* (1924). Together these texts represent a marked shift away from the messianism of his early Marxism, and an acceptance of Lenin's 'revolutionary Realpolitik'.³⁴

It seems to me that this gives us a clue as to the reason why Lukács vehemently formulated a reflection theory, which seemed to be sharply contrasted to subjectivism. My contention is that after *History and Class Consciousness*, when he began strategically following Lenin, Lukács' aesthetic of realism is fundamentally opposed to the pseudo-socialist realism presented by Stalin. In this respect, Lukács' realism can be seen as a form of anti-Stalinist code disguising its political meaning under the veil of aesthetics. From mid-1930s onwards, Lukács launched critical sallies against the naturalism of writers such as Zola and Flaubert. Interestingly, Jameson indicates that 'in Lukács' work, "naturalism" is a code word for "socialist realism"'.³⁵ For Jameson, Lukács' criticism of Zola is a strategy to disguise his attack on 'what is publicly impossible to attack as such'.³⁶ In this way, Jameson says that 'Zola was not only a writer with certain political positions who might demand to be judged on their basis, or evaluated on their basis, but he was also the inventor of a mode of writing, naturalism, which was current in Lukács's day and which Lukács indeed identified with socialist realism'.³⁷ In *Gelebtes Denken*, Lukács himself briefly mentions his Leninist differentiation as 'opposed to Stalin's mechanical uniformity'.³⁸ This fragment clearly reveals the complicated political and aesthetic meaning of Lukácsian realism.

³⁴ Alex Callinicos, *Marxism and Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), p. 78.

³⁵ Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, p. 37.

³⁶ Corredor, *Lukács after Communism*, p. 78.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Lukács, *Record of a Life*, p. 165.

Meanwhile, there is a broad consensus amongst Western intellectuals that Lukács' realism is nothing less than an aesthetic collaboration with Stalinism. For example, David Pike attempts to stress the Stalinist aspect of Lukács' realism, arguing that in the period of Soviet exile, 1933-1939, Lukács wittingly supported Stalin's doctrine with his aesthetic writings. Pike claims that 'Stalin's remarks at the seventeenth congress were significant for Lukács because he claimed the struggle for objectivity in art, which for him was pre-eminently a question of form, to be part of the battle "against capitalist residues in the consciousness of the people"'.³⁹ From this standpoint, Pike regards 'Art and Objective Truth' as evidence that Lukács coupled his aesthetic idea to Stalinism.

However, the way in which Pike criticises Lukács' realism is quite problematic. His assertion that Lukács' realism is a by-product of Stalinism does not seriously consider the question as to how a political doctrine imposes on literary criticism. The problem lies in the way in which Pike reductively conflates Lukács' political agenda with his aesthetic idea. Lukács' formulation of realism is more complicated than what Pike describes. As Tom Rockmore acknowledges, 'Lukács' early interest in German neo-Kantianism influenced his entire later development, specifically including his aesthetic views'.⁴⁰ Tihanov also claims that Lukács' doctrine of realism 'was shaped in the process of responding not only to Hegel's concept of totality but also to the attempts of *Lebensphilosophie* to reconcile form and life'.⁴¹ In this sense, a judgement that the principle of Lukácsian realism is nothing less than an aesthetic variant of Stalinism cannot be easily delivered.

³⁹ David Pike, *Lukács and Brecht* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1985), p. 144.

⁴⁰ Tom Rockmore, 'Lukács, Marxist Aesthetics, and Truth', in *Jahrbuch der internationalen Georg-Lukács-Gesellschaft*, 2001, (Bielefeld: Aisthesis, 2001).

⁴¹ Tihanov, *The Master and the Slave*, p. 103.

More problematically, Pike overlooks the fact that Lukács completed the book on Lenin, which shows the essential idea of his realism, in 1924. In this book, Lukács argues that Lenin's assessment of reality is 'far more *a purely theoretical superiority in accessing the total process*'.⁴² No doubt, Lukács' understanding of Lenin's theory anticipates his later principle of realism: the realistic form of an artwork is superior to other aesthetic forms in its ability to access the total process of reality. Even though one can see a similarity between Lukácsian realism and Stalinism, it is difficult to consider it as an essential and fundamental reconciliation.

Rather than Pike's criticism, Rockmore's analysis of the affinity between Lukács' realism and so-called "official Marxism" might be better taken for granted. Rockmore points out an interesting aspect of Lukács' formulation of realism: 'the reflection theory of knowledge has no demonstrable source in Marx, the source of Lukács's earlier critique of this view. Hence, in returning to the reflection theory which he had earlier criticised, Lukács now agrees with Marxism, even if necessary against Marx'.⁴³ This logical syllogism discloses that Lukács' realism is no more than symptomatic evidence of his alteration of Marx; Lukács' formulation of Marxism is created by his theoretical reinvention emphasising the Hegelian aspect of Marx. As Tihanov indicates, 'while an uncontested political affiliation was driving him towards a full embrace of Marx, a lasting sense of measure, historical continuity, and the unrestricted sway of reason was propelling him towards an appreciation of Hegel as the philosopher *par excellence*, whose thought, regardless of all delusions and limitations, posits the true scale and depth of Marxism'.⁴⁴

⁴² Georg Lukács, *Lenin: A Study on the Unity of his Thought*, trans. by Nicholas Jacobs (London: NLB, 1970), p.42.

⁴³ Rockmore, 'Lukács, Marxist Aesthetics, and Truth', p. 147-8.

⁴⁴ Tihanov, *The Master and the Slave*, p. 248.

However, there is another issue raised by Lukács' modification of Hegel.

Analysing Hegel's conceptualisation of the dialectic of labour in *The Young Hegel*.

Lukács argues that

Man becomes human only through work, only through the activity in which the independent laws governing objects become manifest, forcing men to acknowledge them i.e. to extend the organs of their own knowledge, if they would ward off destruction.⁴⁵

According to Tihanov, this book, *The Young Hegel*, is Lukács' doctoral dissertation submitted to the Institute of Philosophy of the Soviet Academy of Sciences during Lukács' second stay (1933-45) in Moscow.⁴⁶ What is at stake here is that Lukács' analysis of Hegel can be easily compatible with the Stalinist doctrine of dialectical materialism. For Stalinism, the process of labour is an objectified system legitimated by natural law. This seems to be easily followed by the notorious confusion between economic mechanism and natural law. Lukács' discussion of Hegel seems to be insensitive to such a dangerous possibility. Not surprisingly, this is where Löwy raises an issue on Lukács' political harmonisation with Stalin to solve the dilemma of 'either "reconciling with reality" by accepting the Stalinist Soviet Union or breaking with the communist movement'.⁴⁷

For Lukács, there would be no choice except actually existing socialism, in the sense that his philosophical premise was grounded on a fundamental antagonism towards capitalism. This principle of his way of understanding the world system has frequently been considered the result of Lukács' dogmatic "evolutionism". When he drew on Lenin's reflection theory, Lukács presupposed that the evolution of the

⁴⁵ Georg Lukács, *The Young Hegel: Studies in the Relations between Dialectics and Economics*, trans. by Rodney Livingstone (London: Merlin Press, 1975), p. 327.

⁴⁶ Tihanov, *The Master and the Slave*, p. 246.

artwork necessarily reflects the material conditions of society. Lukács' theory of reflection according to the traditional dualism of base and superstructure remained established until the early 1930s. Criticising the Lukácsian exploration of a modernist work of art, for example, Perry Anderson says that 'the basic error of Lukács's optic here was its evolutionism'.⁴⁸ According to Anderson, evolutionism means that 'time ... differs from one epoch to another, but within each epoch all sectors of social reality move in synchrony with each other, such that decline at one level must be reflected in descent at every other'.⁴⁹ In the same way, Anderson uses evolutionism in his rumination on Lukács' criticism of modernism. It goes without saying that Lukács' understanding of "healthy art and sick art" can be criticised as the result of his evolutionism. This is the main point of Anderson's argument in that Lukács' attack on modernism is anachronistic. Anderson convincingly points out the problem of Lukácsian reflection theory, yet, at the same time, he fails to observe that Lukács' sense of evolution metaphorically alludes to the utopian unity of subject and object in artistic reflections. To quote Lukács:

When we consider mankind's evolution through the ages, art is seen to be one of the most important vehicles for the production and reproduction and for the development and continuity of man's consciousness and sense of identity. Because great and healthy art fixes those moments of our development – otherwise transitory – that point ahead and enhance man's self-consciousness and are thus lasting and because perfected forms allow the re-experiencing of these moments, great and healthy works of art remain an ever-renewing treasure for mankind.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Corredor, *Lukács after Communism*, p. 19.

⁴⁸ Perry Anderson, 'Marshall Berman: Modernity and Revolution', in *A Zone of Engagement* (London: Verso, 1992), p. 33.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Georg Lukács, 'Healthy or Sick Art?', in *Writer and Critic*, trans. by Arthur Kahn (London: Merlin Press, 1978), p. 109.

What Lukács argues here implies that “perfected forms” are indicative of the utopian reconciliation between subject and object in narrative. That is to say, form must be grasped as the incarnation of an author’s utopian impulses towards totality. Contrary to Anderson’s argument, Callinicos maintains that the most important influence on Lukács, including other Hegelian Marxists such as Antonio Gramsci and Karl Korsch, was ‘the anti-naturalist revolt at the turn of the nineteenth century’.⁵¹ In short, a significant philosophical factor in Lukács was not evolutionist materialism in the sense of naturalism, but anti-empiricist materialism in the sense of Marxism. What Lukács essentially aimed to do throughout his works was nothing less than ‘the reinterpretation of historical materialism’.⁵² In a sense, the suspicious aspects of evolutionism are inevitably internalised in Lukács’ formulation, insofar as he endorses the orthodox dualism of base and superstructure. However, Lukács’ case was not similar to Christopher Caudwell’s vulgar dualism, precisely because from the outset Lukács’ involvement with Marxism was based on an anti-empiricist materialism.

Lukács does not endorse the “empiricist ideology” but “experience” as such.⁵³ Certainly, the way in which Lukács privileges experience is drawn from Hegel’s distinction between empiricism and experience. Regarding experience as “raw sensory material” distinguished from abstract philosophical thinking, Hegel believes that he can refute empiricism. In fact, Hegel’s differentiating of experience and the abstract is derived from Kant and Hume, who emphasise the indeterminacy of

⁵¹ Callinicos, *Marxism and Philosophy*, p. 71.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 72.

⁵³ See Georg Lukács, *Conversations with Lukács*, ed. by Theo Pinkus (London: The Merlin Press, 1974), pp. 13-14. Lukács claims: ‘someone is crossing the road. He might be the most obstinate neo-positivist in his epistemology, denying all reality, but he will nevertheless be convinced at the pedestrian crossing that, if he does not remain where he is, he will really be run over by a real car, rather than some kind of mathematical formulation of his existence being run over by the mathematical function of the car, or his idea by the idea of the car’.

relationship between experience and thought.⁵⁴ This discrimination is implicit in the way in which Lukács defends realism in the sense that an author's own experience is more important than his abstract idea. It is in this sense that Lukács considers realism as more aesthetic than naturalism and modernism. That is to say, what Lukács pursues through his arguments about realism is this sensuous material that is independent of abstract thinking in the Hegelian sense.

Lukács inevitably drew on the orthodox concept of base and superstructure, as he did not yet have the appropriate narrative to manifest his idea of realism at that moment. In addition, the theoretical transition of Lukács' realism was definitely witnessed after the mid-1930s. In the face of Stalinism, Lukács launched a disguised criticism of official Marxism through the epistemological category of realism.⁵⁵ It is in this sense that Lukács' realism must be considered as the aesthetic surface of a political contention aimed at correcting the Stalinist voluntarism. This is why Lukács precisely stressed objectivity in opposition to subjectivism.⁵⁶

In general, Lukács stresses the philosophical doctrine of realism: first, materiality outside our knowledge determines language. Second, the process of thought reflects the world as reality. Third, appearance hides a more fundamental reality which exists independently of thought. This is the essential philosophical guideline that Lukács observes in his argument for realism. Therefore, Lukács emphasises narration rather than description in the sense that real entities are concealed by their visual appearance. In other words, Lukács' realism is an attempt to

⁵⁴ See Michael Inwood, *A Hegel Dictionary* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), p. 96.

⁵⁵ See Georg Lukács, 'Art and Objective Truth', in *Writer and Critic*, trans. by Arthur Kahn (London: Merlin Press, 1978).

⁵⁶ For more detailed discussion, see László Illés, 'Georg Lukács' Bemühungen um Realismustheorie', in *Literaturtheorie und Literaturkritik in der frühsowjetischen Diskussion* (Berlin: Weimar, 1999), p. 567. What Illés enumerates in this essay is that Lukács' realism must be understood in the historical context of Russian socialism. According to this argument, Lukács' realism can be regarded as a coded attack on Stalinist subjectivism.

make a hidden reality visible. For Lukács, visualisation serves to suppress reality by means of an illusionary inversion in which subjectivity takes the place of objectivity.

In Lukács' sense, realism does not mean an imaginary correspondence, as in naturalism and symbolism, but a "self-containment" that intensively reflects everyday life in "proper proportion". Self-containment is the way in which the form of the artwork reflects social reality, as in the case of synecdoche. Lukács states that 'the totality of the work of art is rather intensive'.⁵⁷ In other words, the form of the artwork is 'the circumscribed and self-contained ordering of those factors which objectively are of decisive significance for the portion of life depicted, which determine its existence and motion, its specific quality and its place in the total life process'.⁵⁸ Lukács' definition of form as self-containment incisively reserves the possibility of the changeability of form in each historical moment – in Lukács' terms, 'history is the history of the unceasing overthrow of the objective forms that shape the life of man'.⁵⁹ From this perspective, a specific artistic form is manifested by the each particular historical epoch. Therefore, what Lukács called "perfected forms" designates a self-contained form in which the intensive totality of artwork cognitively maps the social reality in proper proportion.

As we have seen, Lukács' realism was a detour to get the insight of an alternative socialist system in terms of aesthetic epistemology. For Lukács, aesthetics was always the reverse side of politics, so that his criticism of naturalism and modernism largely aimed to suggest the practical aesthetic criterion for socialist movements. In a sense, Lukács' realism can be said to be a "symbolic act" to solve contradictions in actually existing socialism. That is to say, Lukács' realism contains more politically significant implications than his opponents expect. Regarding his

⁵⁷ Lukács, 'Art and Objective Truth', p. 38.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

unflinching fidelity to the teleological aim of socialism, it can be argued that Lukács' theoretical pursuit towards realism in the 1930s came through the failure of his political career.

In 1928, Lukács drew up the 'Blum Theses' for the Second Congress of the Hungarian Communist Party. As Michael Löwy points out, all that lies behind these draft Theses was 'an application to Hungary of the right turn of the Comintern',⁶⁰ and, at the same time, 'both a continuation of the line of the years 1924-7 and an augury of the Popular Front strategy of 1934-8'.⁶¹ According to Löwy, Lukács' suggestions were too late and too early in the sense that 'these Theses were to be the last echo of the right turn, coming as they did at the very beginning of the International's new 'left' turn'.⁶² This misfortune led Lukács to confront hostile criticisms and consequently to write his "hypocritical" self-criticism. Lukács acknowledged this in the 'New Preface' as follows:

When I heard from a reliable source that Béla Kun was planning to expel me from the Party as a 'Liquidator', I gave up the struggle, as I was well aware of Kun's prestige in the International, and I published a 'Self-criticism'. I was indeed firmly convinced that I was in the right but I knew also – e.g. from the fate that had befallen Karl Korsch – that to be expelled from the Party meant that it would no longer be possible to participate actively in the struggle against Fascism. I wrote my self-criticism as an 'entry ticket' to such activity as I neither could nor wished to continue to work in the Hungarian movement in the circumstances.⁶³

Regardless of some polemical problems arising from these remarks, Lukács' unconditional capitulation to his inner opponents was the consequence of his own circumstances. As Löwy explains, Lukács saw the situation as an 'isolated

⁵⁹ Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, p. 186.

⁶⁰ Löwy, 'Lukács and Stalinism', p. 29.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 29.

⁶³ Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, p. xxx.

phenomenon' and 'temporary aberration'.⁶⁴ As a result, we could consider Lukács' Theses to be an incorrect anticipation, in the sense that the new turn, which would provide an opportunity for the Theses, would only come when 'it was too late, after Hitler's victory and the establishment of fascism in the heart of Europe'.⁶⁵ This analysis would be incomplete without mentioning another important element manifested in the 'Blum Theses'. We need to realise that these Theses provide notable evidence for understanding Lukács' theoretical turn from early pure class-consciousness theory into reflection theory. Löwy's analysis is validated by linking Lukács' political non-fulfilment to his reflection theory. As Löwy points out, 'the ebbing of the revolutionary tide, and the internal changes in the USSR after 1924' forced Lukács to feel disillusionment.⁶⁶

Disoriented by the disappearance of the revolutionary upsurge, Lukács clung on to the only two pieces of 'solid' evidence which seemed to him to remain: the USSR and traditional culture. Seeing that the new, transcendent synthesis had failed, he would at least attempt a mediation, a compromise and an alliance between these two different worlds.⁶⁷

For Lukács, this "reconciliation" of bourgeois-democratic culture and the socialist movement may appear to be more realistic than the utopian messianism that his early hopes presupposed. Lukács confessed that Lenin's intellectual personality, a 'philosopher of praxis, a man who passionately transforms theory into practice, a man whose sharp attention is always focused on the nodal points where theory becomes practice, practice becomes theory', forced him to revise the messianic features of

⁶⁴ Löwy, 'Lukács and Stalinism', p. 31.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

History and Class Consciousness.⁶⁸ According to Lukács, this was the process in which he came closer to reality. From utopian messianism to “*Realpolitik*”, Lukács attempted to develop a reflection theory derived from Lenin, not in an abstract philosophical sense, but in a practical sense.

After the mid-1930s, Lukács intended to wrest realism from Stalinism. As Johan Vogt indicates, Lukács’ harsh criticism of authors such as Hugo and Zola ‘struck also the panegyrical Soviet novels of the Stalin period’.⁶⁹ As has been discussed, in distinguishing Stalinism from Leninism, Lukács emphasised that Lenin’s policy was more “realistic” than Stalinism, in the sense that the Leninist method was nothing less than an attempt to present policy changes as ‘logical consequences and improvements of the previous line’.⁷⁰ For Lukács, Lenin’s method was more suitable than Stalinism, for reflecting the discontinuous reality of history. One of the reasons why Lukács emphasised the rupture between Lenin and Stalin was that ‘Stalinism presented all socialist history as a continuous and correct development’.⁷¹ Convincingly, this statement reveals a clue whereby we can approach Lukács’ reflection theory without any misleading prejudice. Once Lukács embraced this “discontinuity” of history, he would have had to correct his utopian messianism which seemed to be the dominant feature of *History and Class Consciousness*. Lukács confessed this transition to solve this problem of historical development as follows:

In the twenties, Korsch, Gramsci and I tried in our different ways to come to grips with the problem of social necessity and the mechanistic interpretation of it that was the heritage of the Second International. We inherited this problem, but none of us – not even Gramsci, who was perhaps the best of us – solved it. We

⁶⁸ Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, p. xxxii.

⁶⁹ Johan Vogt, ‘The Harmony of Passions and Reason’, in *Georg Lukács Festschrift* (Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1965), p. 34.

⁷⁰ Georg Lukács, ‘Lukács on his Life and Work’, *New Left Review*, 68 (1971), 49-58 (p. 51). In this interview, Lukács says that a complete rupture with Stalinism is necessary, in the sense that Stalinism abandoned Leninist method.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

all went wrong, and today it would be quite mistaken to try and revive the works of those times as if they were valid now. In the West, there is a tendency to erect them into ‘classics of heresy’, but we have no need for that today.⁷²

In these remarks, Lukács’ intention appears to be quite obvious. What he wanted to historicise was his early epoch, in which he tried to establish the system of knowledge of necessity in historical process. This aim of his theoretical work led him to pronouncing ‘pure class consciousness’ based on utopian messianism. As Lukács himself confessed, this was where the problematic aspect of his early subjectivism came to exist. Lukács did not agree with Western Marxism’s emphasis on his early work and the assessment that later Lukács is a digression from early Lukács. While this may have become the fate of Lukács’ reception in Western intellectual contexts, it has, to an extent, paradoxically betrayed him.

2. Forgetting Lukács

Notwithstanding his criticism in *Marxism and Form* of the undialectical approach to Lukács taken by Adorno, Susan Sontag and George Steiner, Jameson also seems to hesitate in acknowledging Lukács’ reflection theory as a kernel of his realism.⁷³ Jameson rather encourages the early Lukács’ view in which realism had not yet genuinely arisen in his theoretical horizon. A significant part in Lukács’ positive reception by Jameson lies in Lukács’ theory of totality and reification, both relatively independent of realism. This is where Jameson’s ruling out of the possibility of any practical understanding of Lukács’ realism comes to be suspect, in the sense that his revision of Lukács’ theory represses its actuality in the name of historicisation. Rejecting Lukács’ negative aspects such as reflection theory, what Jameson retains

⁷² Ibid.

from Lukács is Hegelian dialectics closely related to his theory of totality and reification. In this sense, Jameson also follows the general trajectory of Western Marxism in which the Hegelian dialectic comes to be a resolution to the nightmare of Stalinism.

No doubt, Adorno's essay, 'Reconciliation under Duress', was one of the origins that motivated the hostile attacks on Lukács in the Western intellectual context. Throughout this highly judgmental essay, Adorno consistently reveals his antipathy to and criticism of Lukács. To quote Adorno:

Like Brecht, he would like to widen the concept of socialist realism, which has been used for decades to stifle any spontaneous impulse, any product incomprehensible or suspect to the apparatchiks, so as to make room for works that rise above the level of despicable trash. He ventures a timid opposition in gestures which show him to be paralysed from the outset by the consciousness of his own impotence. His timidity is no mere tactic. Lukács's personal integrity is above all suspicion. But the conceptual structure to which he has sacrificed his intellect is so restricted that it suffocates anything which might have breathed more freely; the *sacrificio dell'intelletto* does not let the intellect off scot-free. This casts a melancholy light on Lukács's unconcealed nostalgia for his own early writings.⁷⁴

Adorno's way of understanding Lukács, in which a split between early Lukács and later Lukács must be stressed, strongly affected the attitude of many Western Marxists' towards Lukács.⁷⁵ Not surprisingly, a marked discrepancy in Lukács' whole theoretical career was easily ascribed to his conciliation under official Marxism. Adorno's bitter counter-attack on Lukács' critique of modernism and avant-garde as decadence, which may appear to Western Marxists as cogent, is worthy of note, yet, at the same time, his condemnation of Lukács is quite paradoxical. For his statement is exactly the reverse of Eastern European criticism of Lukács since the 1950s: Lukács

⁷³ See Jameson, *Marxism and Form*, p. 160.

⁷⁴ Adorno, 'Reconciliation under Duress', p. 152.

⁷⁵ There are a few exceptional cases such as Raymond Williams and Fredric Jameson.

was regarded as an opportunist and anti-Stalinist in East Germany.⁷⁶ This paradoxical situation is indicative of Lukács' contradictory status and must be interpreted by more complex evaluation. It also highlights the fact that Lukács' theoretical track is more complicated than his opponents suggest. It is difficult to deny that Adorno's anti-communism reinforced the rejection of Lukács' realism in his theoretical pursuit. In his critique of Lukács, Adorno deliberately underestimates Lukács' theoretical turn after the mid-1930s. Never considering the anti-Stalinist aspects of Lukács' realism, Adorno simply highlights the conspiracy of Lukács' compromise with Stalinism.⁷⁷ However, Lukács had already estranged himself from USSR when Adorno published the essay. According to Andrew Rubin, 'Lukács had expressed his growing disillusionment with the Soviet Union and supported the Nagy regime against the Soviet invasion of his native Hungary in 1956'. Ironically speaking, it is in this sense that 'Adorno reconciled Lukács' work to the political duress of anti-communism'.⁷⁸

On the other hand, Adorno's attack on Lukács can be regarded as a disguised political criticism of Stalinism – presumably Adorno used the symbolic name of Lukács to conceal his political attitude towards actually existing socialism in the guise of an aesthetic debate. Interestingly, Slavoj Žižek describes the way in which the Frankfurt School silently avoided a theoretical confrontation with Stalinism. To quote Žižek:

'Stalinism' (really existing socialism) was thus, for the Frankfurt School, a traumatic topic with regard to which it *had* to remain silent – this silence was the

⁷⁶ After the "uprising" in Hungary in 1956, a fatal criticism of Lukács began to liquidate Lukács' legacy in East Germany. For a crucial document for this process, see Hans Koch., *Georg Lukács und der Revisionismus* (Berlin: Weimar, 1960).

⁷⁷ According to Rubin, Adorno's anti-communism is partly produced by the American anti-communist policy for the Cold War. See Andrew Rubin, 'The Adorno Files' in *Adorno: A Critical Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002).

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 180.

only way for them to retain their inconsistent position of its underlying solidarity with the Western liberal democracy without losing the official mask of its 'radical' leftist critique. Openly acknowledging this solidarity would have deprived the Frankfurt School theorists of their 'radical' aura, changing them into another version of the cold war anti-communist left liberals, while showing too much sympathy for 'really existing socialism' would have forced them to betray their unacknowledged basic commitment.⁷⁹

According to Žižek, this situation was concomitant with 'the fateful shift from concrete socio-economic analysis to philosophical-anthropological generalisation, the shift by means of which the reifying 'instrumental reason' is no longer grounded in concrete capitalist social relations, but itself almost imperceptibly becomes their quasi-transcendental 'principle' or 'foundation'.⁸⁰ Alongside this, the way in which Adorno denigrates Lukács arises from the theoretical articulation that Adorno attempted, that is to say, replacing orthodox Marxism's conceptualisation of the relationship between the oppressor and the oppressed with the concept of administrative society. To put it another way, Adorno's disparagement of Lukács' formulation symptomatically results from his reformulation of the orthodox Marxist presumption – the ruling class is a crucial cause of oppression in class society – with the idea that the oppressed mass supports and preserves the ruling system as much as the ruling class does.⁸¹ No doubt, the emergence of Fascism and Stalinism, and subsequently the political frustration of European leftists influenced Adorno's theoretical trajectory. As Martin Jay points out, Adorno's critique of Lukács was articulated from the failure of the revolutionary optimism symbolically presented by Lukács' formulation.⁸² As a result, the way in which Adorno criticises Lukács'

⁷⁹ Slavoj Žižek, 'Postface' in *A Defence of History and Class Consciousness: Tailism and the Dialectic* (London: Verso, 2000), p. 158.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 157.

⁸¹ See Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. by John Cumming (London: Verso, 1997). For the historical contexts of this theoretical articulation, see Perry Anderson, *Considerations on Western Marxism* (London: NLB, 1976), pp. 33-34.

⁸² See Martin Jay, 'The Concept of Totality in Lukács and Adorno', *Telos*, 32 (1977), 117-137 (p. 128).

revolutionary pursuit as premature led Adorno to legitimise what Anderson describes as the formal shift of the theoretical site from party assemblies to academic departments.⁸³ In other words, Adorno's rejection of Lukács means the theoretical repression of the practical dimension of Lukács' realism.

In this historical context, the renunciation of any direct engagement of socialist practice in Adorno's formulation is part of a wider historical move in Marxist theory from economics and politics towards philosophy. Adorno himself clearly implies the political effect in the beginning of *Negative Dialectics* in which he consistently rejects Lukács' theoretical presupposition which appeared in *History and Class Consciousness*: 'philosophy, which once seemed obsolete, lives on because the moment to realize it was missed. The summary judgment that it had merely interpreted the world, that resignation in the face of reality had crippled it in itself, becomes a defeatism of reason after the attempt to change the world miscarried'.⁸⁴ From this standpoint, Adorno's theoretical rejection of Lukács' realism can be seen as a "symbolic act" in order to solve the political crisis particularly caused by Stalinism, as in the case of Lukács' defence of realism against Stalin's socialist realism. However, Adorno could not take the path that Lukács practically chose, insofar as he conceived actually existing socialism as a product of the premature revolutionary movement.

It is interesting that there are some remarkable similarities between Adorno and Althusser in their rejection of Lukács.⁸⁵ Even though Althusser aimed at repudiating both Lukács and the Frankfurt School at the same time, the enigmatic alliance appeared in their theoretical projects that attack the notion of "expressive totality". As in Adorno's criticism, Althusser also conceives the Lukácsian notion of

⁸³ Perry Anderson, *Considerations on Western Marxism* (London: NLB, 1976), p. 50.

⁸⁴ Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. by E.B. Ashton (London: Routledge, 1973), p. 3.

totality as an “expressive totality” resting on the presumption that a subject invents the totality through self-objectification.⁸⁶ Only considering Lukács’ early conceptualisation of totality in *History and Class Consciousness*, it is not difficult to acknowledge the validity of these criticisms in the sense that the Lukácsian notion designates a totality as the product of a creative act (as in the case of Sartre).⁸⁷ However, Lukács’ concept of totality throughout his works cannot be fixed in single dimension. In other words, the later Lukácsian concept of totality is not so much what Althusser, as well as Adorno, identify in their critiques, but rather the disguised synonym of universal history, aimed at criticising the subjectivism of Stalinism. As Jay properly points out, ‘if expressive totality was retained in Lukács’ thought at all, it was in the guise of a future possibility, as a normative idea, not a descriptive one’.⁸⁸ In a normative sense, according to Jay, totality is ‘a desirable goal towards which humanity should strive in an age of fragmentation’.⁸⁹ Stated another way, it is the teleological aspect of optimism that Adorno and Althusser attempt to liquidate in Lukács’ formulation. It is clear that their critique of Lukács derived from a different historical context than the one in which Lukács had vigorously defended the optimistic vision of proletarian revolution. Therefore, both Adorno and Althusser symbolically used the name of Lukács as the sign of premature Marxist theorising in order to resolve the political problem of actually existing socialism to which Lukács also strove to find the answer. Let me discuss this more through an investigation of Althusserian Marxism.

⁸⁵ For these similarities, see Jay, ‘The Concept of Totality in Lukács and Adorno’, p. 135-37.

⁸⁶ See *ibid.*, p. 130.

⁸⁷ See *ibid.*, p. 124. According to Jay, Lukács is anticipating the distinction Sartre strives to make between a given totality and the process of totalisation.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 131.

After the events of May 1968 in France, Lukács came rapidly to be regarded as one of the old-fashioned theorists whose theoretical paradigms largely rested on humanism and historicism. Nicos Poulantzas stated:

In the theoretical conjuncture in which we were working it was structuralism against historicism, it was Lévi-Strauss against Sartre. It has been extremely difficult for us to make a total rupture from these two problematics. We insisted that for Marxism the main danger was not structuralism but historicism itself. So we directed all our attention against historicism – the problematic of the subject; against the problematics of Sartre and Lukács, and as a result we ‘bent the stick’; and of course this had had effects in our theory itself.⁹⁰

It is not surprising that post-structuralism also retained this criticism of the problematic of the subject. In fact, this problematic of the subject is nothing less than that of the object: the interrelationship of subject and object. Following Marx, Lukács considers the object as the condition of subjectivity, in the sense that the establishment of the subject-object identity is linked to the process of perceiving totality. Lukács’ realism, therefore, can be seen as an aesthetic approach to the subject-object identity from the perspective that the concrete always deconstructs the abstract in terms of epistemological claims towards totality.

Paradoxically, Althusserian literary criticism, with its strong anti-humanistic tendencies, begins from the same epistemological insight which appeared in the later Lukácsian notion of totality. However, the path of the Althusserians is different from that of Lukács. In ‘On Literature as an Ideological Form’, Etienne Balibar and Pierre Macherey argue that the Marxist category of reflection is a ‘reflection without mirror’.⁹¹ According to them, reflection theory serves as a basic definition which

⁹⁰ Stuart Hall and Alan Hunt, ‘Interview with Nicos Poulantzas’, *Marxism Today* (1979), p. 198. Quoted in Kate Soper, *Humanism and Anti-Humanism: Problems of Modern European Thought* (London: Hutchinson, 1986), p. 89.

⁹¹ See Etienne Balibar and Pierre Macherey, ‘On Literature as an Ideological Form’, in *Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader*, ed. by Robert Young (London: Routledge, 1981), pp. 79-99 (p. 83).

separates two aspects: literature as an ideological form and the specific process of literary production.⁹² Influenced by 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses', in which Althusser attempted to revise the humanistic Marxist notion of ideology, they launched an attack on the formalistic structuralism of *Tel Quel* and the normative realism of Lukács.

While maintaining that ideological forms are 'manifested through the workings and history of determinate practices in determinate social relations'⁹³ – the Ideological State Apparatuses – they criticise literary realism in the sense that 'literature is produced through the effect of one or more ideological contradictions'.⁹⁴ Balibar and Macherey suggest a third way in which the objectivity of literature comes to exist in its own right and avoiding the errors of *Tel Quel* and Lukács. To their minds, ideological contradictions and linguistic conflicts in literary formations are already articulated in a schooling system thereby reinforcing the bourgeois state hierarchy. This is where their condemnation of Lukács' realism arises in the sense that 'realism is the key-word of a school';⁹⁵ therefore, the category of realism already dominates all literary fields and influences definitions of literature. It is in this respect that the definition of literature generally seems to be identified with realism – all literature must be realistic. According to Balibar and Macherey, however, the category of reflection is not concerned with realism but with materialism.⁹⁶ Drawing on Brecht and Gramsci rather than Lukács, they argue that in the Marxist sense literature cannot be a category concerned with realism. For Marxism, literature is not so much fiction – fictive image of the real – but rather the production of fiction-effects. In other words, there is no reality in literature but only a reality-effect. From

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

the position of an Althusserian literary criticism, the text simultaneously produces a reality-effect and a fiction-effect. To sum up, fiction and realism, which are generally acknowledged as central concepts of literature, are nothing less than notions produced by literature itself.

Strictly speaking, Balibar and Macherey draw on Althusser's theoretical modification of the conventional concept of reality in their criticisms of literary realism. The Althusserian reconsideration of reality is nothing less than an attempt to acquire "scientific" knowledge of reality reflected in "true" Marxist dialectics and without a Hegelian concept of mediation. For Althusser, dialectics provide the "scientific" way in which we can rule out the empirical fallacy and humanism. Following Althusser, the main logic underpinning Balibar and Macherey's arguments is that the objectivity of literature is produced from constitutions deriving from the way in which 'the effectivity of ideology of bourgeois education is realised'.⁹⁷ Similar to a Lacanian reading of the symbolic relations rather than the imaginary relations, they argue that 'one must not look for unifying effects but for signs of the contradictions (historically determined) which produced them and which appear as unevenly resolved conflicts in the text'.⁹⁸

Furthermore, the antagonism towards humanism leads Balibar and Macherey to argue for "the death of the author". For them, the writer is neither a supreme creator, nor an expendable medium, but rather a 'material agent, an intermediary inserted in a particular place' in the submission of social contradictions.⁹⁹ Not surprisingly, the writer's conditions existing independently of his creation come through a 'particular social division of labour, characteristic of the ideological

⁹⁶ See *ibid.*

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 94.

superstructure of bourgeois society, which individuates him'.¹⁰⁰ In this sense, the "literary effect" rather than "literature" takes place within the reproduction of other ideological effects, in the sense that the effect results from the imaginary resolution of social contradictions. Having seen a literary text as the imaginary resolution of one contradiction within another, we do not need to focus on the role of an author in the literary production, since there is no place to permit the creative competence.

From a materialistic perspective, Balibar and Macherey raise the problem of "literariness" in Lukács' realism, but they underestimate the mediation between the author and literary institutions. On the other hand, Lukács' arguments of realism can be regarded as an attempt to reveal a mediation of the bourgeois literary tradition and revolutionary socialist literature. Lukács does not, in fact, presuppose a humanistic illusion of a Romantic image of an author in his discussion of "great realists". Lukács reminds us that the role of an author is one of historical mediations whereby literary texts dialectically reflect historical reality. In his discussion of Shakespeare in 1964, Lukács says that 'as the golden age of human achievements that now no longer exists, or the utopian aim that should be completed in the future, Shakespeare stands in front of the world against which we must drastically fight to prevent ourselves from total destruction'.¹⁰¹ It may be seen from this that Lukács' consideration of Shakespeare is yet another example of his teleological thinking. However, the significant point in his suggestion is that he posits Shakespeare as a typical model of an author who should face up to dehumanising worldly law. In this sense, Lukács suggests that a singular theatrical scene of Shakespeare cannot be subsumed under a holistic unity without mediation.¹⁰² The only way in which a text gains such unity is through a mediation in

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Georg Lukács, 'Über einen Aspekt der Aktualität Shakespeare', in *Probleme des Realismus III* (Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1965), p. 632, my translation.

¹⁰² See *ibid.*

which the mutual relationships of independent individualities reconstitute themselves. In other words, it is not surprising for Lukács that mediations are the constitutive interrelations of individual entities. Therefore, a significant factor in Lukács' cogitation of the revolutionary role of an author lies in his underscoring of mediation.

3. The Meaning of Lukácsian Realism

Mediation presupposes unstable and contingent situations between writers and reality. Lukács does not stress the relationship of texts and readers; rather he emphasises the principle that an "author's aesthetic view of the world" – and this is not a political tendency but rather an epistemological perception of reality – crucially determines textuality in the sense that social beings cannot exist outside of social conditions.¹⁰³ In his controversial criticism of modernism, Lukács argues that

Crucial, for the critic, is the determination of the direction in which a writer is moving, not the detection of stylistic idiosyncrasies. This is not to say that style is unimportant. On the contrary, I maintain that the more closely we combine an examination of the ideology informing a writer's work with an examination of specific form given to a specific content, the better our analysis will be. That is to say, the critic must establish by examination of the work whether a writer's view of the world is based on the acceptance or rejection of *angst*, whether it involves a flight from reality or a willingness to face up to it.¹⁰⁴

Lukács' indication of the circumspective view of reality means that writers cannot depict the whole of social reality, in the sense that 'reality is always richer, more multifaceted than any law'.¹⁰⁵ Thus, writers can merely reflect reality in proportion in terms of "typification". In Lukács' formulation, "typification" is closely

¹⁰³ For Lukács' own discussion of this subject, see Georg Lukács, 'Das Problem der Perspektive', in *Probleme des Realismus I* (Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1971), pp. 653-55.

¹⁰⁴ Georg Lukács, *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*, trans. by John and Necke Mander (London: Merlin Press, 1963), p. 83.

¹⁰⁵ Lukács, 'Art and Objective Truth', p. 37.

related to “self-containment” as the way of constructing the form of artwork. In this respect, the reflection in proportion does not necessarily mean that literary textuality is merely the correspondent mirroring of social reality, but rather the formal “self-containment” in which an intense totality of artwork synecdochically signifies the whole worldly reality. To put it another way, Lukács understands the reflection of artwork through the formulation that the whole is properly reflected in a part, at the same time, a part fully manifests the whole. In this sense, typification is what Fredric Jameson would call a cognitive mapping whereby an author reconstructs social reality in proper proportion. From this standpoint, Lukács always presupposes that form is less perfect than reality. Crucial here is that Lukács does not regard the meaning of the word “perfect” as simplicity, but rather as complexity.

Even in his notorious criticisms of modern decadent art, it is not difficult to discern Lukács’ accentuation of social complexity. Lukács says that man himself is a complex biological entity, and social phenomena must be conceived as a ‘complex made up of complexes’.¹⁰⁶ For Lukács, social complexity provides the everlasting changeability of history, while the symptom of inhumanity and anti-humanity in modernist art inflates and distorts ‘the concrete problem of capitalist inhumanity into a hazy, universal, “cosmic” inhumanity’.¹⁰⁷ It is in this sense that Lukács conceives of modernism as “sick” art in which the development and continuity of man’s consciousness and sense of identity cannot be achieved. In other words, to reflect complexity is the only way in which art can be healthy, in the sense that reflection is nothing less than the process of constituting textuality according to objectivity. A significant factor in Lukács’ criticism of modernism lies in the way he disagrees with

¹⁰⁶ Georg Lukács, *Conversations with Lukács*, ed. by Theo Pirkus, trans. by David Fernbach (London: Merlin Press, 1974), p. 18.

¹⁰⁷ Lukács, ‘Art and Objective Truth’, p. 108.

the formalist legitimisation of aesthetic autonomy and its separation of artworks from material reality.

Notwithstanding the theoretical validity of Lukács' realism, his classification of healthy art and sick art comes to be problematic in contemporary critical contexts. When Lukács puts the distinction between healthy art and sick art in the metaphorical sense of evolution, he obviously presupposes the utopian perspective of artistic reflections in which the conciliation of subject and object can be achieved in perfect forms. However, it is not easy to depict this optimistic happy ending of history in the sense that one no longer imagines the flawless teleological process of history in a utopian sense. It is rather that the teleological evolutionary paradigm itself becomes an absolute nightmare. Certainly, this nightmare causes the repression that leads to the evaluation of Lukács' realism today. It seems to me that a positive aspect of Lukács' realism is deliberately repressed by an attempt to resolve political and theoretical contradictions in Western Marxism. However, allowing for the historical situation in which Lukács articulated his criticism, the question seems to reside in the way in which Lukács considers description as an aesthetic symptom of the utopian impulse towards the understanding of a complex reality. It was in this sense that Lukács criticised modernism as "sick art".

It is interesting to note that there was no proper terminological consensus among Western critics to conceptualise the broad spectrum of art designated as modernism when Lukács was criticising this aesthetic tendency as "politically decadent art". As Astradur Eysteinnsson claims, "when Georg Lukács wrote about "Avangardeismus" he was in fact dealing with "modernism" but resorted to the concept of the "avant-garde" for lack of a better term at the moment in critical

history'.¹⁰⁸ What is implicit in Eysteinnsson's investigation is that there was no clear distinction between realism and modernism in the Western aesthetic scope before 1960s. Therefore, it is arguable that in Lukács' criticism modernism is not an opposite aesthetic category opposed to realism, but rather modernism was a cultural symptom that was caused by the situation in which literary realism lost its cultural power in the capitalist market system. In this respect, Lukács does not deny that modernism can be regarded as an aesthetic resolution to social contradictions. For Lukács, modernism is also "reflection", even though modernists reject the category of reflection. To quote Lukács:

The real question is the treatment of time, for here the modernists have indulged in the wildest orgies. However, their experiments, which one may condemn as empty, artificial, hothouse, do reflect something of the relationship of the individual and his personal life to the social framework or, more precisely, historical time of which this particular life is a moment. The reflection may be distorted, mannered, playful indeed, but reflection it is.¹⁰⁹

What is implicit in this argument is that Lukács locates modernism in the broader sense of representation; in other words, Lukács' formulation of reflection can be understood in the necessary category of representation in general. From this perspective, Lukács does not criticise the style of modernism, but rather its pessimistic view of reality. There is no doubt that such pessimism is partly related to the development of media technology. The proliferation of the visual media influenced literary form and technique, and as Adorno states, 'just as painting lost many of its traditional tasks to photography, the novel has lost them to reportage and

¹⁰⁸ Astradur Eysteinnsson, *The Concept of Modernism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), p. 2.

¹⁰⁹ Georg Lukács, *Essays on Thomas Mann*, trans. by Stanley Mitchell (London: Merlin Press, 1964), p. 78.

the media of the culture industry, especially film'.¹¹⁰ This is where modernism's aesthetic turn comes to exist through its own cultural logic of political frustration in the face of capitalism.

There is an example to support Lukács' understanding of modernism. In her criticism of realism that appears in 'Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown', Virginia Woolf alludes to the change in the way in which the cultural perception of reality constitutes literary truth.¹¹¹ What is implicit in Woolf's argument is that the language of realism no longer properly catches up on the details of reality. For Woolf, the way in which the literary expression accurately describes reality is not the inventory of details, but rather the epitome of the worldly totality.¹¹² Interestingly, for Woolf it is the writer's subjective attitude towards reality that is more significant than technique in the expression of reality. Stressing an epistemic break between the Edwardian and the Georgian way of perceiving reality, Woolf claims:

I ask myself, what is reality? And who are the judges of reality? A character may be real to Mr. Bennett and quite unreal to me. For instance, in this article he says that Dr. Watson in *Sherlock Holmes* is real to him: to me Dr. Watson is a sack stuffed with straw, a dummy, a figure of fun.¹¹³

Here, what is clear is that the validity of Woolf's argument rests on the presupposed shift from the conventional category of reality to subjectivism – the subjective objectification of reality. It is important that Woolf points out the aesthetic resolution for the crisis of representation that arises from the more developed circumstance of capitalism, a circumstance that reinforces the reification of the social

¹¹⁰ Theodor W. Adorno, 'The Position of the Narrator in the Contemporary Novel', in *Notes to Literature, Vol. 1*, trans. by Shierry Weber Nicholsen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), p. 31.

¹¹¹ See Virginia Woolf, 'Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown', in *The Captain's Death Bed and Other Essays* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1950), pp. 91-92.

¹¹² See *ibid.*, p. 105.

relationship between individuals. This situation strongly prompted the collapse of the conventional literary machine, and gave rise to the new formal technique of representing reality; the cultural decoding experiment is necessarily followed by the devaluation of the conventional code system. In this way, modernism resorts to the category of truth instead of everyday reality. Stated another way, modernism adapts the sensuous truth of everyday life in order to reject the empirical sphere of reality. It seems to me that this is a symbolic act, which resolves the crisis of realism by retaining the utopian impulse. This attempt gives rise to the theology of art, art for art's sake. The development of capitalism destroys any common sensuous perception of reality; and the fragmental reification over the surface of reality prevails. This is the very perspective that Lukács took, when he attacked modernism as "sick art". That is to say, Woolf's definition of literary transition seems to support Lukács' aesthetic presupposition: the public aesthetic consensus is changed according to the shifts of human relationships. Woolf describes the transformation of the cultural codes on which the conventional literary apparatuses are constituted. To quote Woolf:

At the present moment we are suffering, not from decay, but from having no code of manners which writers and readers accept as a prelude to the more exciting intercourse of friendship. The literary convention of the time is so artificial ... that, naturally, the feeble are tempted to outrage, and the strong are led to destroy the very foundations and rules of literary society. Signs of this are everywhere apparent. Grammar is violated; syntax disintegrated; as a boy staying with an aunt for the week-end rolls in the geranium bed out of sheer desperation as the solemnities of the sabbath wear on. The more adult writers do not, of course, indulge in such wanton exhibitions of spleen. Their sincerity is desperate, and their courage tremendous; it is only that they do not know which to use, a fork or their fingers.¹¹⁴

A significant factor seems to lie in the way in which Woolf attempts to depict the changed cultural situation that is manifested by the linguistic transformation and

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 97-98.

¹¹⁴ Woolf, 'Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown', p. 108.

gives rise to the aesthetic desperation of realism. From this perspective, it is effectively possible to reconsider Lukács' defence of realism against modernism. Strictly speaking, for Lukács, modernism just means a temporary anti-realistic tendency; this judgement precisely stemmed from Lukács' presupposition that 'all we do, all we know and all we are, in the final analysis, is the product of our reaction to reality'.¹¹⁵ It seems to me that this is the kernel of Lukács' aesthetics in which his criticism of naturalist and modernist techniques focuses on their descriptive aspects.

In his essay, 'Narrate or Describe?', Lukács criticised description as a method that endows writers with 'still lives' and brings them to the position of spectators. For Lukács, this tendency generates certain pessimism in writers as they attempt to represent capitalist reality. According to Lukács, capitalist reality is a dialectical process in which dehumanisation dominates everything alongside the evolvement of individuals. Lukács claimed that the capitalist system 'reproduces itself continuously, and this progress is in reality a series of bitter and implacable struggles – a process evolving simultaneously in the life of the individual, who is transformed into a soulless appurtenance of the capitalist system'.¹¹⁶ Severely denouncing description as a passive method which acknowledges the perfection of the capitalist system, Lukács suggests the following:

The decisive ideological weakness of writers of the descriptive method is in their passive capitulation to these consequences, to these phenomena of fully-developed capitalism, and in their seeing the result but not the struggles of the opposing forces. And even when they apparently do describe a process – in the novel of disillusion – the final victory of capitalist inhumanity is always anticipated.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ Georg Lukács, *Művészet és társadalom* (Budapest, 1968), p. 13. Quoted in Királyfalvi, *The Aesthetics of György Lukács*, p. 55.

¹¹⁶ Lukács, 'Narrate or Describe?', pp. 145-46.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 146.

In a sense, Lukács' attack on symbolism lies in this presupposition that the symbolic mode of representation fosters pessimism, and finally capitulates to conformism. Lukács' scathing criticism of description attacks the claim that this method adequately mirrors the inhumanity of capitalism. Lukács does not admit the position that advocates a descriptive method as more realistic, but rather reproaches the writers who employ description to dilute the essential capitalist reality. Along with this criticism, Lukács deplores "modern realism" for making the novel lose 'its capacity to depict the dynamics of life, and thus its representation of capitalist reality is inadequate, diluted and constrained'.¹¹⁸ A philosophically important factor relating to Lukács' privileging narration is that Lukács' concept of realism resorts to Vico's *verum-factum* principle: 'the true and the made are interchangeable'.¹¹⁹ In this respect, Lukács contends that 'truth is revealed only in practice, in deeds and actions'.¹²⁰ This is where the suspicion of reflection theory arises for Lukács' realism. As we have seen, however, Lukács puts his realism on the opposite side of "mirroring realism". Lukács rather draws on the notion of reflection as the category of representation in general. What is at issues in Lukács' formulation of reflection is not merely to what degree form reflects content, but rather how form is structured by the combination of writer's intention and objective reality. From this perspective, Lukács plainly argues that writers should take the opportunity to reach a higher aesthetic level by means of realism rather than symbolism. In Lukács' view, therefore, symbolism means a mirror on which writers' subjectivity, not external objectivity, merely reflects itself. Lukács denotes this non-aesthetic aspect as "mannerism".

¹¹⁸ Lukács, 'Narrate or Describe?', p. 147.

¹¹⁹ Martin Jay, *Marxism and Totality: The Adventures of a Concept from Lukács to Habermas* (Cambridge: Polity, 1984), p. 35.

¹²⁰ Lukács, 'Narrate or Describe?', p. 123.

What we see in Lukács' criticism of description is not attention to the structure of narration that contains the utopian impulse, but rather the commitment of writers who would want to revolt against de-humanising "capitalist prose" in order to obtain the "true poetry of things".¹²¹ Lukács believes that 'objects come to life poetically only to the extent they are related to men's life'.¹²² Without any interrelationship between objects and their function in concrete human experience, narrative cannot achieve artistic significance. For Lukács, this is why the incomprehensibility of the symbol arises in its own right. According to Lukács, a symbol results from the attempt that objects acquire significance 'only through direct association with some abstract concept which the author considers essential to his view of world'.¹²³

Contrasting Balzac, Stendhal, Dickens and Tolstoy with Flaubert and Zola, Lukács illuminates the difference between these writers. For Lukács, the latter writers are lacking in participation in the social struggles of their times. The former writers are not "specialist", and they follow 'the tradition of the writers, artists and scientists of the Renaissance and of the Enlightenment', while the latter writers become 'specialists in the craft of writing, writers in the sense of the capitalist division of labour'.¹²⁴ What Lukács focuses on here is not so much the cultural condition of description by which the recent writers become servile to capitalism, but rather the political function of the writers' literary text. Lukács argues that 'when a writer is isolated from the vital struggles of life and from varied experiences generally, all ideological questions in his work become abstractions', and 'such abstraction results

¹²¹ For Lukács, description cannot provide the true poetry of things, but transforms us into components of still lives. It is hardly surprising that Lukács regards the true poetry of things as the real epic in which things play a part in the destinies, actions and passions of men. See *ibid.*, p. 137.

¹²² *Ibid.*, p. 137.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p. 131.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 118-19.

in the loss of the creative productiveness provided by questions of ideology in the earlier literature'.¹²⁵ This presumption constitutes the practical aspect of Lukácsian realism. It would also be incomplete without considering Lukács' reception of Hegel to understand the Lukácsian formulation of the relationship between artwork and practice. In this sense, Lukács could inspire Western Marxism to re-interpret Marx through the Hegelian dialectic. In the following, I will investigate the relationship between Lukács and Western Marxism to understand the historical context in which Lukács' realism comes to be underestimated by the strategic emphasis on early Lukács' Hegelian tendency.

4. Lukács and Western Marxism

In his several autobiographical sketches, Lukács discussed the crucial influence of Hegel in his studies of Marx.¹²⁶ Although Lukács criticised his own inclination to Hegel in the new preface of *History and Class Consciousness*, his theory has been generally considered as a mixture of Marx and Hegel. Even for Jürgen Habermas, Lukács was one of theorists who silently made an orthodox tie with Hegel: Lukács rested on the Hegelian dialectic to rescue his Marxism from the official doctrine of dialectical materialism and its assertion of the dialectic of nature.¹²⁷ To some extent, the way in which western theorists consolidate Lukács with Hegel is

¹²⁵ Ibid., p. 143.

¹²⁶ Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, p. ix. Lukács states that 'I first read Marx while I was still at school. Later, around 1908 I made a study of *Capital* in order to lay a sociological foundation for my monograph on modern drama. At the time, then, it was Marx the 'sociologist' that attracted me – and I saw him through spectacles tinged by Simmel and Max Weber. I resumed my studies of Marx during World War I, but this time I was led to do so by my general philosophical interests and under the influence of Hegel rather than any contemporary thinkers'. We can find similar statements by Lukács in other interviews, such as *Record of a Life*, *Interview with New Left Review*, and *Conversations with Lukács*, etc.

¹²⁷ See Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action, Volume 1: Reason and the Rationalization of Society*, trans. by Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), p. 150.

influenced by the fact that Western Marxism privileged the early Lukács rather than the later Lukács.

In its own historical context, Western Marxism has faced sustained criticism for its attacks on, and negative attitude towards orthodox Marxism. As Anderson properly points out, the distinctive characteristic of Western Marxism is a rupture between “theory” and “practice”.¹²⁸ In a similar tone to Anderson, Neil McInnes describes Western Marxism as a theory that reflects political despair at the defeat of the working class by Nazism and Fascism.¹²⁹ In the case of Western Marxism, theory emerges at the point where practice stops. It is not so surprising, therefore, that theory seems constantly to return to preceding theories for theorizing its situation, because theory can never go before the situation but fly at dusk when the situation ends (to paraphrase Hegel). In other words, the emergence of new theory is not so much the result of will on the part of individuals, but rather the product of specific concrete situations. The return to Hegel by Western Marxists was a moment when they regained this perspective on the relationship between theory and practice.

The restoration of Hegel by Western Marxists can be understood in the sense that Hegelian philosophy is not only the reflection of Hegel as an individual, but also the product of history as a collective process. According to the Hegelian dialectic, the opposition between subject and object means that the subject is part of the object and

¹²⁸ See Anderson, *Considerations on Western Marxism*, p. 29. Anderson claims that ‘the organic unity of theory and practice realized in the classical generation of Marxists before the First World War, who performed an inseparably politico-intellectual function within their respective parties in Eastern and Central Europe, was to be increasingly severed in the half-century from 1918 to 1968, in Western Europe’. In Anderson’s terms, the unity of theory and practice, a fundamental principle of Marxism was deconstructed by the ‘structural divorce’. World capitalism went its way in ‘a long boom of unprecedented dynamism, the most rapid and prosperous phase of expansion’. Contrasted with capitalism’s boom, the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe showed no hope in modification of their bureaucratic structure, so that no political challenge to the enhancement of the capitalist bloc was brought out in that period.

¹²⁹ See Neil McInnes, *The Western Marxists* (London: Library Press, 1972), p. 31.

the object is producing the subject.¹³⁰ In this sense, Marx did not refute the Hegelian dialectic in itself but Hegel's philosophy in a guise of bourgeois ideology. Above all, the important point is that Marx criticises not the Hegelian dialectic as such but only the mystificatory side of the Hegelian dialectic. Marx writes as follows:

The mystification which the dialectic suffers in Hegel's hands by no means prevents him from being the first to present its general forms of motion in a comprehensive and conscious manner. With him it is standing on its head. It must be inverted, in order to discover the rational kernel within the mystical shell.¹³¹

To invert the Hegelian dialectic does not mean to remove it, but rather to return it to its correct form. Even though Marx remarks that his dialectical method is 'not only different from the Hegelian, but exactly opposite to it', this does not place his method outside the Hegelian dialectic.¹³² On the contrary, Marx regards the Hegelian dialectic as an "ideological reflex" just as with phenomena in the *camera obscura*.¹³³ It is in this sense that the purpose of Marx's criticism of Hegel seems not so much to refuse the Hegelian system, but rather, to complete it in terms of its own negation. Paradoxically, Marx's attempt to rescue the Hegelian dialectic from bourgeois ideology means the "realisation" of Hegel's philosophy, that is to say, the "end" of philosophy, since 'the ideal is nothing but the material world reflected in the mind of man, and translated into forms of thought'.¹³⁴ From this perspective, every theory must be understood as "forms of thought" into which the material world is translated.

¹³⁰ See *ibid.*

¹³¹ Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Vol. 1, trans. by Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin, 1990), p. 103.

¹³² *Ibid.*, p. 102.

¹³³ See Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology*, ed. by C.J. Arthur (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1999), p. 47.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

The inversion of the Hegelian dialectic in the works of Marx sets it to work not so much in matter as in history.¹³⁵ For the dialectic is not the natural law by which matter is worked, but the way in which the individual subject understands the world. It is in this sense that the Hegelian dialectic leads idealism to collapse because the dialectic presupposes an attempt to overcome the split between the world and the mind in terms of a critical rather than a systematic characteristic.¹³⁶ Here is the point where one can say that the abstract is always deconstructed by the concrete. When George Lichtheim indicates that ‘the Hegelian dialectic is not really what it purports to be’,¹³⁷ he seems undoubtedly to be thinking of this dialectical principle. As Lichtheim points out, Hegel cannot take flight from ‘the idealist cave in which the speculative enterprise has been imprisoned since Plato’, in that ‘his procedure is kept going by the operation of the sovereign intellect which undertakes to render an adequate report of the world by reflecting up its own self-consciousness’.¹³⁸ Lichtheim continues with a further problem:

The philosopher, as an empirical individual, is a contingent being and as such cannot constitute an absolute starting-point. German Idealism, culminating in Hegel, tries to escape from this dilemma by treating the individual mind as the vehicle of Mind or Spirit in the abstract: conceived as intersubjective and transphenomenal. But in making this assumption Hegel oversteps the boundary of the idealist metaphysics. Rather it is a metaphor whose employment veils a particular kind of empirical reality: the collective mind of society.¹³⁹

¹³⁵ See McInnes, *The Western Marxists*, p. 18. McInnes points out the fact that “dialectical materialism” misuses Marx’s dialectic as follows: ‘If Hegel’s upside-down dialectic concerned ideas, then by standing it back on its feet, Marx must get a dialectic that works in matter. Matter, too, would then be held capable of contradicting itself and thereafter progressing to higher forms by overcoming that contradiction. This was the blunder of the founders of dialectical materialism and it is still solemnly taught as one variety of Marxist metaphysics. In truth, Marx’s dialectic, being the historical interpretation of Hegel’s, worked in history, not matter’. Nevertheless, McInnes confuses the Hegelian dialectic with Hegel’s idealism, and is not aware that Western Marxism is interested in “historical materialism”, not “dialectical materialism”.

¹³⁶ See Jameson, *Marxism and Form*, pp. 361-62.

¹³⁷ George Lichtheim, *From Marx to Hegel and Other Essays* (London: Orbach & Chambers, 1971), p.24.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

In this way, Hegel's thinking comes to be negated by its own dialectic, so that Marx endorses the Hegelian dialectic, even though it is in mystified form. Jameson also indicates that this Hegelian sequence is distinguished by 'that ultimate and inevitable, structurally inherent movement toward its own dissolution, in which it projects the Marxist model out of itself as its own concrete realization and fulfillment'.¹⁴⁰ For Marx, Hegel's idealism can be seen as the result of an "inverted dialectic". Thus, it is not surprising that Marx indicates this "distortion" not as something to be eliminated but as the condition of ideology. As Marx remarks, 'men and their circumstances appear upside-down' in all ideology, in that 'this phenomenon arises just as much from their historical life-process as the inversion of objects on the retina does from their physical life-process'.¹⁴¹ In Marx's terms, therefore, Hegel's idealism is nothing more than the "form" in which the material world is translated, so that we can regard Hegel's idealism as the "inverted relation" of form and content. Marx sees this illusion as mere phantoms formed in human brains, to which their material life-process is sublimated.

In Descartes' *cogito*, for example, to prove "I who think" means to reject 'all reasonings I hitherto accepted as proofs'.¹⁴² For Descartes, everything outside "I who think" is false, so that only "I" is something to justify "am" in the world. The relationship of subject and object is reversed in this statement. It is in this sense that *cogito* is the ghostly inversion of *sum*. Here is the point where Marx mentions the phenomenon of ideology in which men and their circumstances appear upside-down

¹⁴⁰ Jameson, *Marxism and Form*, p. 326.

¹⁴¹ Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, p. 47.

¹⁴² René Descartes, *Discourse on Method and the Meditations*, trans. by F. E. Sutcliffe (London: Penguin, 1968), p. 53.

as in a *camera obscura*.¹⁴³ Consequently, in Marx's terms, Descartes' *cogito* is not so much philosophical discovery as ideological invention. These phantoms have no history and development, while men's material life-process changes in its own way.¹⁴⁴ This is the reason why the dialectic must be employed to understand these phantoms. In this sense, Marx's concept of ideology and dialectical method serves as a key term to approach Western Marxism.

Lukács also sustained his positive evaluation of Hegel, even though he provided a self-criticism of his own early idealism that was influenced by Hegelian philosophy. Lukács acknowledged that his concept of alienation in *History and Class Consciousness* was equated with objectification in the Hegelian terms. Lukács claimed that 'when I identified alienation with objectification I meant this as a societal category – socialism would after all abolish alienation – but its irreducible presence in class society and above all its basis in philosophy brought it into the vicinity of the 'condition humaine''.¹⁴⁵ In this respect, Lukács suggested that the concept of reification is neither socially nor conceptually identical with alienation, even though the phenomenon of reification is closely related to that of alienation. As has been discussed, Lukács drew on Lenin to overcome his Hegelian tendency. For Lukács, Lenin was a symbolic figure who seemed to materialise Hegelian dialectic in the real political dimension. Therefore, the Western Marxist version of Lukács

¹⁴³ Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, p. 47.

¹⁴⁴ See *ibid.*, It is compelling that Deleuze and Guattari seem to use this formulation in order to criticize Lacan in *Anti-Oedipus*. They launch an attack on psychoanalysis, since it makes the unconscious not 'the fantastic factory of Nature and Production' but 'a private theater'. For them, the Oedipus complex is a "phantom" which has no relation to the unconscious. They argue that '*the unconscious is an orphan, and produces itself within the identity of nature and man. The autoproduction of the unconscious suddenly became evident when the subject of the Cartesian cogito realized that it had no parents, when the socialist thinker discovered the unity of man and nature within the process of production, and when the cycle discovers its independence from an indefinite parental regression*'. See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. by Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), p.49. Of course, Deleuze and Guattari depend on the empirical method rather than the Hegelian dialectic. Throughout *Anti-Oedipus*, nevertheless, this radical attitude against "idealism" provides the basis on which their analysis stands.

conceals an interesting factor within its historical context – Lukács as a Leninist philosopher. More importantly, Lukács himself had a lack of interest in the contemporary Hegelian revaluation of his early philosophy.¹⁴⁶ However, it is not easy to see that Lukács was an orthodox Leninist or that his later theory stemmed from Leninism as such. In other words, it is undeniable that there was a gap between Lukács' interpretation of Lenin and Leninism. According to Žižek, Lenin 'was not fully aware of the philosophical stance he 'practised' in his revolutionary work',¹⁴⁷ when Lukács tried to provide the philosophical account of Leninism.

For Lukács, as we have seen, the name of Lenin was a symbolic resolution to his early utopian messianism in the sense that it stands for the revolutionary *Realpolitik*. In Lukács' sense, revolutionary *Realpolitik* was sharply opposed to the idea that socialism is a complete condition. Lukács argued that 'the utopian conceives socialism not as a process of 'becoming', but as a state of 'being''.¹⁴⁸ From this standpoint, Lukács regarded Lenin's politics as 'the admirable realism'.¹⁴⁹ This is where Lukács' aesthetics paves the way for realism by which all utopianism are finally eliminated. In this respect, Lukácsian realism is an aesthetic transformation of his political interpretation of Leninism. In Hegel's terms, Lukácsian realism can be perceived as an aesthetic, resulting from the "moment" of action in which the essence was resolved into individuals.¹⁵⁰ As was previously discussed, Lukács emphasised "mediation" to abolish his utopian workerism, whereby he once rejected any possible mediation between the bourgeois' past and the proletariat's future.

¹⁴⁵ Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, p. xxiv.

¹⁴⁶ See Lukács, *Record of a Life*, pp. 77-78.

¹⁴⁷ Žižek, 'Postface', n. 4.

¹⁴⁸ Lukács, *Lenin*, p. 72.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

¹⁵⁰ See Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 264.

5. Lukács and Althusserian Marxism

As opposed to Löwy who considers Lukács' stress on mediation as a symptom of the political retreat, I want to suggest that it is rather a theoretical turn from utopianism to realism, whereby Lukács attempted to retain a positive non-Stalinist legacy of the Russian Revolution. It also seems to me that Althusserian Marxists' refusal of any mediation can be understood as the consequence of disillusionment caused by actually existing socialism. The decline of revolutionary action easily engenders a reactionary condemnation of the preceding theoretical models such as Lukácsian realism. While the theoretical emphasis on the complexity of structure immediately discouraged the utopian perspective of the May '68 events, there were disturbing and changing political situations outside France. As Keith Reader describes:

Mao's reputation as the 'Great Helmsman' was shattered by the revelation about the Cultural Revolution ... The euphoria caused by the ending of the Vietnam War seemed to become a nightmare with the ensuing bloodbath and the horrors of the Pol Pot regime in Cambodia. Many on the French Left felt doubly compromised by these, for while what was then 'Indo-China' had been under French colonial occupation many of the Cambodian leaders had been learning their Marxism in Paris. The PCF's attempts at self-rehabilitation were drained of their credibility by the Party's timorousness in condemning Soviet or Soviet-backed repression first in Afghanistan, then in Poland.¹⁵¹

This horrific malpractice of Marxism inclined French Intellectuals to radicalise themselves in rejecting any mediation between past and present theoretical developments. Consequently, they stressed a break rather than a mediation of cultural conventions. It is not surprising then that an anarchistic epistemology and avant-garde aesthetics, whereby de-Marxified French theorists legitimise aesthetic production rather than cognitive criteria, followed this radicalisation. Reader argues that 'the

bizarre amalgam of conceptual rigour and freewheeling textuality ... in the *Tel Quel* 'manifesto' has clearly left its mark, in the erosion of established disciplinary boundaries and consequent calling into question of specialist competence, if not in the polysemic 'Grand Science' which was the dream to which it aspired'.¹⁵² From this perspective, the distinction between "art" and "reality" comes to be questionable, in the sense that poststructuralist textuality continuously demonstrates an ontological concern – asking what it is to be a text.¹⁵³ The newly emerged formulation presupposes that 'theory does not simply "analyze" or "describe" reality; far more importantly, it seems to articulate strategies by which what is extant may perpetually be overcome'.¹⁵⁴ Suffice it to say that theoretical reading comes to be regarded as practical action. This new formulation incisively precipitated the renunciation of Marxist aesthetics of realism by its emphasis on aesthetic production rather than cognitive criteria; the substitution of an aesthetic realm for the cognitive definitely reinforced the shift of the focus from the role of authors to the role of readers. It seems to me that this shift clearly demonstrates a reified state of cultural production by which the revolutionary creative activity fails to involve social realities, a situation in which academic disciplines and the market system largely come to dominate the field of cultural production as a whole.

Regarding this, there is certainly a significant political intention to "bend the stick" in Balibar and Macherey's attacks on *Tel Quel* and Lukács: they reinterpret a materialistic criterion in terms of multiple structural determinations. The Althusserian sense of "overdetermination" supports this theoretical approach to social reality. Stressing the multiple conditions of contradictions manifesting the structure in

¹⁵¹ Reader, *Intellectuals and the Left in France Since 1968*, p. 20.

¹⁵² See *ibid.*, p. 28.

¹⁵³ See Allan Megill, *Prophets of Extremity: Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault, Derrida* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), p. 263.

dominance that unifies the whole, Althusser says that '*this reflection of the conditions of existence of contradiction within itself, this reflection of the structure articulated in dominance that constitutes the unity of complex whole within each contradiction*, this is the most profound characteristic of Marxist dialectic, the one I have tried recently to encapsulate in the concept of '*overdetermination*''.¹⁵⁵ In other words, Althusser's concept of "overdetermination" can be expressed as 'complexly-structurally-unevenly-determined'.¹⁵⁶ The definition of overdetermination is nothing less than the counter-concept of totality.

The way in which Althusser emphasises the complexity of structural determination could be described as a symbolic strategy to liquidate the mechanical materialism dominating preceding socialist movements. By symbolically attacking the Lukácsian category of totality, Althusser developed the concept of overdetermination. On the other hand, in the 'Introduction' to *For Marx*, there is another symptomatically significant factor that alludes to the political meaning of the Althusserian repudiation of Lukács. To quote Althusser:

Those who impute all our disappointments, all our mistakes and all our disarray in whatever domain, to Stalin, along with his crimes and errors, are likely to be disconcerted by having to admit that the end of Stalinist dogmatism has not restored Marxist philosophy to us in its integrity. After all, it is never possible to liberate, even from dogmatism, more than already exists. The end of dogmatism produced a real freedom of investigation, and also in some a feverish haste to make philosophy an ideological commentary on their feeling of liberation and their taste for freedom. Fevers sink as surely as stones. What the end of dogmatism has restored to us is the right to assess exactly what we have, to give both our wealth and our poverty their true names, to think and pose our problems in the open, and to undertake in rigour a true investigation.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 233.

¹⁵⁵ Louis Althusser, *For Marx*, trans. by Ben Brewster (London: Verso, 1999), p. 206.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 209.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 30.

This description obviously reveals a disturbing dilemma in which Althusser strives to search for the third way between Stalinism and Western Marxism. What Althusser chooses here is a scientific investigation to know “ourselves”. It is interesting that Althusser identifies the scientific with a true investigation in which we face the reality that Marxist philosophy has still to be constituted. No doubt, this statement calls for self-examination, through which one should obtain true knowledge of reality. For Althusser, true knowledge – scientific Marxism – could be achieved by ruling out unscientific Hegelianism. Symptomatically analysing the deeper sense of this declaration, we can see that Althusser presents the concept of overdetermination in order to legitimise his theoretical perspective as scientific. Althusser’s insistence on the scientific implies an intransigent attitude in which objectivity must not be confused with subjectivity. That is to say, the scientific is more objective than the unscientific. In order to develop this account, Althusser seems to suggest ‘structural causality’ in *Reading Capital*.

Althusser sees the scientific as a category of anti-reflection; on the other hand, Lukács posits “scientific cognition” as an essential category of reflection. Even when Lukács mentions that ‘objective reality is correctly reflected in any accurate scientific cognition’, in order to explain the difference between scientific reflection and artistic reflection, he does not mean that particular knowledge produced by particular reflection is always decisively scientific.¹⁵⁸ Lukács rather understands the scientific as the way in which the absolute cognition always appears as relative and as an approximation. For Lukács, the scientific is the nature of knowledge, whereby the dialectic of absolute and relative cognitions comes to exist. In comparing the scientific and the artistic reflections of reality, Lukács states that ‘individual scientific

¹⁵⁸ Lukács, ‘Art and Objective Truth’, p. 37.

cognitions (laws, etc.) are not independent of each other but form an integral system', while artistic reflection is relatively independent of general social development.¹⁵⁹ Lukács employs the concept of "self-containment", the 'capacity to achieve its effect on its own',¹⁶⁰ to distinguish artistic reflection from scientific reflection: Lukács separates theoretically aesthetic realism from scientific realism. Althusser, on the one hand, does not preserve the distinction between these reflections; Althusser's concept of the scientific is not posited as oppositions of subject and object at all: science is not the subjective reflection of objectivity, but rather opposed to ideology. Althusser's formulation of anti-reflection does not seem to provide the proper alternative to Lukács' realism, in the sense that Althusser simply declares the concept of a decentred structure of totality without any theoretical demonstration that verifies how much Lukács' realism is "unscientific". Allowing for the distinction between their theoretical contexts, Althusser's attack on Lukács is political rather than theoretical. In the following, my concern will be related to the hidden impetus behind Althusser's critique of Lukács.

Even though Lukács also criticises empiricism, Althusser still denounces Lukács' realism as empirical. What Althusser proposes to accomplish in his criticism of empiricism is precisely the concept of the subject that is defined by Stalinism, just as Lukács consistently emphasises objective reality more than artistic form, to reject Stalinist subjectivism. Considering this, it is difficult to say that Althusser properly establishes a new formulation in order to correct Lukács' fallacy, but rather easy to see that Althusser draws on the notion of Lukács' compromise with Stalinism, first raised by Adorno. As Etienne Balibar acknowledges, Lukács was 'a symbolic figure

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 38.

in the history of Western communism more than an object of proper study'.¹⁶¹

Balibar's statement clearly demonstrates that there is "bending the stick" in Althusser's anti-Lukácsian formulation. In this respect, the difference between Althusser and Lukács merely lies in the use of rhetoric to defend scientific cognition against Stalinist subjectivism. Taking these rhetorical aspects into account, it can be said that Lukácsian reflection is synecdochical, while the Althusserian concept of scientificity metonymically signifies material reality.¹⁶² In Althusser's terms, synecdochical reflection refers to "expressive causality", in the sense that 'if the whole is fully reflected in every part, then aspects of the whole not immediately visible in a part must be latent within it, repressed or unconscious within it'.¹⁶³ From this perspective, Althusser claims:

To speak of the criterion of practice where theory is concerned, and every other practice as well, then receives its full sense: for *theoretical practice* is indeed its own criterion, and contains in itself definite protocols with which to *validate* the quality of its product, i. e., the criteria of the scientificity of the products of scientific practice. This is exactly what happens in the real practice of the sciences: once they are truly constituted and developed they have no need for verification from *external* practices to declare the knowledges they produce to be 'true', i. e., to be *knowledges*.¹⁶⁴

Here, Althusser involuntarily refers to the Lukácsian concept of artistic reflection as "self-containment" in order to explain the absoluteness of knowledge. Lukács precisely points out that science establishes absolute concreteness by investigations of practical laws,¹⁶⁵ yet, at the same time, the absolute concreteness of scientific knowledge always appears as relative, in the sense that knowledge must be

¹⁶¹ Corredor, *Lukács after Communism*, p. 116.

¹⁶² For a useful insight about this, see Jonathan Arac, *Critical Genealogies: Historical Situations for Postmodern Literary Studies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), p. 264.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ Louis Althusser and Étienne Balibar, *Reading Capital*, trans. by Ben Brewster (London: Verso, 1997), p. 59.

amplified and elaborated by the transformation of reality. In other words, scientific concreteness is a unity of the absolute and the relative, as in the case of artistic reflection. On the other hand, Lukács argues that there is a crucial difference between scientific reflection and artistic reflection, because artistic reflection produces ‘a unity which cannot go beyond the framework of the work of art’.¹⁶⁶ Abandoning the concept of synecdochical reflection, the Althusserian formulation of scientificity consequently creates a vicious circle. As Kant presupposes that Newtonian physics legitimises his scientificity, so does Althusser with Marxist science. Nevertheless, there is no way in which one can sufficiently define what Marxist science really is. In an Althusserian formulation, Marxist science is already always an absent cause whereby the effect of scientificity emerges. Even Althusser himself acknowledges this circle in the sense that ‘this circle is not the closed circle of ideology, but the circle perpetually opened by its closures themselves, the circle of well-founded knowledge’.¹⁶⁷ It is quite surprising that this statement reminds us of Lukács’ definition of scientific knowledge.

To solve this controversial aspect of his formulation Althusser draws into his theoretical scope the concept of “symptomatic reading”, inspired by Lacanian psychoanalysis. Althusser describes Marxist readings as the “symptomatic reading”, since it is a scientific way in which a reading divulges the undivulged event in the text.¹⁶⁸ As we have seen, a symptomatic reading does nothing less than reveal the structural complexity in textuality – the reading necessarily presupposes the “self-containment” of the text as in the Lukácsian concept of artistic reflection. What is at stake in this formulation is that Althusser simply focuses on the self-contained

¹⁶⁵ See Lukács, ‘Art and Objective Truth’, p. 37.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

¹⁶⁸ See *ibid.*, p. 28.

textuality, disregarding what Lukács practically suggests with his concept of synecdochical reflection. In this respect, Althusser sees philosophy as a theoretical practice whereby science can be articulated through politics, while Lukács posits art as a mediation of science and politics. This is where a fundamental difference between them arises, a difference that lies in the attitude towards the mediating role of an author in the process of constructing texts. Since the symptomatic reading comes through reading hidden registered linguistic traces in texts, the author's intention must be regarded as a surface meaning. To attack a humanistic defence of interpretation, Althusser's concept of symptomatic reading rests on Lacanian psychoanalysis: the stress on symbolic registers, rather than the imaginary, raises the philosophical problem of the subject.

When Althusser mentions the "absent presence" of scientific discourse, he obviously alludes to this philosophical connotation in the Lacanian concept of subject. In other words, the Althusserian concept of absence is associated with traces in which presence is repressed by ideology – the material system of social practice. The absence is like an empty mould to which the repressed must return. The symptomatic reading, therefore, lies in the nature of scientific discourse, that is to say, 'the specific nature of a discourse which cannot be maintained as a discourse except by reference to what is present as absence in each moment of its order'.¹⁶⁹ No doubt, this presumption of the symptomatic reading cannot be linked to Lukács' realism, in the sense that the Lukácsian formulation of realism does not aim at establishing an interpretative approach for readers, but rather a practical criterion for writers. In other words, Lukács suggests realism as a practical way in which writers effectively overcome reification in order to accomplish the perfect form of artwork in capitalist

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 69.

society. Suffice it to say that Lukács' defence of realism is nothing less than a way of disguising his political involvement, even though it is the product of political frustration.

Both Lukács and Althusser stress the scientific perspective as an essential component of Marxism. According to Althusser, a scientific perspective provides the only method by which we can reach towards a complex material reality beyond abstract ideology.¹⁷⁰ Nevertheless, for Althusser, ideology is not just "an illusion" by which reality is veiled, but rather the overdetermined unity of the real relation and imaginary relation between them and their real conditions of existence.¹⁷¹ It is in this sense that 'the real relation is inevitably invested in the imaginary relation' in ideology.¹⁷² So ideology can be seen as the expression of collective desire on which people's hope and nostalgia are consequently founded. As Althusser points out, ideology is not at all related to describing a reality, but rather the chemistry in which the overdetermination of the real and the imaginary reinforces or modifies the relation between men and their conditions of existence.

Althusser's concept of ideology can be compared to Lukács' criticism of ideology as pseudo-objectivity, in the sense that both theorists largely regard ideology as the abstract whereby the trace of reality is virtually replaced with a 'phantom objectivity'. To be sure, there is an undeniable difference or a break between Althusser and Lukács, precisely precipitated by their ways of defining ideology. Contrary to Althusser, who stresses the educational function of ideology, thereby constituting a subject, Lukács sees ideology as an illusion which manifests the failure of reconciliation between subject and object. The way in which Lukács grasps

¹⁷⁰ See Althusser, *For Marx*, p. 85. Althusser argues that 'if we are prepared to stand back a little from Marx's discovery so that we can see that he founded a new scientific discipline and that this *emergence* itself was analogous to all the great *scientific discoveries* of history'.

¹⁷¹ See *ibid.*, p. 233.

ideology seemingly can be affiliated with Althusser's notion of ideology, in the sense that Lukács also opens the way in which we approach ideology in terms of the dialectic of the visual representation.

For Lukács, it is reification that obstructs epistemological totalisation in capitalist society, specifically the rationalisation of a world operated by commodity-structure. This process of rational objectification subsequently conceals the immediate qualitative and material character of things as things.¹⁷³ This is the very process of reification through capitalist rationalisation; rationalisation transforms any quality of natural materials into the symbolically quantitative dimension. Not surprisingly, Marx analyses this symbolising mechanism of rationalisation in explaining the relation between time and the clock – 'the clock was the first automatic device applied to practical purpose; the whole theory of the production of regular motion was developed through it'.¹⁷⁴ As Charlie Chaplin's film, *Modern Times*, clearly manifests, the clock is, so to speak, an ideological apparatus, whereby the rationalisation of capitalism comes to occupy human consciousness as well as the unconscious. When Lukács conceptualises the meaning of reification, it refers to not only the rationalisation of human relationships in capitalist society but also the individual and collective psychological effect generated by the process of the symbolic mechanism. It is in this sense that reification can be seen as a matrix in which the chemistry of the ideological production is closely linked to the individual fantasy. From this criticism of ideology, Lukács' formulation of realism implicitly reveals an interesting aspect – the non-ocularcentric aesthetic.

¹⁷² Ibid., p. 234.

¹⁷³ See Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, p. 92.

6. Realism as Non-Ocularcentric Aesthetic

The hidden impetus behind the philosophy of consciousness resides in its ocularcentrism, in the sense that from the outset it presupposes visual sight as a predominant media of perception. Hans Jonas points out that this has been a specific feature of the Western philosophy: ‘since the days of Greek philosophy sight has been hailed as the most excellent of the senses’.¹⁷⁵ According to Jonas, sight incisively tends to provide ‘the model of perception in general and thus as the measure of the other senses’.¹⁷⁶ This ocularcentric way of perception particularly endows the privileged authority to “image”. As Jonas claims, there are three characteristics for largely securing the visual image’s primacy in the realm of perception – ‘(1) *simultaneity* in the presentation of a manifold, (2) *neutralization* of the causality of sense-affection, (3) *distance* in the spatial and mental senses’.¹⁷⁷ These three features appeared in the function of image endow vision with the primary position, though vision has no self-sufficient sensible function. As Jonas plainly puts, sight needs to have ‘the complement of other senses and functions for its cognitive office’.¹⁷⁸

No doubt, this is where Lukács’ criticism of description crucially arises – the passivity of visualisation essentially resides in its contemplative characteristic. The Lukácsian conceptualisation of the distinction between narration and description is the result of his classical dichotomy between subject and object. However, the Lukácsian category of subject and object precisely lies in the way in which mediation is always already involved with the relationship. As Jameson indicates, it is not the

¹⁷⁴ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Selected Correspondence*, trans. by I. Lasker (Moscow: Progress Publisher, 1975), pp. 129-130.

¹⁷⁵ Hans Jonas, *The Phenomenon of Life: Toward a Philosophical Biology* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1979), p. 135.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 136.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 135-6.

linguistic discourse that makes mediation between the individual and the socio-economic reality, but rather they are always related in actuality.¹⁷⁹

The way in which Lukács conceptualises realism is decisively opposed to mimetic visualisation, which dominates the representational mode in general, insofar as Lukácsian literary criticism defines description as a symptom of artistic impotence in the engagement with reality. Strictly speaking, thus, Lukácsian realism does not designate the dominant visual representation mode in general, but rather a strategically designed non-ocularcentric aesthetic edifice in particular. More significantly, Lukácsian realism is not effectively anti-ocularcentric but literally non-ocularcentric; Lukács specifically postulates description as an effect of artistic frustration in its process of achieving the perfect form. For Lukácsian realism, it is not important whether a certain work politically contains the real content, but rather whether its form immanently embodies the logic of reality.¹⁸⁰ Therefore, description is supposedly grasped as the symptomatic failure of the utopian impulse, insofar as capitalist reification comes to occupy the field of cultural production.

The direct consequence of this historically changed condition in late capitalism gives rise to reformulating Lukács' criticism of modernism – modernism is not so much pessimistic decadence retreated from social reality, but rather the consequence of the petty bourgeoisie's desperate struggle against instrumentally demystifying capitalism.¹⁸¹ In this respect, Lukács' realism is possibly grasped as a utopian project that allows writers to overcome the limit of modernism, in the sense that the drastic impetus of modernism that demands the totalisation of cultural power

¹⁷⁹ See Jameson, *Marxism and Form*, p. 406.

¹⁸⁰ See Georg Lukács, 'Marx und das Problem des ideologischen Verfalls', in *Probleme des Realismus I* (Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1970).

¹⁸¹ See T.J. Clark, *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), p. 389.

is necessarily failed in capitalist society, and the successful aesthetic achievement seems to be attained only by a realistic representational mode.

Not surprisingly, the presupposition of Lukácsian realism is precisely raised by the concept of reification – reification fundamentally impedes the totalisation of identity in capitalist society, as Lukács always states, ‘commodity fetishism is a specific problem of our age’.¹⁸² In other words, it is almost impossible to describe the total content of the cultural logic without recognising the specific function of formal reification in the age of modern capitalism. It is in this sense that Lukács comes to privilege narration rather than description, precisely because description is nothing less than the spatialisation of time imposing an escape from the everlasting change of reality. To quote Lukács:

Thus time sheds its qualitative, variable, flowing nature; it freezes into an exactly delimited, quantifiable continuum filled with quantifiable ‘things’ ... in short, it becomes space.¹⁸³

It is Bergson’s philosophy that crucially sheds light on this Lukácsian formulation of reification. According to Martin Jay, Bergson was one of the most important philosophers to influence the Lukácsian formulation of reification.¹⁸⁴ The purpose of Bergson’s philosophy resides in its pursuit of restoring “true memory” into consciousness of recollections. More important is that, in Bergson’s conceptualisation, “consciousness of recollections” cannot be reduced to the body, even though the body is a necessary matrix of memories.¹⁸⁵ This assumption that consciousness is stored “somewhere else” leads Bergson’s philosophical formulation

¹⁸² Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, p. 84.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

¹⁸⁴ Jay, *Downcast Eyes*, p. 196.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 193.

to the third path, in which no cognitive image is allowed – his theoretical project is to overcome both idealism and materialism. For Bergson, ‘each was too cognitive, each too trusting in images of the intellect, each not sensitive enough to that vital substratum of concrete, lived reality available only to the holistic understanding of the intuition’.¹⁸⁶ It is unlikely that Lukács would agree with Bergson’s valorisation of the intuition; however, the way in which Lukács emphasises narration rather than description specifically proves his theoretical affinity with Bergson, who defends action over contemplation.¹⁸⁷ Lukács implicitly draws on the distinction between time and space in his discussion of narration and description in affiliation with Bergson’s formulation; the problem of description arises from its contemporising characteristic, while narration always recounts the past in its recollection.¹⁸⁸ In other words, description is lively restoring memories of temporal experiences by action than superficially mirroring the reification of spatialisation by contemplation.

Convincingly, this adverse criticism of description is deeply rooted in Lukács’ investigation of ocularcentric capitalist culture. Symptomatically reading the historical matrix in which the descriptive style comes to dominate the modern composition, Lukács practically encourages writers to overcome cultural reification by adopting a dialectical, realist method. In short, reification definitely possesses the visual characteristic that erases all physical reality. Lukács is distinguished from typical anti-ocularcentrism by the way in which he encapsulates reification as “a symptomatic effect of commodity fetishism” – visual description is a formalistic self-containment raised by the impossibility of narrative. As Michael Riffaterre argues,

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 194.

¹⁸⁷ This theoretical affinity might be constituted by the idea of *Lebensphilosophie* that arises from neo-Kantian opposition of culture and civilisation. The idea of *Lebensphilosophie* influences both Bergson and Lukács in such a way that they subordinate culture to life. For more detailed argument of the relationship between Lukács and the idea of *Lebensphilosophie*, see Tihanov, *The Master and the Slave*, pp. 21-24.

description is 'a verbal detour so contrived that the reader understands something else than the object ostensibly represented'.¹⁸⁹ That is to say, the crucial function of literary description does not lie in the way in which the reader sees something outside of the literary text. According to Riffaterre, 'its aim is not to present an external reality'.¹⁹⁰ In other words, description is not imagery mimesis but rather linguistic significance. It is in this sense that the purpose of description is 'not to offer a representation, but to dictate an interpretation'.¹⁹¹

Riffaterre's analysis of description seems to indirectly illuminate the reason for Lukács' criticism of description as a reified form of narrative. Description does not require active mediation between subject and object, but rather the logical verification of linguistic structure. For Lukács, it is in this respect that description is definitely regarded as a symptom arising from the reification of language. It is worthy of note that Lukács is interested not so much in what is the political content of description, but rather in 'how and why description, originally one of the many modes of epic art (undoubtedly a subordinate mode) became the principle mode'.¹⁹² Therefore, a more significant factor in Lukács' criticism of description certainly resides in the other side of its political strategy: description is not simply a political surrender abolishing any possibility of intervention into the reified situation, but rather an aesthetic symptom symbolically rendering a political dissatisfaction.¹⁹³

Description is the closed moment of narrative. For Lukács, the closed characteristic of literary descriptive imagery seems to cause the uncreative reductionism of its signification: to put it in Riffaterre's terms, 'the reader expects the

¹⁸⁸ Lukács, 'Narrate or Describe?', p. 130.

¹⁸⁹ Michael Riffaterre, 'Descriptive Imagery', *Yale French Studies*, 61 (1981), 107-125 (p. 125).

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹² Lukács, 'Narrate or Describe?', pp. 116-7.

imagery to support the acceptability of representation first offered in literal terms'.¹⁹⁴ For Lukács, the literary work should employ the mediatory function of narrative as the logic of the real content. In this respect, Lukács observes that Romantic concept of "correspondence" is no longer capable of properly reflecting the reified reality of capitalist society. However, there is indubitable weakness in Lukács' formulation, insofar as Lukács' utopian perspective of realism consistently revolves around his conceptualisation of realism. In other words, his realism plainly presupposes the historical triumph of socialism over capitalism, hence fails to sufficiently conceptualise the political meaning of the other aesthetic achievements such as modernism.

Allowing for Lukácsian realism as a failed utopian political aesthetic, the ethical distinction between sick art and healthy art comes to be meaningless. To resituate the Lukácsian formulation in the current historical context, it is not important whether a certain cultural form is aesthetically classified in the realistic mode or the symbolic mode. More ironically, only the attitude to reality, the kernel of the Lukácsian formulation of realism, is mainly imposed on a critical category; it is most likely impossible to see the clearly orthodox realistic mode today, in the sense that reification becomes largely prevalent in late capitalist society. As Virginia Woolf poignantly observes,¹⁹⁵ realism has already become a dominant aesthetic norm in capitalist cultural industry: realism itself has been reified, and reproduced its cultural mode as commodity. In the newly emerged historical condition that actually existing socialism is no longer sustainable, the production of narrative seems to be trapped in

¹⁹³ For Lukács' symptomatic analysis of the relationship between literary form and history, see *ibid.*, p. 118-7.

¹⁹⁴ Riffaterre, 'Descriptive Imagery', p. 107.

¹⁹⁵ See Virginia Woolf, *The Waves*, ed. by Gillian Beer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992). In this novel, it is not difficult to see that Woolf's modernism comes to exist as a strategic reification in the course of resistance against the principle of realism dominating the world.

an “autonomous repetition”. No more narrative is needed but only descriptive image takes over the representational mode: Lukácsian realism comes to remain as merely uncompleted utopian aesthetic project.

Considering their provocative political meanings issued by their historical contexts, Adorno and Althusser’s attacks on Lukács can be conceived largely as an attempt to precipitate the shift of the central arena of theoretical polemics from reflection to symptom. Alongside this shift, the role of readers rather than writers must be stressed. From this standpoint, the anti-Lukácsian formulations signify the further reified situation of Marxist theory in late capitalist society, in which Marxist theorists cannot but move from the immediate political dimensions to the mediating academic disciplines. In a sense, one might say that Lukács’ realism foreshadows this situation.

CHAPTER TWO

THE PARADOX OF REALISM: BENJAMIN AND ADORNO

Introduction

Walter Benjamin is one of the most important theorists who reflects upon the relationship between technology and mimesis. For Benjamin, the technical reproducibility of the work of art designates a new stage of aesthetic production, in the sense that the distance between artworks and spectators, the fundamental condition of aura, is no longer possible in capitalism. Criticising Benjamin's formulation of aura, Adorno elaborates the presupposition of the commodification of aesthetic production in the newly articulated system of the culture industry in the administrative society. What is implicit in Adorno's formulation of the relationship between technology and the work of art is that there is a paradoxical aspect of aesthetic production – art disenchanting the traditional code system and, at the same time, mystifies its autonomy. For Adorno, it is not the outer effect of technology but the inner law of art that liquidates the magical aura from the work of art.

My concern in this chapter is, through a theoretical comparison of Lukács, Benjamin and Adorno, to stage a specific consideration of the relationship between technology and realism in the age of the culture industry. First, the chapter recounts Benjamin's theory of the mimetic faculty in relation to his postulation of the technical reproducibility of artworks. Second, my investigation leads to a comparison between Benjamin and Adorno. Finally, in relation to Lukács' formulation of realism, the chapter provides a discussion of Adorno's aesthetic strategy, a strategy that strives to preserve the utopian impulse of art through defending the category of sensuous experience, in order to overcome the total system of the culture industry.

1. Realism and Dialectical Images

Unlike Lukács who strives to formulate realism as a revolutionary mode of literary production, Benjamin is concerned with the linguistic or semiotic structure of realism. Benjamin's analysis of realism focuses on the way in which a specific mode of literary production is transformed by social and cultural changes. For Benjamin, realism is not a means for the expression of worldviews, but rather a media system in which experience comes to be compromised by the massive convention of perception. It is the aspect of mimesis or the mimetic faculty that needs to be investigated in Benjamin's formulation. Benjamin observes a positive aspect of Walt Disney's cartoons as follows:

Mickey Mouse proves that a creature can still survive even when it has thrown off all resemblance to a human being. He disrupts the entire hierarchy of creatures that is supposed to culminate in mankind.¹

In this fragment, Benjamin briefly mentions the meaning of the rise of Mickey Mouse films – 'the explanation for the huge popularity of these films is not mechanization, their form; nor is it a misunderstanding. It is simply the fact that the public recognizes its own life in them'.² There is no doubt that this short analysis is open to various interpretations; but it is also clear that Benjamin properly picked out the kernel of the disenchanted world that capitalism provides to the public; hence, Benjamin correctly observes the point that capitalism destroys traditional cultural codes and creates a new knowledge of reality. More interestingly, there is a deeper sense in Benjamin's argument, for he presupposes the mimetic impulse as a cause of

¹ Walter Benjamin, 'Mickey Mouse', in *Selected Writings, Volume 2: 1927-1934*, trans. by Rodney Livingstone and others (London: Belknap, 1999), p. 445.

Mickey Mouse's success. Mickey Mouse is not a cultural commodity that is produced by the traditional mimetic faculty, but rather constructed by a newly established level of mimesis, the semiotic mimetic faculty. What Benjamin calls the modern mimetic faculty is the hidden impetus whereby narrative is constituted in contemporary realistic artworks.

Observing the newly emerged stage of art production, Benjamin crucially observes that the introduction of technology into the mode of art production is caused by 'the desire of contemporary masses to bring things 'closer' spatially and humanly'.³ As Benjamin contends, the desire is related to 'their bent toward overcoming the uniqueness of every reality by accepting its reproduction';⁴ the desire provokes a conflict of reproduction and uniqueness. Benjamin argues:

Unmistakably, reproduction as offered by picture magazine and newsreels differs from the image seen by the unaided eye. Uniqueness and permanence are as closely linked in the latter as are transitoriness and reproducibility in the former. To pry an object from its shell, to destroy its aura, is the mark of a perception whose 'sense of the universal equality of things' has increased to such a degree that it extracts it even from a unique object by means of reproduction.⁵

For Benjamin, the uniqueness of the artwork is located in its ritual function as use value. The stress on the exclusive characteristic of the artwork gives rise to the principle of *l'art pour l'art*, a theology of art – in Benjamin's terms, 'a negative theology in the form of the idea of 'pure' art, which not only denied any social function of art but also any categorizing by subject matter'.⁶

² Ibid.

³ Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', in *Illuminations*, trans. by Harry Zohn (London: Fontana, 1973), p. 216-17.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., p. 218.

A significant factor in Benjamin's critique of aestheticism does not reside in the way in which he emphasises "a theology of art" as the means of Fascism, but rather in the way in which he alludes to the conflicting relationship between individual artists, who try to establish the isolated aesthetic realm, and the masses, who desire to perceive the real at a closer distance. For Benjamin, the mimetic faculty in high capitalism has remarkably declined, in the sense that 'the observable world of modern man contains only minimal residues of the magical correspondences and analogies'.⁷ In this sense, the modern mimetic faculty is not presented in sensuous similarity, but rather indirectly transformed by language. From this perspective, Benjamin suggests the important function of the semiotic aspect of language in the modern mimetic system – in Benjamin's terms, nonsensuous similarity – by which 'the ties not only between the spoken and the signified but also between the written and the signified, and equally between the spoken and the written'.⁸ At the semiotic level of language, the modern mimetic faculty eventually reveals its own place in the unified system of representation.

Similar to Benjamin's argument, Jameson suggests a third category beyond the aesthetic binary of realism and modernism. In the conclusion of *Aesthetics and Politics*, Jameson suggests that there is 'the aesthetic conflict between realism and modernism, whose navigation and renegotiation is still unavoidable for us'.⁹ Jameson's emphasis in this discussion is on the overlooked opposition between the problem of Lukácsian realism, which attempted to lengthen traditional forms of realism into the new historical moment, and Brecht's defence of modernism, which understood realism as the experimental relationship between the audience and the

⁷ Walter Benjamin, 'On the Mimetic Faculty', in *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, trans. by Edmund Jephcott (New York: Schocken, 1986), p. 334.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 335.

work of art. Jameson does not regard Brecht as a resolution of Lukács' problem; Brecht also criticised the pure formalistic experiment which appeared in the artistic trend of modernism.

Jameson's interest rather lies in what Benjamin, as well as Brecht, strove to achieve in their appropriation of technology in relation to the popular audience. By substantiating realism within the context of late capitalism, Jameson argues that 'the originality of the concept of realism ... lies in its claim to cognitive as well as aesthetic status'.¹⁰ For Jameson, Lukács' concept of realism must be rewritten in terms of the categories of reification and totality.¹¹ As Benjamin alludes to narrative as the contemporary mimetic faculty, so Jameson sees realism as narrative by which the new category of reality itself is produced. Alongside this, according to Jameson, 'realism must also deprogram the illusory narrative and stereotypes of the older mode of production'.¹² The way in which realism takes place in the artistic stance is, however, quite paradoxical – 'where the epistemological claim succeeds, it fails; and if realism validates its claim to being a correct or true representation of the world, it thereby ceases to be an *aesthetic* mode of representation and falls out of art altogether'.¹³ To satisfy both categories of aesthetics and epistemology, realism cannot but choose a path of disenchantment, thereby simultaneously deconstructing and reconstructing cultural codes.

Jameson's formulation of realism as a dialectical narrative between the epistemological and the aesthetic seems to suggest a point of resistance to the formalised theory, such as Niklas Luhmann's formulation, which seems to reduce

⁹ Fredric Jameson, 'Reflections in Conclusion', in *Aesthetics and Politics* (London: Verso, 1980), p. 196.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 198.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 212.

¹² Fredric Jameson, *Signatures of the Visible* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 166.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 158.

realism to a by-product of a self-referential coding system. Luhmann could be such a theoretician who attempts to explain the correlation between the historical process and the social system in a highly formalised way. To a certain extent, Luhmann's formulation of "differentiation" seems to elucidate the another facet of realism, a facet of realism as communication in a broad sense. Luhmann's conceptualisation of differentiation contributes more or less to an understanding of the relationship between realism and modernism.

As Jameson points out, Luhmann's differentiation consists in 'the gradual separation of areas of social life from each other, their disentanglement from some seemingly global and mythic (but more often religious) overall dynamic, and their reconstitution as distinct fields with distinct laws and dynamics'.¹⁴ Luhmann draws a distinction between system and structure: 'systems have boundaries'.¹⁵ In Luhmann's conception, a system exists and works universally beyond a structure. The intensification of boundaries lends systems differentiation, or vice versa – 'a boundary separates elements, but not necessarily relations'.¹⁶ In other words, differentiation is the mechanism for producing boundaries and removing boundaries all at once. The intensification of a boundary separates a system from its environment – finally, a system perceives its environment as another system. Differentiation is closely tied to the particular acts of selection. According to Luhmann, 'a system's internal organization for making selective relations with the help of differentiated boundary mechanisms leads to systems' being indeterminable for one another and to the

¹⁴ Fredric Jameson, *A Singular Modernity: Essay on the Ontology of the Present* (London: Verso, 2002), p. 90.

¹⁵ Niklas Luhmann, *Social Systems*, trans. by John Bednarz, Jr., and Dirk Baecker (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), p. 28.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

emergence of new systems (communication systems) to regulate this indeterminability'.¹⁷

In this sense, Luhmann writes that 'the ability to differentiate between functionally specific acts or functional dominances of one or the other selection horizon is possible only if the unity of communicative synthesis is guaranteed in advance as something normal'.¹⁸ To quote Luhmann:

The combination of information, utterance, and expectation of success in one act of attention presupposes "coding." The utterance must duplicate the information, that is, on the one hand, leave it outside yet, on the other, use it for utterance and reformulate it appropriately: for example, by providing it with a linguistic (eventually an acoustic, written, etc.) form.¹⁹

The success of communication depends on this condition of coding: 'coded events operate as information in the communication process, uncoded ones as disturbance (noise)'.²⁰ What is implicated in Luhmann's argument is that communication does not have a dual structure, but requires a third category, the difference between information and utterance. The third category is required to make an addresser and an addressee have the expectation of success in the communicative act. Luhmann maintains that communication does not consist in an event as a giving and receiving, or as the difference between information and utterance, but rather emerges 'only if this last difference is observed, expected, understood, and used as the basis for connecting with further behaviors'.²¹ In this way, Luhmann formulates communication as a system, the transcendental and self-referential category beyond mediation.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 142.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., p. 141.

The coding process is necessarily linked to the adequate standardisation by the act of selection. In other words, subject and media must take on a specific coding system in the same way. What Luhmann calls the third component of communication, the category of expectation in success, is nothing other than the habitual perception of reality, which Benjamin's and Jameson's criticisms want to change. Luhmann's idea of system leads to a defence of the reification of a particular communicative code as an autonomous unity from any social conflicts. Luhmann simplifies a dialectic whereby 'at any given moment the increase triggers a leap from quantity to quality and produces a radically new type of differentiation'.²² In this way, Luhmann simply replaces the classical category of self-consciousness with the modern ideology of system; a system is tied in with an ego in his theory.

Therefore, Luhmann's formulation must necessarily be reconstructed from a Marxist perspective if it is to be used for analysing the modern condition of realism. Jameson claims that 'the strength of Luhmann's concept of differentiation lies in the way in which it posits formation and rearticulation together and at one within the same process: the public begins to differentiate at the very moment in which it comes into being as a newly identifiable social institution: the emergence of the new bourgeois reading public is at one with its fragmentation into articulated sub-groups that gradually become autonomous in their own right'.²³ In other words, the newly established code system of communication encourages a relative view of the traditional cultural code of a specific community at a historical moment.

No doubt, the historical change of the mode of production crucially precipitates the transformation of the code system of communication. Insofar as we define artistic expression as one of the general means of communications, it is not

²² Jameson, *A Singular Modernity*, p. 90.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 158.

difficult to see that the unification between the visual code and the linguistic code – as Benjamin observes – serves as the possible condition of literary realism in the nineteenth century. In this cultural situation, the democratic form of the novel comes to be ‘a champion of the common life’.²⁴ More importantly, this is where the novel is to be taken as the exemplary genre by Lukács to prove his doctrine of realism: ‘through the novel, realism should portray a world which neither conceals its contradictions nor presents itself in a fragmented and beguilingly autonomous fashion’.²⁵

The way in which Lukács defends the principle of realism is similar to Benjamin’s notion of allegory, which is directed against the Romantic symbol. Benjamin wants to reveal the mechanism of the Romantic symbol through an analysis of Baroque allegory.²⁶ Benjamin’s study of Baroque allegory is deeply influenced by Alois Riegel. Riegel is the most pivotal theoretician of art history, whose work has affected succeeding generations of art historians such as Wilhelm Worringer and Erwin Panofsky. First of all, Riegel’s influence on art historians lies in the way in which he separates art history from philosophy. Second, Riegel’s formulation of art history aims at welding a formal analysis of the individual work to a historically grounded analysis: ‘Riegel’s art history represents an important synthesis of the two strands of aesthetics which had dominated the nineteenth century, Kantian formalism and Hegelian historicism’.²⁷

²⁴ Terry Eagleton, *Figures of Dissent: Critical Essays on Fish, Spivak, Žižek and Others* (London: Verso, 2003), p. 14.

²⁵ Galin Tihanov, *The Master and the Slave: Lukács, Bakhtin, and the Ideas of Their Time* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), p. 110.

²⁶ See Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. by John Osborne (London: Verso, 1998), p. 160.

²⁷ Michael W. Jennings, *Dialectical Images: Walter Benjamin's Theory of Literary Criticism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), p. 153.

As Michael Jennings indicates, 'Riegel's historical model is ideally suited to Benjamin's convictions'.²⁸ Endorsing Riegel's fundamental insight into the history of art, Benjamin is convinced that the unity of the material and the transcendental object, which constitutes the paradox of the theological symbol, is distorted into a relationship between appearance and essence. From this standpoint, Benjamin argues that Romanticism introduced this distorted conception of symbol into aesthetics.²⁹ In contrast to allegory that comes to be seen as mere tradition, symbol does not need poetic tradition because its radiance transmits itself spontaneously. However, Benjamin does not accept Riegel's idea of a linear universal history. Benjamin's formulation of art history rather privileges decadent periods as 'more "historically responsible" than ages that produce classical or symbolic works of art'.³⁰ In this respect, just as Lukács criticises the Kantian system in which the dilemma of the thing-in-itself becomes a kind of "optical illusion",³¹ Benjamin claims that such a transcendental, immanent, symbolic unity is an impossible accomplishment, because of the discrepancy between ideas and the world. Benjamin's analysis of the Romantic symbol insinuates that it is a kind of the transformation of allegory in that it springs from the desire to annihilate the tension within allegory.

In a similar tone to Benjamin,³² Lukács criticises symbolism. As Jameson indicates, 'the principal characteristic of literary realism is seen to be its antisymbolism; realism itself comes to be distinguished by its movement, its

²⁸ Ibid., p. 155.

²⁹ See Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, p. 160.

³⁰ Jennings, *Dialectical Images*, p. 156.

³¹ See Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Form: Twentieth-Century Dialectical Theories of Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), p. 185.

³² In fact, Lukács seemed to have much sympathy for Benjamin's theoretical approach to allegory. Lukács discussed Benjamin's theory and indicated that 'Benjamin interprets Baroque (and Romanticism) from the perspective of the ideological and artistic needs of the present'. See Georg Lukács, 'On Walter Benjamin', trans. by Rodney Livingstone, *New Left Review*, 110 (1978), pp. 83-88 (p. 84).

storytelling and dramatization of its content'.³³ Lukács acclaims Benjamin's examination of the relationship between symbol and allegory, since 'Benjamin sees with absolute clarity that, though the opposition of symbol and allegory is crucial to the aesthetic definition of any work of art, it is not ultimately the spontaneous or conscious product of aesthetic considerations'.³⁴ Lukács' interest in Benjamin's work here derives from his consideration of symbol and allegory as 'fundamentally divergent human responses to reality'.³⁵ However, in his criticism of Benjamin, Lukács is concerned only to 'establish aesthetic (or trans-aesthetic) parity for allegory'.³⁶ Censuring Benjamin's attempt, Lukács suggests the fact that 'to give things a more imposing form is to fetishize them, in contrast to an anthropomorphizing mimetic art, with its inherent tendency to defetishization and its true knowledge of things as the mediators of human relations'.³⁷

For Lukács, an attempt to retrieve an archaic culture as in avant-garde art can take place in the imagination, but in reality capitalist fetishisation of human relations into things always already occurs. It is in this sense that literary realism can be the only way in which writers engage with historical reality, since 'the realistic mode of presentation, the possibility of narration itself, is present only in those moments of history in which human life can be apprehended in terms of concrete'.³⁸

However, contrary to Lukács' understanding of realism, Benjamin's argument genuinely indicates the representational transposition between image and language that dominates the process of the modern cultural transformation. For Benjamin, 'language may be seen as the highest level of mimetic behavior and the most

³³ Jameson, *Marxism and Form*, p. 196.

³⁴ Lukács, 'On Walter Benjamin', p. 86.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Jameson, *Marxism and Form*, p. 200.

complete archive of nonsensuous similarity'.³⁹ In Benjamin's sense, the modern mimesis of language liquidates the earlier magical power of mimetic visualisation; the linguistic communicative form transparently translates the visual communicative form into the same code system. According to Jennings, Benjamin's early speculations of language represent 'a late echo of the crisis of language', which is presupposed by such German Idealist figures as Ernst Mach, Fritz Mauthner, and Hugo von Hofmannsthal.⁴⁰ This influence lends Benjamin the idea of 'the exhausted language to reveal inner essence'.⁴¹ From this perspective, Benjamin's doctrine of the aesthetic is fundamentally hostile to the positivistic idea of reality.

As Benjamin suggests, the consolidation of image and language presupposes the positivistic view of the human body and social reality. Jonathan Crary's discussion may provide a supplement for Benjamin's insight:

The collective achievement of European physiology in the first half of the nineteenth century was a comprehensive survey of a previously half-known territory, an exhaustive inventory of the body. It was a knowledge that also would be the basis for the formation of an individual adequate to the productive requirements of economic modernity and for emerging technologies of control and subjection. By the 1840s there had been both (1) the gradual transferral of the holistic study of subjective experience or mental life to an empirical and quantitative plane, and (2) the division and fragmentation of the physical subject into increasingly specific organic and mechanical systems.⁴²

This process incisively propelled by physiology can be regarded as the rationalisation of the body in which all the human sensuous functions are quantitatively reduced to statistic standardisation. Needless to say, such standardisation means the deconstruction and demystification of the traditional

³⁹ Benjamin, 'On the Mimetic Faculty', p. 336.

⁴⁰ Jennings, *Dialectical Images*, p. 105.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1992), p. 81.

communicative code, which provokes the Romantic critique of capitalism. This is where a distinction between scientific positivism and literary realism is crucially drawn. The problem of nineteenth century positivism resides in the insistence of transparency between image and language; language is a self-evidently neutral medium whereby thought prior to words is clearly transmitted. However, it is difficult to acknowledge that literary realism in the nineteenth century was acquiescently obliged to adopt the positivistic worldview. The ideological radiance of literary realism is markedly distinguished from the mainstream of positivism in modern society, because the novel discloses the fact that ‘the more down-at-heel your life, the more precarious and potentially tragic it is likely to be’.⁴³

There is no doubt that Benjamin’s idea of language is tied in with his theory of the dialectical image. In a sense, Benjamin’s notion of the dialectical image can be said to be equivalent to the way in which Marx analyses the commodity form. As Jennings puts it, ‘Benjamin conceived of the dialectical image as a powerful antidote to the concept of progress, for him the most dangerous ideological weapon in the capitalist arsenal’.⁴⁴ Yet, it is undeniable that Benjamin’s theory of the dialectical image is deeply immersed in German Idealism rather than the classical Marxian view of historical materialism. In contrast to Marx’s 11th Feuerbach thesis – ‘the philosophers have only *interpreted* the world, in various ways; the point is to *change* it’⁴⁵ – revolution does not mean a political activity for Benjamin, aimed at directly changing the world, but the change of human perception and reason, and the change ‘in the structure of consciousness rather than the structure of society’.⁴⁶

⁴³ Eagleton, *Figures of Dissent*, p. 16.

⁴⁴ Jennings, *Dialectical Images*, p. 37.

⁴⁵ Karl Marx, ‘Concerning Feuerbach’, in *Early Writings*, trans. by Rodney Livingstone and Gregor Benton (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975), p. 421.

⁴⁶ See Jennings, *Dialectical Images*, p. 37.

In his analysis of commodity, Marx reveals the equivocal aspects of the commodity in the mechanism of capitalist society, insofar as commodification raises iconoclastic questions about social convention, while fetishising the relations of things. What makes Marx's achievement unique is that his analysis stresses not the iconoclastic feature of commodity but rather its fetishistic mechanism. This duplicated process of commodification in capitalist society leads Benjamin to consider the fantasy of commodity culture as a field of cultural production and the place of the dialectical image. Defining dialectical thinking as the "organ" of historical awakening, Benjamin argues that "phantasmagorias" should be considered as the residue of a dream world, to which 'the development of the forces of production shattered the wish symbols of the previous century'.⁴⁷

The modern is nothing less than 'citing primal history'.⁴⁸ Benjamin's idea of the modern stems from his understanding of history: the duplicated process of progress and regression. In this way, Benjamin impressively analyses the historical transformation of high capitalism, as the figure of the *flâneur* replaces that of the *bohème*. For Benjamin, the *flâneur* can be said to be the "ruin" of the *bohème*, and the *bohème* is the newly articulated image of the journeyman that was described in Marx's *The Communist Manifesto*. In his writing on Baudelaire, Benjamin deliberately introduces Marx's terminology of the *bohème* into the context of Baudelaire's poetical textuality. Benjamin states:

The *bohème* appears in a revealing context in the writings of Marx. In it he includes the professional conspirators with whom he concerns himself in his detailed note on the memoirs of the police agent, de la Hodde, which appeared in the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* in 1850. To bring to mind the physiognomy of

⁴⁷ Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (London: Belknap, 1999), p.13.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

Baudelaire means to speak of the resemblance which he displays with this political type.⁴⁹

As a transformed figure of the *bohème*, the *flâneur* is a dialectical phenomenon that retains the trace of totality, in the sense that the crowd consists of the fantasy of the *flâneur* in which images of modernity are produced by the collective unconscious. Resorting to Marx's insight of the relation between image and ideology, Benjamin's analysis of the dialectical image of the *flâneur* in capitalism also seems to provide a way in which one understands an ideology in relation to the fetishistic visualisation of the commodity-structure.

Following Benjamin's analysis of the image of the *flâneur*, Susan Sontag also provides a useful discussion of the relationship between vision and reality. Seeing the *flâneur* as the image of the middle-class in nineteenth century capitalism, Sontag uses this newly charted historical image of human existence by Baudelaire to explain the advent of photography. According to Sontag, the photographer as a *flâneur* is 'an armed version of the solitary walker reconnoitring, stalking, cursing the urban inferno, the voyeuristic stroller who discovers the city as a landscape of voluptuous extremes'.⁵⁰ Sontag's account of the relationship of the *flâneur* and photography, not surprisingly, refers to the heroic image of a modern artist normally depicted in modernism. It is in this sense that 'gazing on other people's reality with curiosity, with detachment, with professionalism, the ubiquitous photographer operates as if that activity transcends class interests, as if its perspective is universal'.⁵¹ By means of photography, the *flâneur* finds the world "picturesque" because the hidden reality comes to be visible. Seemingly, a more significant factor in Sontag's discussion lies

⁴⁹ Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, trans. by Harry Zohn (London: Verso, 1997), p. 11.

⁵⁰ Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (London: Penguin, 1979), p. 55.

in the way in which photography – the newly emerged technological cultural form in nineteenth century capitalist society – is related to the fetishism of the visual image found by the eyes of the middle-class.

As Benjamin and Sontag imply, ideological production resides not only in the manipulation of ideological state apparatuses but also in a commodity fetishism spontaneously operated by individuals. In this sense, the commodity-structure requires the *flâneur* to sell goods for its continuation; at the same time, the *flâneur* can exploit the potential of the commodity structure, which may be called “newness”. For Benjamin, ‘newness is a quality independent of the use value of the commodity’.⁵² Benjamin’s contemplation of “newness” corresponds to the way in which Marx presents the iconoclastic aspect of the commodity. Marx raises the question of “new” idolatry coming through the critique of “old” idolatry in his formulation of commodity fetishism. For Marx, the commodity-form has no connection to the physical nature of commodity and is ‘the definite social relation between men themselves which assumes here, for them, the fantastic form of a relation between things’.⁵³ That is to say, commodity fetishism magically attaches itself to commodities, and so offers the commodity-form to an autonomous figure endowed with a life of its own.

It is true that commodity fetishism can emerge by equating the different products of labour in exchange for values; the money fetish engenders the commodity fetish; therefore, money as the universal equivalent value form crucially gives rise to the very metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties of commodities. Marx remarks metaphorically in relation to values and fetishism as follows:

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, p. 11.

⁵³ Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Vol. 1, trans. By Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin, 1976; repr. 1990), p. 165.

Values, therefore, do not have its description branded on its forehead; it rather transforms every product of labour into a social hieroglyphic. Later on, men try to decipher the hieroglyphic, to get behind the secret of their own social product: for the characteristic which objects of utility have of being values is as much men's social product as is their language.⁵⁴

What Marx particularly emphasises here is nothing less than the question of how values change every product of labour into the mysterious commodity-form. This question inevitably leads to an answer explaining why the simple money-form comes to be the universal equivalent value-form: money is a central commodity of the general commodity exchange. As the difference of use-value to each other is equated by exchange-value, then we consequently perceive the value-form as the universal equivalent of the money-form. Seemingly, a significant point in this argument is that the secret of values resides in the very enigmatic characteristic of commodity fetishism; if values are not related to any specific materiality of the commodity, at least they are like the materiality of commodity. Simply adopting Marx's metaphor, it seems that values are the language of commodification whereby the variety of different meanings of commodity can be translated into each other. Marx's analysis lies in this description of that process, whereby the money-form comes to be the universal language of commodity.

Marx claims that the money-form of commodities is 'a purely ideal or notional form'⁵⁵ distinct from commodities' real bodily form. In his analysis of the value-form versus the money-form, Marx speaks of the progressive development of the money-form from the simple value-form; he describes the simple form of value as 'an embryonic form which must undergo a series of metamorphoses before it can ripen

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 167.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 189.

into the price-form'.⁵⁶ Herein, the Hegelian dialectic that Marx employs to explain the commodity-structure sufficiently raises the suspicion of evolutionism for non-Marxist theorists. Yet, the way in which Marx appears to analyse the commodity-structure arises in the exact opposite course of the Hegelian dialectic. To quote Marx:

The value-form, whose fully developed shape is the money-form, is very simple and slight in content. Nevertheless, the human mind has sought in vain for more than 2,000 years to get to the bottom of it, while on the other hand there has been at least an approximation to a successful analysis of forms which are much richer in content and more complex. Why? Because the complete body is easier to study than its cells. Moreover, in the analysis of economic forms neither microscopes nor chemical reagents are of assistance. The power of abstraction must replace both. But for bourgeois society, the commodity-form of the product of labour, or the value-form of the commodity, is the economic cell-form. To the superficial observer, the analysis of these forms seems to turn upon minutiae. It does in fact deal with minutiae, but so similarly does microscopic anatomy.⁵⁷

Intrinsically, the purpose of Marx's project, which appears here, resides in the "microscopic anatomy" of the enigmatic feature of commodity-structure: 'we have to trace the development of the expression of value contained in the value-relation of commodities from its simplest, almost imperceptible outline to the dazzling money-form'.⁵⁸ That is to say, to analyse this simple form is precisely Marx's real task. For Marx, the only way in which we can solve the riddle of commodity lies in the way in which we understand the language of commodity – the secret edifice of values. Marx metaphorically calls this language of commodity the hieroglyphic. The reason why Marx criticises political economists' bourgeois consciousness is that they cannot decipher this hieroglyphic of commodity-structure; they never raise radical questions about the fetishistic character of commodity; hence, 'political economy has indeed analysed value and its magnitude however incompletely, and has uncovered the

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 154.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 90.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 139.

content concealed within these forms'.⁵⁹ What Marx illuminates here is that classical political economy has already unmasked the content of the commodity-form. For Marx, the secret of the commodity does not so much reside in its content, but rather in its form, the logic of fetishism. As Marx continues to explain, only by the radical question 'why this content has assumed that particular form', can one solve the riddle of commodity fetishism. In this sense, the critique of ideology within capitalist society could fall into a vicious circle of iconoclastic criticism, if it does not include the critique of commodity fetishism. Iconoclastic criticism arises in the same way that "fashion" produces a new mode of life style: the demand of newness, the engine of fashion machinery, is the origin of the illusory appearance in capitalist society in which commodity fetishism has been contained.

For Marx, ideology means false consciousness; false consciousness is not so much fallacy but rather false understanding.⁶⁰ This means that ideology is a necessary mechanism through which one can obtain any perception of reality. The unique aspect of Marx's conceptualisation of ideology totally distinguished from a widespread liberal idea lies in the way in which his formulation reveals the material and structural feature of ideology. Marx's postulate of ideology leads us to gain an insight into the image, through his metaphor of the inverted image in the *camera obscura*. The *camera obscura* is a machine for turning an image upside down. Marx illustrates the distinction between an inverted image produced by the *camera obscura* and a fetish image of commodity. To quote Marx:

Consciousness can never be anything else than conscious existence, and the existence of men is their actual life-process. If in all ideology men and their

⁵⁹ See *ibid.*, p. 174.

⁶⁰ See W.J.T. Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 172.

circumstances just as much from their historical life-process as the inversion of objects on the retina does from their physical life-process.⁶¹

Employing a metaphor of the *camera obscura*, literally a “dark box” in which an upside down image is projected, Marx elaborates the concept of ideology which can be distinguished from the commodity fetishism. As we have seen in the previous quotation, Marx rhetorically posits an analogy between the “historical life-process” and the “physical life-process”. Significantly, the “historical life-process” and the “physical life-process” consist of the “actual life-process”; it is a necessary part of men’s actual life-process, even if ideology is nothing other than the “inversion of objects”. Not surprisingly, this is where the metaphor of the *camera obscura* comes to unveil its duplicated meaning: a technical machine by which we can see highly realistic images of the visible world;⁶² a machine which scientifically produces optical images. Commodity fetishism, on the other hand, is located on the opposite side of the realistic and scientific image: the side of an irrational superstitious image.

As Terry Eagleton points out, Marx’s implication of the metaphor would be that ‘idealism is really a kind of inverted empiricism’.⁶³ What Marx indicates in his conceptualisation of ideology is precisely that the “historical life-process” produces “false understanding” of the real world as the *camera obscura* projects inverted images of visible objects. It is certainly significant to know that “false understanding” is not so much a nonsensical error but rather a system of representation as such. In this sense, one of the most important factors in Marx’s concern of ideology is the problem of representation. When regarding the relations between the historical process and representation, the production of ideology must stress its dialectical

⁶¹ Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology*, ed. by C. J. Arthur (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1970-96; repr. 1999), p. 47.

⁶² See Mitchell, *Iconology*, p. 163.

characteristic. Contrary to this, commodity fetishism is definitely not dialectical; it rather petrifies the dialectic of ideology.

From this standpoint, Benjamin's first thesis on the philosophy of history can be opened towards a new interpretation. Here, Benjamin implicitly adopts Adorno's conceptualisation of the utopian impulse in his metaphor of a chess-playing puppet in Turkish attire. According to Jessica Riskin, the Turkish puppet exemplifies a contradictory attitude towards "a deception".⁶⁴ Even though the disguised automatic device was not automatic, and the truth was finally revealed, the deceptive machine was praised as an original invention, in which 'two separate "powers", a visible "vis motrix" and a hidden "vis directrix"'⁶⁵ were successfully combined. This is a situation that Žižek describes in his reformulation of ideology: 'they know very well how things really are, but still they are doing it as if they did not know',⁶⁶ a situation slightly different from Marx's formulation of commodity fetishism: 'they do this without being aware of it'.⁶⁷ In short, metaphorically taking the chess-playing puppet as an example of more complex historical process, Benjamin aims at formulating a more elaborated version of Marxism to solve the newly emerged problem of capitalist society by constituting his own allegorical realism. There is no doubt that Benjamin also attempts to develop the Brechtian idea of mass culture and aesthetic strategy in high capitalism.

In this way, the Benjaminian idea of allegorical realism retains the category of theological messianism, the hidden-dwarf in the visible machine; Benjamin's messianism is mixed with his Marxism in such a way that 'the true, creative

⁶³ Terry Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction* (London: Verso, 1991), p. 76.

⁶⁴ See Jessica Riskin, 'The Defecating Duck, or, the Ambiguous Origins of Artificial Life', *Critical Inquiry*, 29 (2003), 599-633 (p. 623).

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989), p. 32.

⁶⁷ Marx, *Capital*, p. 167.

overcoming of religious illumination ... resides in a *profane illumination*, a materialist, anthropological inspiration'.⁶⁸ For Benjamin, a profane illumination is related to the secularisation of the mystic, in his well-known idea, the decline of "aura". Benjamin's concept of profane illuminations is articulated by his idea of modern language. For Benjamin, 'language in its communicative, or semiotic function is itself depotentiated'.⁶⁹ Benjamin is well aware of the limited ability of linguistic representation in modern society. However, it is for Benjamin that the original communicative feature of language is 'now the necessary medium of the occasional flash of insight permitted modern man'.⁷⁰ As Jürgen Habermas also points out, Benjamin's idea of the profane illumination epitomises a communication in which the esoteric experience of happiness in high cultural form has become public and universal.⁷¹ To quote Habermas:

The development of art away from ritual involves the risk that the art work will surrender the substance of experience along with its aura and be merely banal; only the disintegration of the aura, on the other hand, offers a chance to universalize and stabilize the experience of happiness ... When in a state of deep emotion, the mystic is more interested in the proximity and palpable presence of God than in God Himself. Only, the mystic shuts his eyes in his solitude; his experience is as esoteric as its tradition. It is just this moment that separates the religious experience of happiness from the one with which Benjamin's redemptive criticism is concerned. Therefore Benjamin calls this illumination, explicated in terms of the impact of surrealist art, secular; these works are no longer art in the autonomous sense, but rather manifestation, slogan, document, bluff and counterfeit.⁷²

⁶⁸ Walter Benjamin, 'Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia', in *Reflections*, trans. by Edmund Jephcott (New York: Schocken Books, 1978), p. 179.

⁶⁹ Jennings, *Dialectical Images*, p. 118.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ See Jürgen Habermas, 'Consciousness-Raising or Redemptive Criticism: The Contemporaneity of Walter Benjamin', trans. by Philip Brewster and Carl Howard Buchner, *New German Critique*, 17 (1979), 30-59 (p. 46).

⁷² *Ibid.*

For Benjamin, the hidden similarities between a text and reality, a complex constellation, can be revealed by reading. Reading produces the dialectical image, which flashes as a constellation bridging the past and the present all at once.⁷³ Benjamin regards the similarity as a category of knowledge, which cannot be obtained in logical perception. In contrast to Lukács and Adorno, Benjamin does not endorse mediation; he presupposes that immediate experience, *Erlebnis*, can achieve messianic redemption by an epistemological glimpse, by the shock of dialectical thinking. Benjamin's conceptualisation of dialectical thinking, or better still, "totalisation" without the category of mediation, is equivalent to his formulation of magic. According to Winfried Menninghaus, 'within the conceptual chemistry of the Romantics, both reflection and magic are identical at least in that they are forms of 'totalizing', 'potentiating' and 'romanticizing' – that is, forms with a medial reference to the 'absolute''.⁷⁴

Rather than Hegelianism, Benjamin's formulation of dialectical thinking is incisively inclined to the Romantic idea of thinking, the idea that 'thinking that should, in the place of intuition, be true to the living, non-concretized 'I', is reflection'.⁷⁵ More significantly, Benjamin's consideration of literary criticism as another philosophical practice can be stemmed from 'the breakdown of systematic philosophy in such figures as Nietzsche and Dilthey, and the rechanneling of this philosophical energy into other areas – psychology and cultural criticism for Nietzsche, hermeneutics and the philosophy of history for Dilthey'.⁷⁶ In this sense, as Fred Rush argues, 'Benjamin was all but untouched by Hegel, whose cast of mind he

⁷³ See Jennings, *Dialectical Images*, p. 119.

⁷⁴ Winfried Menninghaus, 'Walter Benjamin's Exposition of the Romantic Theory of Reflection', in *Walter Benjamin and Romanticism*, ed. by Beatrice Hanssen and Andrew Benjamin (London: Continuum, 2002), p. 28.

found ‘repellent’.⁷⁷ For Benjamin, Hegel is ‘the silent yet always present ‘third party’ in his dialogue with Romanticism’.⁷⁸ Even though Benjamin’s conceptualisation of aura remains ambiguous, his formula of history, the co-existence of progress and regress, undoubtedly serves to rethink the relationship between ideology and reality without the Hegelian category of mediation. It seems to me that Benjamin’s insight anticipates the Althusserian conceptualisation of the ideology of ideology, the imaginary distortion that recognises ‘the ‘ideas’ of a human subject exist in his actions, or ought to exist in his actions, and if that is not the case, it lends him other ideas corresponding to the actions (however perverse) that he does perform’.⁷⁹

However, Benjamin does not push his idea of ideology beyond an intuitive perception to the formulation of the correlation between ideology and subject. As Lukács points out,⁸⁰ Benjamin still brings the aesthetic solution of the social contradiction into focus, when he regards the transformation from the mystic illumination to the profane illumination by the shock of the dialectical image. Lukács claims that Benjamin’s aesthetic of allegory disregards ‘the fact that to give things a more imposing form is to fetishize them, in contrast to an anthropomorphizing mimetic art, with its inherent tendency to defetishization and its true knowledge of things as the mediators of human relations’.⁸¹ Lukács’ criticism of Benjamin might be right insofar as Benjamin does not consider properly the relationship between reification and ideology; Benjamin’s formula appears to lack the category of action,

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 29. However, Menninghaus points out that this is not the exact Romantic postulate of the relationship between thinking and reflection, but rather a slightly different version of the Romantic concepts revised by Benjamin’s own project.

⁷⁶ Jennings, *Dialectical Images*, pp. 111-2.

⁷⁷ Fred Rush, ‘Jena Romanticism and Benjamin’s Critical Epistemology’, in *Walter Benjamin and Romanticism*, ed. by Beatrice Hanssen and Andrew Benjamin (London: Continuum, 2002), p. 124.

⁷⁸ Nickolas Lambrianou, ‘Neuromancer’, *Radical Philosophy*, 120 (2003) 38-41 (p. 39).

⁷⁹ Louis Althusser, ‘Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses: Notes towards an Investigation’, in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. by Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), p. 168.

⁸⁰ See Lukács, ‘On Walter Benjamin’, p. 86.

of mediation. As Jennings also claims, Benjamin's formulation of profane illuminations does not consider the actuality that 'whether readers can become aware of such a complex constellation as the hidden similarity of a Parisian tenement and the venues of colonial imperialism ... may finally depend less on the mystical capability implied here than upon their skill as readers of texts'.⁸²

Benjamin's idea of an epistemological glimpse without mediation is explicitly influenced by the Brechtian conceptualisation of estrangement-effect; the shock is a capacity whereby audience can learn from their experience. From this perspective, Benjamin develops the idea of dialectical image that 'the damming of the stream of real life, the moment when its flow comes to a standstill, makes itself felt as reflux'.⁸³ In fact, Benjamin's concept of dialectical image is not homogenous and universal, but rather the re-formulation of the traditional concept of a mental picture, *Bild*, in which heterogeneous strata are constructed at a standstill. Benjamin argues that 'where thinking suddenly comes to a stop in a constellation saturated with tensions, it gives that constellation a shock, by which thinking is crystallized as a monad'.⁸⁴ This is nothing less than the way in which Brecht's aesthetic strategy of the estrangement-effect achieves its pedagogical goal through revealing social contradictions. As I will return to the relationship between Benjamin and Brecht in Chapter 3, I restrict myself here to recount Benjamin's idea of realism.

Developing Marx's presupposition of the relationship between knowledge and historical process, Benjamin points out that the category of reality is changeable according to the transformation of cultural codes to which the masses agree. The important point Benjamin makes is that the experience of technology changes the

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Jennings, *Dialectical Images*, p. 120.

⁸³ Walter Benjamin, *Understanding Brecht*, trans. by Anna Bostock (London: Verso, 1998), p. 13.

massive perception of reality: 'the mass is a matrix from which all traditional behaviour toward works of art issues today in a new form'.⁸⁵ What Benjamin indicates here is that the new relationship between spectators and artworks has arisen from the new circumstance in which 'the distracted mass absorbs the work of art'.⁸⁶ The emergence of the masses, whereby quantity necessarily replaces quality, signifies the commodification of artworks, insofar as the masses are by-products of the consumer society. No doubt, this situation imposes the disappearance of a distance in the relationship between spectators and artworks.

As Benjamin claims, this condition of contemporary artworks plainly makes "aura", the unique phenomenon of a distance, decline. It cannot be denied that Benjamin's concept of aura is quite controversial; he employs the term against the contemporary popular cult that is raised by commodification. In Lukács' terms, this can be called "reification". Benjamin elucidates that 'the cult of the movie star, fostered by the money of the film industry, preserves not the unique aura of the person but the 'spell of the personality', the phony spell of a commodity'.⁸⁷ That is to say, Benjamin's conceptualisation of aura clearly aims at attacking commodity fetishism, in the sense that the traditional concept of art can promote revolutionary criticisms.

In this respect, Benjamin's critical pursuit can be easily regarded as a branch stemming from the Romantic criticism of modernity. However, what Benjamin definitely proposes to do with the concept of aura resides in the way in which he demonstrates a new condition of the artwork in modern society, a condition that renders unsustainable the Kantian opposition of subject and object. As in the case of Lukács, Benjamin also presupposes the impossibility of the Romantic

⁸⁴ Walter Benjamin, 'On the Concept of History', in *Selected Writings, Volume 4: 1938-1940*, trans. by Edmund Jephcott and others (London: Belknap, 2003), p. 396.

⁸⁵ Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', p. 232.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

correspondences in capitalist society. Contrary to Lukács, however, Benjamin wants to penetrate into the deeper sense of the media, the correlation between technology and the way of thinking – or, better still, language – in relation to artistic production and consumption. From the outset, therefore, Benjamin assumes a new condition for art in the age of mechanical reproduction. It is in this sense that Benjamin's formulation is based on the proposition that the transformation of the mode of production can be inscribed in cultural forms.

For Benjamin, the new condition of art is constituted by the technical reproducibility of artworks. The experience of technology transforms the relationship between spectators and artworks; it is technology that fulfils the contemporary mimetic impulse, yet, at the same time, the technical reproduction of art threatens the autonomy of artworks. Dialectically considering these contradictory aspects of technology, Benjamin ultimately reveals the problem of commodification in the field of cultural production. Benjamin's analysis of technology and its cultural function can be thought as a precursor for Adorno's formulation of the culture industry. For Benjamin, the unique phenomenon of aura is a sublime autonomy of art that is tenable with a distance between spectators and artworks. However, the technical reproducibility of artworks transforms the way in which the masses react towards art. Benjamin describes this in his discussion of film as a newly thriving cultural form:

The greater the decrease in the social significance of an art form, the sharper the distinction between criticism and enjoyment by the public. The conventional is uncritically enjoyed, and the truly new is criticized with aversion. With regard to the screen, the critical and the receptive attitudes of the public coincide. The decisive reason for this is that individual reactions are predetermined by the mass audience response they are about to produce, and this is nowhere more pronounced than in the film.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 224.

⁸⁸ Ibid., pp. 227-28.

What Benjamin suggests in this analysis lies in the way in which film provides a new situation of artistic production and consumption in capitalist society. As Benjamin observes, 'the reactionary attitude toward a Picasso painting changes into the progressive reaction toward a Chaplin movie'.⁸⁹ The intimate fusion of visual and emotional enjoyment whereby the masses produce the collective codes for a specific cultural form is a decisive feature that constitutes the cultural power of film. It is noticeable that Benjamin witnessed the rise of the culture industry and its effect in his analysis of film. This is the new condition that the absolute autonomy of artworks is no longer possible, in the sense that 'quantity has been transmitted into quality'.⁹⁰ As Benjamin points out, film was undoubtedly one of catalysts for sharply boosting these transformations.

Benjamin and Adorno each understand the culture industry as one of the most important factors that influence the fate of the work of art: Benjamin focuses on the effect of the culture industry; Adorno, its economic foundation. Adorno critically considers the culture industry as a holistically totalising system in which 'even the aesthetic activities of political opposites are one in their enthusiastic obedience to the rhythm of the iron system'.⁹¹ Adorno's criticism of the culture industry is based on Marx's analysis of the real subsumption of labour under capital.

For Marx, the process of production has two stages: the formal subsumption of labour and the real subsumption of labour under capital. Marx describes the formal subsumption of labour as a situation in which 'the labour process becomes the instrument of the valorization process, the process of the self-valorization of capital –

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 227.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. by John Cumming (London: Verso, 1997), p. 120.

the manufacture of surplus-value'.⁹² In other words, the process of production is transformed into the process of capital itself. According to Marx, this process arises from the direct intervention of the capitalist under his direction with 'the sole purpose of using money to make more money'.⁹³ In this stage, it is not difficult to immediately witness class struggle between the capitalist and the working class. However, the eventful situation of class struggle comes to be concealed when the real subsumption of labour gradually comes to dominate the process of production. Marx argues that on the foundation of the formal subsumption of labour under capital, 'there now arises a technologically and otherwise *specific mode of production – capitalist production –* which transforms the *nature of the labour process and its actual conditions*'.⁹⁴ This is the new stage of capitalist accumulation named as the real subsumption of labour under capital, in which all the changes in the labour process by capital's formal subsumption become reality as such. That is to say, the industry comes to be identified with nature. From this perspective, it is not difficult to say that the culture industry stands for the purer capitalism that totally colonises nature and the unconscious.⁹⁵ This new phase of capitalism is closely related to the development of forces of production accelerated by technology and science. Marx explains the result of the appliance of technology and science for large-scale production as follows:

On the one hand, *capitalist production* now establishes itself as a mode of production *sui generis* and brings into being a new mode of material production. On the other hand, the latter itself forms the basis for the development of capitalist relations whose adequate form, therefore, presupposes a definite stage in the evolution of the productive forces of labour.⁹⁶

⁹² Marx, *Capital*, p. 1019.

⁹³ Ibid., p. 1020.

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 1034-35.

⁹⁵ See Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), p. 36.

⁹⁶ Marx, *Capital*, p. 1035.

What this situation imposes on society is 'the productivity of labour, the mass of production, of population and of surplus population created by this mode of production that constantly calls new branches of industry into being once labour and capital have been set free'.⁹⁷ No doubt, one of the new industries is what Adorno denotes as the culture industry – this is the industry in which 'the people at the top are no longer interested in concealing monopoly: as its violence becomes more open, so its power grows'.⁹⁸

This is the point where Benjamin raises the category of habit whereby even the optical reception is determined.⁹⁹ In other words, despite its violent monopoly system, the culture industry as the way in which capital's real subsumption of labour dominates the mode of production can be constituted by habit. What Benjamin attempts to say in his conceptualisation of habit is that the cultural code system is fabricated by language. As we have previously seen, Benjamin assumes language to be a central medium of modern mimesis. By introducing the category of language into the problem of representation, Benjamin incisively rejects the Kantian reflection theory based on Cartesian correspondence between consciousness and reality. More importantly, these formulae on which both Benjamin and Lukács rely inevitably presuppose an invisible dimension that cannot be represented by language. Benjamin and Lukács attempt to explain the hidden facet of cultural narratives.

What Benjamin seems to argue with the notion of habit precisely lies in the way in which the semiotic aspect of modern mimesis works at practical cultural fields: the emergence of mass culture definitely opened the era of the culture industry, whereas the aura of cultural forms evidently declined. For Benjamin, habit stands for

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. 121.

⁹⁹ See Benjamin, 'The Work of art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', p. 233.

the category of reality commonly perceived by the masses, which is subsequently established by the economic system. Crucial here is the knowledge that reality is not fixed at a specific moment, but ‘the adjustment of reality to the masses and of the masses to reality is a process of unlimited scope’.¹⁰⁰ In a sense, Benjamin’s conception of habit can be compatible with Lukács’ concept of form, insofar as it must be stressed that Benjamin’s terminology connotes the hidden reality of the political unconscious in Jameson’s terms. In other words, what Benjamin denotes as the concept of technical reproducibility is related to the political unconscious: the technically reproduced image of reality is not “conscious knowledge” of reality. Interestingly, Benjamin’s conceptualisation of the relationship between habit and the perception of reality is deeply influenced by Romanticism – the Romantic concept of the hidden system. As David S. Ferris points out, Benjamin’s analysis of ‘the concept of criticism in the Romantics cannot be restricted to the Romantics alone’.¹⁰¹ In the following, my discussion leads to the consideration of Benjamin’s involvement with Romanticism and its anti-capitalist aspect.

2. Benjamin and Romanticism

In his early philosophical writing about experience, Benjamin criticises experience that serves as the mask of the adult, the habitual criticism of youth. Benjamin’s claim seems to be a romantic defence of a youthful perspective on life; his comment focuses on the way in which the adult devalues youth according to his overwhelming experience. However, a more significant aspect resides in the way in which Benjamin tends to raise the question of experience against what he designates

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, p. 217.

¹⁰¹ David S. Ferris, ‘Goethe, the Romantics and the Pure Problem of Criticism’, in *Walter Benjamin and Romanticism*, ed. by Beatrice Hanssen and Andrew Benjamin (London: Continuum, 2002), p. 180.

as the “philistine” who effortlessly comes to believe his “experience”. To quote Benjamin:

Nothing is so hateful to the philistine as the “dream of his youth”. And most of the time, sentimentality is the protective camouflage of his hatred. For what appeared to him in his dreams was the voice of the spirit, calling him once, as it does everyone. It is of this that youth always reminds him, eternally and ominously. This is why he is antagonistic toward youth.¹⁰²

What Benjamin signifies here can be translated into the nightmare of History, in which the “voice of the spirit” is repressed as the political unconscious in Jameson’s terminology. For Benjamin, experience, to some extent, serves as the reality principle whereby many blossoming dreams of youth cannot be satisfied; the philistine’s conviction of experience is nothing less than a symbolic act in order to forget the imaginary dream of youth. Benjamin’s analysis of the relationship between the experience of technology and mass culture is based, I suggest, on this early insight into experience. Positively considering the dialectical interaction between technical reproducibility and the category of reality, Benjamin raises the critical problem of realism, in the sense that the classical way of understanding realism as mimesis is no longer possible in the age of technology. As Benjamin states,

Even if one has a general knowledge of the way people walk, one knows nothing of a person’s posture during the fractional second of a stride. The act of reaching for a lighter or a spoon is familiar routine, yet we hardly know what really goes on between hand and metal, not to mention how this fluctuates with our moods. Here the camera intervenes with the resources of its lowerings and liftings, its interruptions and isolations, its extensions and accelerations, its enlargements and reductions. The camera introduces us to unconscious optics as does psychoanalysis to unconscious impulses.¹⁰³

¹⁰² Walter Benjamin, ‘Experience’, in *Selected Writings, Volume 1: 1913-1926*, trans. by Rodney Livingstone and others (London: Belknap, 1996), pp. 4-5.

¹⁰³ Benjamin, ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction’, p. 230.

From this perspective, descriptive mimesis must be regarded as an illusion that conceals many fractions of reality. In other words, Benjamin implicitly raises the problem of empiricism in our optical perception, in the sense that technical reproducibility reveals the hidden dimensions foreclosed by our optical experience. For Benjamin, ‘there is no greater error than the attempt to construe experience – in the sense of life experience – according to the model on which the exact natural sciences are based’.¹⁰⁴ Benjamin posits observation as a medium of knowledge and perception based on “self-immersion”.¹⁰⁵ Benjamin raises the issue of the category of reality that is more real than reality as such.

It is true that the influence of Romanticism on Benjamin was essential for the constitution of the whole scope of his writings. Benjamin’s doctoral dissertation, ‘The Concept of Criticism in German Romanticism’, is a theoretical pursuit ‘to ‘potentiate’ the poetic philosophical terminology of the Romantics – ‘criticism’, ‘reflection’, ‘sobriety’ – in determinate contrast to the mystical interpretations of the protégés of Stefan George’.¹⁰⁶ In this dissertation, what attracts Benjamin is the Romantic concept of criticism which postulates the role of critical interpretation as constituting or completing the artwork and ‘the consequent shift away from issues of critical judgement to those of critical comprehension’.¹⁰⁷ Benjamin’s interpretation of Romanticism is deeply reflected in his critical methodology, including the idea of language. This implicates that Benjamin’s formulation of mimesis, which sheds light not on representation but on embodiment, is indebted to Romanticism.

¹⁰⁴ Walter Benjamin, ‘Experience’, in *Selected Writings, Volume 2: 1927-1934*, trans. by Rodney Livingston and others (London: Belknap, 1999), p. 553.

¹⁰⁵ See *ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ Lambrianou, ‘Neuromancer’, p. 38.

¹⁰⁷ Rush, ‘Jena Romanticism and Benjamin’s Critical Epistemology’, p. 127.

For Benjamin, Romantic reflection should be understood ‘as the mutual and reciprocal production of reflected and reflecting – and even the metaphysical assumption holds here that the differential division in the poles of reflection not only does not run counter to the unpreconceivable Absolute, but that this unpreconceivable Absolute is already located in and of itself in the position of dividing – divided reflection, and thereby experiences its very self-representation in reflection’.¹⁰⁸ This concept of reflection is closely related to the Romantic formulation of language: ‘the *entire* system is contained in every linguistic element, since every sound and every meaning is what it is not on account of some positivity in its substance, but solely on account of its negative and differential relations to all other elements’.¹⁰⁹ In other words, ‘the self-referential and differential systematic character of language’ articulates the Romantic idea of reflection.¹¹⁰

In this way, it is the Romantic doctrine of language in relation to reflection that influences Benjamin’s way of understanding the relationship between perception and reality. Indeed, Benjamin’s inclination towards Romanticism subsequently gives rise to his analysis of technology; and his conceptualisation of aura seems to link the Romantic doctrine to the modern cultural criticism of technology. The hidden impetus behind the Romantic way of understanding the world resides in the epistemological impulse towards the absolute system of the knowledge of everything real.¹¹¹ Benjamin’s positive reception of Romanticism seems to lie in the way in which he identifies the epistemologically realistic urge with the utopian impulse. It is in this

¹⁰⁸ Menninghaus, ‘Walter Benjamin’s Exposition of the Romantic Theory of Reflection’, p. 40.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ See Walter Benjamin, ‘The Concept of Criticism in German Romanticism’, in *Selected Writings, Volume 1: 1913-1926*, trans. by David Lachterman, Howard Eiland and Ian Balfour (London: Belknap, 1996), p. 144.

sense that technology can be regarded as an elaborated medium of mimesis in which the utopian impulse is closely combined with realism.

According to Michael Löwy and Robert Sayre, ‘Romanticism is essentially a reaction against the way of life in capitalist societies’;¹¹² the Romantic vision is inevitably accompanied by a melancholic nostalgia with its retrospective view of the past, while containing the critique of capitalist modernity. In the Romantic view, capitalism imposes a cruel realism on individuals, destroying the organic unity of humanity and society. By accelerating industrialisation and the market system, this capitalist realism encourages accepting “reality” in which there emerges rationalisation, bureaucratisation, urbanisation, secularisation, reification, etc; hence, “reality” precisely designates the socio-economic system of capitalism.¹¹³ Löwy and Sayre highlight the anti-capitalist impulse of Romanticism, as they pursue the third path of defining the political signification of Romantic sensibility; their theoretical resituating of the term “Romantic” aims to reconsider the prevailing account of Romanticism as a decadent symptom of pre-fascism. Therefore, what they attempt to attain seems to lie in the way in which the Romantic critique of capitalist economy was incisively propelled by a revolutionary subjective intention towards utopia. In this way, they come to redefine the aesthetic characteristic of Romanticism as “critical irrationalism”.¹¹⁴ Leaving aside their theoretical side-stepping of the difficulty of drawing an aesthetic distinction between realism and irrationalism, their criticism of the superficial anti-Romantic tendency and suggestion that Romanticism should not be defined as an aesthetic term but rather as a political category is to be welcomed.

¹¹² Michael Löwy and Robert Sayre, *Romanticism against the Tide of Modernity*, trans. by Catherine Porter (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), p. 17.

¹¹³ See *ibid.*, p. 19.

¹¹⁴ See *ibid.*, p. 12.

However, as Lambrianou criticises, their presupposition of Romantic anti-capitalism ‘unfortunately demonstrates little or no understanding of the way in which the foundational moments of the Romantic project emerged out of the German Enlightenment itself’.¹¹⁵ To put it in another way, they simply neglect the specific historical context in which such a Romantic doctrine reacts against modernisation. They only stress that the specificity of Romanticism develops an anti-capitalist critique ‘from the standpoint of a value system – with reference to an ideal – drawn from the past’.¹¹⁶ Yet, they do not describe the dark side of the Romantic aesthetic ideology – ‘the dream of a language linked to a purified body politic, purified by violence and maintained by repression’.¹¹⁷ More controversially, the Romantic politics of the symbol ‘would appear as a politics of embodiment (the signified in the signifier), the archform of embodiment being the state’.¹¹⁸

This is where Benjamin’s attention to the dialectic between nostalgia and progress becomes significant. Constantly throughout his works, Benjamin retains the way of seeing historical progress as the product of the dialectical image in which the nostalgic utopian impulse towards the past ideal community ironically drives civilisation to the future. In ‘On the Concept of History’, Benjamin explicitly depicts the dialectical image borrowed from Klee’s painting named *Angelus Novus*:

The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise and has got caught in his wings; it is so strong that the angel can no longer close them. This storm drives him irresistibly into the future, to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows toward the sky. What we call progress is *this* storm.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵ Lambrianou, ‘Neuromancer’, p. 40.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p. 28.

¹¹⁷ Christopher Prendergast, *The Triangle of Representation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), p. 114.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 114-5.

¹¹⁹ Benjamin, ‘On the Concept of History’, p. 392.

Benjamin's Romantic idea of history is well reflected in his conceptualisation of historical materialism: the founding concept of historical materialism is 'not progress but actualization'.¹²⁰ Benjamin's Romantic orientation is also revealed in his applause of collectors, whereby 'the most profound enchantment for the collector is the locking of individual items within a magic circle in which they are fixed as the final thrill, the thrill of acquisition, passes over them'.¹²¹ This shows that Benjamin acknowledges the complex modality of Romanticism in the sense that the collector's Romantic re-enchantment against the capitalist disenchantment precisely connotes the anti-capitalist, but ideal aspect, all at once. Benjamin's concept of the dialectical image, an image emerging in a flash, denotes this paradoxical and convoluted Romantic critique in which the nostalgia of the imaginary society in the past reacts against modernity. Therefore, what Benjamin is really interested in is not only the nostalgic aspect of Romantic idealism, but also the revolutionary potency of Romanticism; Benjamin's argument presents Romantic nostalgia as nothing less than an aesthetic symptom resulting from the Romantics' anti-rational absolutism against capitalist realism. This means that Benjamin's attitude towards Romanticism is more entangled than Löwy and Sayre's argument of Benjamin's theoretical affinity with the Romantic worldview.

Löwy and Sayre argue that, against capitalist rationalisation, Romanticism attempted to establish mysterious analogies or correspondences between the human soul and nature.¹²² The Romantic critique of capitalist rationalisation and quantification specifically lies in its implementation of the absolutising strategies against the secularism and relativism of modernity; more importantly, in attempting to

¹²⁰ Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, p. 460.

¹²¹ Benjamin, 'Unpacking My Library', in *Illuminations*, trans. by Harry Zohn (London: Fontana, 1973), p. 62.

bridge the gulf between human beings and nature, what most revolutionary Romantics tried to restore was a perfect harmony of the universe without the presence of God. Not surprisingly, the political vision of the French Revolution permeated the Romantic utopian project.

In his philosophical fragments, for example, Friedrich Schlegel, like Goethe and Fichte, designated the French Revolution as the greatest tendency of the age.¹²³ For Schlegel, the historical insights of the French Revolution remained isolated as a few traces, in the sense that one can see it as ‘the center and apex of the French national character, where all its paradoxes are thrust together; as the most frightful grotesque of the age, where the most profound prejudices and their most brutal punishments are mixed up in a fearful chaos and woven as bizarrely as possible into a monstrous human tragicomedy’.¹²⁴ Schlegel raised the new presumption that ‘there is no greater need of the age than the need for a spiritual counterweight to the Revolution and to the despotism which the Revolution exercises over people by means of its concentration of the most desirable worldly interests’.¹²⁵

In light of the neo-Kantian doctrine which regards the world as ‘disintegrated and poised between a realm of facts and a realm of values’,¹²⁶ Romanticism should be aesthetically distinguished from a mere epigone of the classical *Weltanschauung*, the perspectival worldview of the Renaissance. Such a framework no longer produces a sense of the real in the historical moment of Romanticism. Therefore, Romanticism is a cultural symptom manifesting the collapse of the classical world and a utopian pursuit to re-establish the systematic knowledge of universality by means of aesthetic

¹²² Löwy and Sayre, *Romanticism against the Tide of Modernity*, p. 32.

¹²³ Friedrich Schlegel, *Philosophical Fragments*, trans. by Peter Firchow (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), p. 46.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

¹²⁶ Tihanov, *The Master and the Slave*, p. 93.

strategies against the fragmentation of capitalist rationalisation in which the absolutism of God no longer sustains the system of classical knowledge.

Contrary to the positively scientific *Weltanschauung*, according to Benjamin, ‘the early Romantics, thanks to their method, dissolve this worldview completely into the absolute’.¹²⁷ The way the early Romantics surmounted the positive science resides in the method of “reflection”, an absolutely systemic thinking.¹²⁸ The Romantic reflection was an elaborated Kantian “Reflection” that does not mean speculation, but ‘connotes only a pure referral or reflecting back, obtained by a simple, optical pattern and presupposing, moreover, the mediation of an inert, dead body, of a blind tain’.¹²⁹ Reflection is equivalent to thinking whereby a mode of consciousness transcends the reifications of intuition and reflection.¹³⁰ Endorsing this Kantian reflection, the Romantic concept of the subject is ‘the “I” as an “empty form”’.¹³¹ Needless to say, this transformation from the Cartesian *cogito* to the Romantic concept of the subject, which presupposed no substantial re-presentation, resulted from the condition that what had philosophically supported the classical worldview disappeared – the classical value system is melted down by capitalist commodification. The newly emerged capitalist exchange value form of commodity definitely destroys the hierarchical system of pre-capitalist culture and palpably equalises all individuals according to the relationship of commodity exchange in the capitalist market system. This is properly what Žižek identifies when he says that ‘in capitalism relations between men are definitely not ‘fetishized’’.¹³² To quote Žižek:

¹²⁷ Benjamin, ‘The Concept of Criticism in German Romanticism’, p. 131.

¹²⁸ See *ibid.*, pp. 126-35.

¹²⁹ Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Literary Absolute: The Theory of Literature in German Romanticism*, trans. by Philip Barnard and Cheryl Lester (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), p. 31.

¹³⁰ See Menninghaus, ‘Walter Benjamin’s Exposition of the Romantic Theory of Reflection’, p. 29.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

¹³² Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, p. 25.

What we have here are relations between 'free' people, each following his or her proper egoistic interests. The predominant and determining form of their interrelations is not domination and servitude but a contract between free people who are equal in the eyes of the law.¹³³

What Romantics were concerned with was the alienation of human relationships, 'the destruction of the old organic and communitarian forms of social life, the isolation of individuals in their egoistic selves, which taken together constitute an important dimension of capitalist civilization, centered on cities'.¹³⁴ However, this is also where the regressive and reactionary trends of later Romanticism whose political vision of organic form becomes the feudal picture of society. What is at stake is that the Romantic cultural-politics was impotent to provide effective strategies penetrating into the kernel of capitalist reification. Not surprisingly, this is the reason why the aesthetic of realism reserves its future within the impossibility of Romantic irrationalism.

3. The Problem of Romantic Irrationalism

Contrary to Romantic re-enchantment, realism is characterised as demystification of the conventional code of aesthetics. This was partly a disturbing factor for Marxist theorists who attempted to combine the Marxist project with the Romantic narrative. As Fredric Jameson claims, however, the Marxian vision of history can be described as 'the salvational or redemptive perspective of some secure future' in the romance paradigm.¹³⁵ Jameson's position seems to largely raise the question of the close relationship of romance and realistic narrative. The Lukácsian

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Löwy and Sayre, *Romanticism against the Tide of Modernity*, p. 42.

¹³⁵ Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), p. 103.

principle of realism, the reconciliation of subject and object, has an affinity with the Romantic utopianism that tries to re-establish the correspondence between the human soul and nature. It is in this sense that Löwy and Sayre point out the influence of Romanticism on the young Lukács.¹³⁶

The purpose of those who strategically introduce the Romantic vision into the Marxian aesthetics of realism seems to lie in the presupposition that realism comes to be a dominant in capitalist cultural production. Jameson also indicates that realism has been gradually reified in late capitalism.¹³⁷ In this respect, the Romantic anti-capitalist tendency is to be welcomed, insofar as it tactically secures the utopian impulse towards the future. For Jameson, rationalisation is ‘something like the “reality principle,” the censorship of the new bourgeois social order, from which the longing for magic and providential mystery must be smuggled in order to find symbolic appeasement’.¹³⁸ From Jameson’s perspective, rationalisation is included in reification.

The way in which Jameson theoretically grasps Lukács’ concept of reification is located in the position that it is ‘a synthesis of Marx and Weber’.¹³⁹ In this respect, the concept of reification is nothing less than an elaborate Marxian conception, ‘not merely of commodity fetishism and exchange but of the commodity *form* itself.’¹⁴⁰ It is interesting that Jameson enlarges the signification of reification to subsume not only Weber’s account of the rationalisation process, but also ‘of the mind, of the scientific disciplines fully as much as of the psyche and the senses’.¹⁴¹ Strictly speaking, there is a difference between Weberian rationalisation and Lukácsian

¹³⁶ See Löwy and Sayre, *Romanticism against the Tide of Modernity*, pp. 104-7.

¹³⁷ Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, p. 104.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 134.

¹³⁹ Fredric Jameson, ‘History and Class Consciousness as an “Unfinished Project”’, *Rethinking MARXISM*, 1 (1988), 49-72 (p. 52).

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

reification. Defining the ethics of modern industrial society as “the spirit of rational calculation”, Weber’s analysis of capitalism can be viewed as an insight penetrating into the kernel of capitalist realism. However, the distinction between reification and rationalisation as well as commodity fetishism resides in the fact that reification can be called a philosophical attempt to bring the *Begriff* (concept) of commodity form and fetishism into Marxist thought. Lukács’ theoretical search for the *Begriff* of commodification draws on not Weberian but Hegelian methodology; the Weberian method rejects the Hegelian dialectical view that contradictions can ultimately be integrated into the ideal type, and aims at constructing non-contradictory concepts.¹⁴²

In other words, Weber’s concept of rationalisation intends to provide a partial view of sociology, different from the study of history, which has a goal of dialectically selecting the ideal type. Therefore, the concept of rationalisation presents a more specific picture than the concept of reification, in the sense that Lukács’ conceptualisation of reification systematically proposes to establish the dialectical *Begriff* of capitalism beyond a particular discipline of sociology. As Jameson claims, it is in this sense that ‘the operative paradox of this first extraordinary *systemic* account of the logic of capitalism lies in the way in which it insists on extreme fragmentation as a social norm’.¹⁴³ Contrary to the Weberian sociological concept of rationalisation, this Hegelian *Begriff* of reification itself contains a contradiction in which totalisation and fragmentation always collide with each other. Put in Jameson’s terms, ‘it attempts to project a process which separates, compartmentalizes, specializes, and disperses: a force which at one and the same time operates uniformly

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² See Löwy and Sayre, *Romanticism against the Tide of Modernity*, p. 260, n. 33.

¹⁴³ Jameson, ‘*History and Class Consciousness as an “Unfinished Project”*’, p. 52.

over everything and makes a heterogeneity a homogeneous and standardizing power'.¹⁴⁴

In this sense, Jameson argues that 'what is synchronic is the "concept" of the mode of production; the moment of the historical coexistence of several modes of production is ... open to history in a dialectical way'.¹⁴⁵ Therefore, there is a contradictory relationship between the practical and the epistemological dimensions within the concept of reification; the reified historical situation always interrupts the conceptualisation of reification. As Jameson properly points out, it is in this sense that Lukács' theoretical approach to reification leads us to think 'a collective project not merely capable of breaking the multiple systemic webs of reification, but which must do so in order to realize itself'.¹⁴⁶ Thus, it is meaningless to draw the clear distinction between romance and realistic narrative, because those narrative strategies can be regarded as aesthetic attempts to surmount the empirical dimension of the capitalist reality principle.

Löwy and Sayre draw on this presumption in order to legitimise their argument: if the realistic critique of capitalism retrospectively emerges from a reactionary value system, 'it is because they look toward the past that they criticise the present with so much acuity and realism'.¹⁴⁷ Nevertheless, there is an undeniable difference between romantic narrative and realistic narrative. Löwy and Sayre tacitly overlook the fundamentally distinctive aspects that distinguish two narratives into different political layers. This tendency within their consideration of the relationship between Romanticism and realism leads them to focus on the mimetic function of realism. More importantly, I suggest, is the idea that realism is not simply an aesthetic

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, p. 95.

¹⁴⁶ Jameson, 'History and Class Consciousness as an "Unfinished Project"', p. 52.

¹⁴⁷ Löwy and Sayre, *Romanticism against the Tide of Modernity*, p. 11.

category but rather the possibility of an artwork, as such, in modern cultural production. To adapt Franco Moretti's notion of *Weltliteratur*,¹⁴⁸ the possibility of realism designates not the name of an aesthetic object, but a problem.

The dialectical framework that Lukács employs to criticise the symbolic mode of representation proposes to solve the problem of Weberian formalism. According to Lukács, it is impossible 'to reach an understanding of particular forms by studying their successive appearances in an empirical and historical manner';¹⁴⁹ Lukács deliberately eliminates Weberian sociological positivism, while silently retaining Weber's critique of capitalism by means of the Romantic perspective. In this respect, Lukács argues:

So that if ... the categories describing the structure of a social system are not immediately historical, i.e. if the empirical succession of historical events does not suffice to explain the origins of a particular form of thought or existence, then it can be said that despite this, or better, because of it, any such conceptual system will describe in its totality a definite stage in the society as a whole.¹⁵⁰

Here, Lukács points out the kernel of the Romantic critique of capitalism, an antagonism towards capitalist reification at the very moment when the historical transformation of cultural forms rapidly explodes into the every social field. Nevertheless, the Romantic critique does not fundamentally grasp the matrix of capitalism; it merely pursues its project within the aesthetic dimension, blaming the chaotic collapse of traditional codes on the disappearance of the correspondence between the human soul and nature. The Romantics' political strategy is exclusively revealed in their relatively reactionary attempt to maintain the traditional value system

¹⁴⁸ See Franco Moretti, 'Conjectures on World Literature', *New Left Review*, 1 (2000), 54-68. For a critical diagnosis of Moretti's conceptualisation of "World Literature", see Jonathan Arac, 'Anglo-Globalism?', *New Left Review*, 16 (2002), 35-45.

¹⁴⁹ Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, trans. by Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1999), p. 186.

of aesthetics. The only way the Romantics preserve traditional values is in their venture to intentionally separate aesthetics from values.

In this way, the Romantic symbol becomes an aesthetic monad that is utterly original and not in the old sense 'imitated'; 'concrete', yet fluid and suggestive; a means to truth, a truth unrelated to, and more exalted than that of positive science, or any observation depending upon the discursive reason; out of the flux of life, and therefore, under one aspect, dead; yet uniquely alive because of its participation in a higher order of existence, and because it is analogous not to a machine but to an organism; coextensive in matter and form; resistant to explication; largely independent of intention, and of any form of ethical utility.¹⁵¹

These contradictory aspects of Romanticism seem to arise from the aesthetic ideology that develops into the critique of capitalist secularisation. In other words, Romantics tactically allow the relativity of values in the secular world, while exalting their aesthetic ideal to the transcendental dimension. This attempt consists of the structure of Romantic utopianism in which something such as "System" beyond everyday empirical reality is mystically presupposed. No doubt, Romantic melancholy symptomatically arises from this contradictory existential status in which the utopian strategies of Romantic aesthetics are always secularised by the capitalist market system. Benjamin's analysis of Romanticism aims at investigating this impotent situation in which Romantics cannot maintain their dominance of cultural power thereby imposing on them 'the disintegration of the aura in the experience of shock'.¹⁵² Just as Lukács witnesses the limit of Romantic politics, Benjamin observes the problem of Romantic aesthetics.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ See Frank Kermode, *Romantic Image* (London: Routledge, 1957), p. 44.

¹⁵² Walter Benjamin, 'On Some Motifs in Baudelaire', in *Illuminations*, trans. by Harry Zohn (London: Fontana, 1973), p. 190.

From *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* to 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', Benjamin's aesthetics consistently aims at establishing a new category of "art", which is unlike the Romantic definition of the artwork, in the era of consumer society. In his consideration of photography, Benjamin decisively reveals the theoretical intention that the Romantic notion of "art" no longer retains its validity, precisely because it lacks the insight that technology dialectically opens a new direction in the production of the artwork. For Benjamin, the Romantic concept of the artwork that influences theoreticians of photography is fetishistic and fundamentally anti-technological, and does not successfully grasp the new mode of production of the work of art.¹⁵³ More importantly, Benjamin's argument presupposes that technology provides a way in which optical experience constitutes the category of reality. Dialectically observing the effect of technology in the field of cultural production, Benjamin argues that 'to an ever greater degree the work of art reproduced becomes the work of art designed for reproducibility'.¹⁵⁴ This is where Adorno and Horkheimer's criticism of the culture industry comes into its own.

4. Critique of the Culture Industry

There is a widespread preconception of Adorno's criticism of the culture industry, a preconception that Adorno's analysis of popular culture is dominated by his positive reception of high art, and that Adorno himself overtly tended towards the elitism of modernism, rejecting popular culture.¹⁵⁵ However, what Adorno really wants to describe in his critique of the culture industry is not the way in which the

¹⁵³ Walter Benjamin, 'Little History of Photography', in *Selected Writings, Volume 2. 1927-1934*, trans. by Rodney Livingstone and others (London: Belknap, 1999), pp. 507-530 (p. 508).

¹⁵⁴ Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', p. 218.

¹⁵⁵ Jameson argues that Adorno and Horkheimer aimed at differentiating 'mass-cultural 'experience' from the genuinely aesthetic type' in their analysis of the culture industry. See Fredric Jameson, *Late Marxism: Adorno, or, the Persistence of the Dialectic* (London: Verso, 1990), p. 145.

form of the high art is superior to the form of the low art; but rather the impossible condition of conventional aesthetic production: the collapse of the aesthetic condition, the very condition in which the work of art can produce its own autonomy. It is interesting that Adorno and Horkheimer distinguish the culture industry from “mass culture”. In ‘Culture Industry Reconsidered’, Adorno reveals the intention that was implicit in their criticism of the newly emerged system of the cultural production.

In our draft, we spoke of ‘mass culture’. We replace the expression with ‘culture industry’ in order to exclude from the outset the interpretation agreeable to its advocates: that it is a matter of something like a culture that arises spontaneously from the masses themselves, the contemporary form of popular art.¹⁵⁶

The term “culture industry” gives rise to the consideration of the relationship between culture and industry. Adopting Benjamin’s presupposition of the relationship between the work of art and massive technical reproducibility, Adorno develops the idea that the long-lasting dichotomy of high and low culture is no longer possible in the total system of the culture industry. Adorno plainly acknowledges the positive aspect of low culture as rebellious.¹⁵⁷ What Adorno really intends to say with his analysis of cultural production in the new stage of capitalism is that the culture industry is a precise system by which the distinction of high and low culture becomes meaningless.

What Adorno argues in his conceptualisation of the culture industry is the way in which cultural forms can obtain their autonomy, in resisting the holistically totalising system that ‘transfers the profit motive naked onto cultural forms’.¹⁵⁸ For Adorno, the constellations of effects are implicit in the autonomy of works of art; the

¹⁵⁶ Theodor W. Adorno, ‘Culture Industry Reconsidered’, in *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, ed. by J.M. Bernstein (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 85.

¹⁵⁷ See *ibid.*

autonomy of works of art is not a transcendental feature, which is naturally contained in their forms as such, but rather an acquired characteristic. In a cursory reading, Adorno's definition of the autonomous artwork seems to argue for the possibility of art in the age of the culture industry; more interestingly, it seems to me that Adorno defends the mediation of an artist in the process of constructing artistic forms. Adorno criticises Benjamin's formula of artworks, which asserts the aura of the great work of art, in the sense that Benjamin simply liquidates any appeal to 'the actual consciousness of actual workers who have absolutely no advantage over the bourgeois except their interest in the revolution but otherwise bear all the marks of mutilation of the typical bourgeois character'.¹⁵⁹ Partly endorsing Benjamin's observation, Adorno praises modernism's battles with capitalist mechanism and materiality, which threatens the autonomy of the work of art. The main point that Adorno raises here is that the decline of the aura of the work of art emerges not because of its technical reproducibility, but rather because of 'the fulfillment of its own 'autonomous' formal laws'.¹⁶⁰ That is to say, the autonomy of the work of art can be obtained by erasing a magical aura from its form.

In *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno more plainly develops this conceptualisation of artworks decisively distinguished from Benjamin's formula:

Art is motivated by a conflict: Its enchantment, a vestige of its magical phase, is constantly repudiated as unmediated sensual immediacy by the progressive disenchantment of the world, yet without its ever being possible finally to obliterate this magical element. Only in it is art's mimetic character preserved, and its truth is the critique that, by its sheer existence, it levels at a rationality that has become absolute. Emancipated from its claim to reality, the enchantment

¹⁵⁸ Adorno, 'Culture Industry Reconsidered', p. 86.

¹⁵⁹ Theodor W. Adorno, 'Letters to Walter Benjamin', in *Aesthetics and Politics* (London: Verso, 1980), p. 124.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

is itself part of enlightenment: Its semblance disenchant the disenchanted world.¹⁶¹

For Adorno, the mimesis of artistic technique is fundamentally paradoxical, in the sense that its claim to truth cannot be compatible with its aesthetic truth. Through introducing technology into the process of artistic production, the modern artistic act consequently rejects emotional spontaneity. This process necessarily excludes the individual from artistic creation, since the process subjects rationalisation to the aesthetic production. The disenchanted world of science repudiates the artistic enchantment in which mimesis can be perceived as sorcery with which truth is revealed by semblance. From this standpoint, Adorno stresses the positive aspect of autonomous artworks by which “critique” arises from its claim to aesthetic truth, in the sense that ‘the renunciation of any claim to truth by the preserved magical element marks out the terrain of aesthetic semblance and aesthetic truth’.¹⁶² Therefore, the work of art, which exists in a condition of compromise in relation to the culture industry, can serve as the critique of its matrix, insofar as ‘art inherits a comportment of spirit once directed toward essence, and with it the chance of perceiving mediately that which is essential yet otherwise tabooed by the progress of rational knowledge’.¹⁶³

The paradoxical state of the work of art is constituted by the condition of capitalism: the historical stage of the real subsumption of labour under capital in Marx’s own terms. This is the very moment that both the aestheticisation of industry and the industrialisation of aesthetics emerge. Rachel Bowlby describes the transformation as follows:

¹⁶¹ Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. by Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p. 58.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

In the shift to consumer society, then, modern commerce engages in a curiously double enterprise. On the one hand, a process of rationalization: the transformation of selling into an industry. The department stores are organized like factories, with hundreds of workers, shareholding companies, vast turnovers, and careful calculation of continual strategies of expansion. On the other hand, the transformation of industry into a shop window. This massive and revolutionary extension of scope is achieved by the association of commerce with ideological values that seem to be diametrically opposed to the mundane actuality of work, profits and rationality.¹⁶⁴

Alongside these alterations, signs and images that are the elements of aesthetic appeal come to be centred in the terrain of cultural consumption – ‘what the new large-scale commerce shares with practices derived not from industrial production, but from the arts’.¹⁶⁵ While industry was becoming more like art, art itself was taking on the rationalized structure of industry.¹⁶⁶ Observing this shift, Adorno provides a new formula for understanding the fate of aesthetics in the new moment of capitalism. In this transitional situation, technology is one of the most crucial categories that aesthetics must confront; technology seems to be an opponent of the traditional artistic production as in the relationship between photography and painting. Adorno considers the link between technology and the work of art as a paradoxical relationship, whereas Benjamin implicitly regards it as one of opposition.

For Adorno, ‘the deaestheticization of art is immanent to art ... in accordance with the technological tendency of art’.¹⁶⁷ There is no distinction between high art and low art in the process of de-aestheticisation. Adorno does not point out that technology mainly causes the decline of the aura of art; he argues that the aesthetic production in general must be regarded as a self-destructive process in which the

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Rachel Bowlby, *Just Looking: Consumer Culture in Dreiser, Gissing and Zola* (London: Methuen, 1985), p. 6.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 8.

¹⁶⁶ See *ibid.*

work of art comes to function as a component of modern rationalism by its technological tendency. What is unique in Adorno's argument is the way in which his formulation presupposes cultural transformation by the immanent logic of artworks. For Adorno, the traditional cultural forms such as painting and novels give way to new ones such as photography and film through technological development.¹⁶⁸ The more the mimesis of artistic technique develops, the less the magical aspect of artworks declines. The mimesis of artistic technique is nothing less than a process that reproduces a new socially dominant sense of reality: 'realism is not a matter of any fidelity to an empirical reality, but of the discursive conventions by which and for which a sense of reality is constructed'.¹⁶⁹

From this theoretical consideration of the relationship between technology and realism, it is not difficult to see that Adorno identifies realism with mimetic technique. There is only the cultural logic in the culture industry that the more realistic is the more beautiful, in the sense that technology is metaphorically perceived as a transparent medium through which natural beauty can be perfectly reflected. In other words, there is an immanent demand within the technological reproduction, a demand that strives to complete the inadequacy of the mimetic faculty. However, the demand for the perfect technique cannot be fulfilled by representation, precisely because art is nothing less than the rational legitimisation of a new knowledge of the real; art is not the imitation of natural beauty, but rather natural beauty as such.

Regarding technology as an artistic material such as language, Adorno seems to underestimate the objective presence of technology, a mechanical causality of technology that constitutes itself outside the immanent artistic logic and imposes

¹⁶⁷ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 59.

¹⁶⁸ See Theodor W. Adorno, 'The Position of the Narrator in the Contemporary Novel', in *Notes to Literature, Vol. 1*, trans. by Shierry Weber Nicholsen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), p. 31.

formal transformations on the work of art. Strictly speaking, the system of technology serves as a significant alteration from the outside, but Adorno merely considers this as a negative effect of the culture industry. As Bowlby claims, 'the massive increase in book and journal output during the nineteenth century responded in part to a real change in market conditions'.¹⁷⁰ That is to say, the technological development as objectivity, which arises from the outside of artistic self-fulfilling laws, where the material accumulation gives rise to the process of commodity production in the capitalist system, significantly influences the change of artistic form. In a similar tone, Jameson also defends the validity of the mechanical causality in the transformation of artistic form as follows:

I would want to argue that the category of mechanical effectivity retains a purely local validity in cultural analysis where it can be shown that billiard-ball causality remains one of the (nonsynchronous) laws of our particular fallen social reality. It does little good, in other words, to banish "extrinsic" categories from our thinking, when the latter continue to have a hold on the objective realities about which we plan to think. There seems, for instance, to have been an unquestionable causal relationship between the admittedly extrinsic fact of the crisis in late nineteenth-century publishing, during which the dominant three-decker lending library novel was replaced by a cheaper one-volume format, and the modification of the "inner form" of the novel itself.¹⁷¹

The mechanical effectivity, affected by technological evolution, is not only restricted in the specific moment of the nineteenth century, but is intrinsically linked to the development of capitalism. For example, DVD in the twenty-first century can be seen to influence film form today as in the case of *Apocalypse Now Redux*. To quote:

¹⁶⁹ John Fiske, *Television Culture* (London: Methuen, 1987), p. 21.

¹⁷⁰ Bowlby, *Just Looking*, p. 8.

¹⁷¹ Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, p. 25.

Away from the cinemas, video has become a natural home for 'added extras' – the US video of *Natural Born Killers* contains the gory footage trimmed to ensure its theatrical R-rating – likewise Laserdisc (where Spinal Tap's truly great lost scenes were first glimpsed) and now DVD, whose 'special features' are often a unique selling point. The DVD of *Apocalypse Now* was released last year in the States. True to form, it featured a film-length commentary by Coppola, plus one deleted scene: the air strike on Colonel Kurtz's compound. So, that's one – count it – measly scene for aficionados of a film known to exist in a five-hour rough cut.¹⁷²

Technology is not only the logic of technique constituting artistic form, but also the mechanically material objectivity which transforms the mode of cultural production from the outside of the subjective artistic activity. Therefore, it is feasible to claim that the new stage of capitalist accumulation, the process of the real subsumption of labour under capital, as well as the self-fulfillment of artistic formality, specifically actuates the transition of the cultural production. For this reason, Adorno's formula must be reinterpreted as a theoretical attempt to explain the relationship between the transformation of the mode of production and its effect by which the cultural logic of the work of art symptomatically reveals the historical changeability of the category of reality.

5. The Paradox of Mimesis

There is another hidden impetus behind Adorno's analysis of the relationship between the work of art and reality: an aesthetic attack on Lukács' defence of realism. Rejecting the kernel of Lukácsian realism, the idea of perfect form, Adorno abolishes Lukács' ontological presupposition of being, a presupposition by which Lukács grasps the work of art as one of the 'various forms in which men organize those actions and reactions of the external world, to which they are always exposed, in some

¹⁷² Andrew Collins, 'The Final Cut – But Not the Last Word', *Observer*, 1 October 2000.

kind of way that will enable them to protect and develop their own existence'.¹⁷³ In other words, the work of art is a socially symbolic act, carried out in order to fulfil an ontological intention. Considering that Lukács regards the real as the whole, which means that the work of art is an example of the real world, a work of art is a key hole through which we can see the wider outside world. This is what Lukács suggests with the ontological consideration of the work of art, the Lukácsian presumption about the genetic aspect of art in general. In this way, Lukács confirms that art is a historical accomplishment gradually developed by human labour, presupposing that there are genetic inconsistencies between art and general social production.

Adorno also considers the link between art and social production as one of connection and disconnection. However, the crucial difference between Lukács and Adorno arises from the fact that Adorno's theory regards the artistic material as the elements of reality: the work of art is a new configuration of an image.¹⁷⁴ According to Adorno, this image is not a copy of reality, but rather 'objectivation thereby negates the process and reduces it to a mere as-if'.¹⁷⁵ This image supposedly emancipates the elements of reality from reification – from the fixed functions in the social cultural system.

The distinction between realism and naturalism, on which Lukács' formula is consistently based, becomes meaningless in Adorno's definition of artworks, precisely because there is no integrated form of the work of art, but rather a paradoxically conflicting one. Therefore, it does not matter whether an artwork is realistic or not, because realism is not so much a stable aesthetic category as a tension between the formal law of an autonomous artwork and the material reality; realism is

¹⁷³ Georg Lukács, *Conversations with Lukács*, ed. by Theo Pirkus, trans. by David Fernbach (London: Merlin Press, 1974), p. 14.

¹⁷⁴ See Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 280.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

inherent in the form of artworks. Adorno sees the mimetic impulse, which Benjamin raises in his discussion of the mass cultural production, as a paradox that is necessarily internalised in its enlightenment pursuit. In this respect, the work of art can acquire its autonomy only through resisting realism.

According to Christopher Prendergast, Adorno's standpoint is that, by achieving the autonomy from the material law of capitalism, the work of art can be liberating and even revolutionary, insofar as 'it was held to extricate us from the grip of ideology and its naturalizing habits'.¹⁷⁶ Yet, it is not plausible that self-consciously autonomous artworks could produce a distance in which the revolutionary speculation permanently comes to exist in its own right. This is because scientific revolution fundamentally undermines 'the very foundation of freedom, by teaching us that we are caught in the blind determinisms and mechanisms of a purely material world'.¹⁷⁷ This is where Adorno's critique of power and domination remains paradoxical in the sense that the mimetic impulse, prompting the development of artistic technique, can be seen as the subjective identification with the object in the Freudian sense. In contrast to Lukács, Adorno alludes to mimesis as subjective, imitative visualisation which bears no relation to the representation of objects.

From this perspective, it is not uncommon to think that there is a crucial distinction between Lukács and Adorno in the light of their argument over mimesis. Adorno consistently postulates his formula of mimesis in contrast to Lukács. For Lukács, realism is not so much related to the technique of mimesis, but rather 'the future perspective which it should put forward';¹⁷⁸ Realism is not related to the question about to what degree a specific artwork has absorbed more actuality; hence, it depends on the future perspective whether realism can be accomplished in a work of

¹⁷⁶ Christopher Prendergast, 'Modernism's Nightmare?', *New Left Review*, 10 (2001), 141-156 (p.142).

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

art. As we have seen, it is for Lukács that the future perspective designates the artistic impulse to reach totality in its resistance against the subjective illusion of reality such as naturalism. Interestingly, Adorno rejects this formula in the sense that totality fails to contain something outside its conceptualisation: ‘totality is a reified society as such’.¹⁷⁹

To abolish the concept of totality, Adorno employs *Konstellation*, a revised version of Benjamin’s notion which ‘seeks specifically to undermine its own provisional architectonic ... terms’.¹⁸⁰ To be sure, Goethe’s idea of plurality of an artwork initially inspired Benjamin’s terminology; Goethe considers the relation of artworks to art as ‘unity in plurality – which means that the unity of art is found again and again in plurality of works’.¹⁸¹ This conception is squarely opposed to Romantics’ definition of the work of art as ‘infinity in totality – which means that the infinity of art is fulfilled in the totality of works’.¹⁸² Positively receiving this idea of *Darstellung*, Adorno reinvents the concept of constellations, which means ‘all the elements are present but the form of their juxtapositions, the shape of their falling out, is merely occasional’.¹⁸³ Adorno explains this notion as follows:

By themselves, constellations represent from without what the concept has cut away within: the “more” which the concept is equally desirous and incapable of being. By gathering around the object of cognition, the concepts potentially determine the object’s interior. They attain, in thinking, what was necessarily excised from thinking.¹⁸⁴

¹⁷⁸ Lukács, *Conversations with Lukács*, p. 36.

¹⁷⁹ Theodor W. Adorno, *Soziologische Schriften I* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1982), p. 292.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 50. Adorno acknowledges his positive reception of Benjamin’s term in *Negative Dialectics*. See *Negative Dialectics*, trans. by E.B. Ashton (London: Routledge, 1973), p. 164.

¹⁸¹ Benjamin, ‘The Concept of Criticism in German Romanticism’, p. 183.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*

¹⁸³ Jameson, *Late Marxism*, p. 50.

¹⁸⁴ Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 162.

In short, constellations designate something outside Weberian sociological *Begriff* in which the actuality of contradictions must be repressed. For Adorno, the inert aspect of concepts accounts for Lukács' conceptualisation of totality.¹⁸⁵ Against the concept of totality, Adorno postulates constellations as 'everything does not become resolved, everything does not come out even; rather, one moment sheds light on the other, and the figures that the individual moments form together are specific signs and a legible script'.¹⁸⁶ It is not difficult to see that there is a surprising similarity between Adorno's *Konstellation* and Althusser's *surdétermination*; 'constellation is not system'¹⁸⁷ but overdetermined relations in which the psychological dimension is closely interrelated with the material sphere. They use these categories to illuminate the something outside theory, in a way that borrows other disciplinary terms, which do not belong to orthodox Marxism, to attack the Lukácsian concept of totality.¹⁸⁸

On the other hand, what they really wanted to do in criticising the concept of totality does not seem to fit with the way in which they reject the category of totality as such. For totalisation and totality are the elements which ratify whether any knowledge of reality is properly correct or not – they are supposed to prove their arguments to be more true than what they criticise. Therefore, it would not be far wrong to say that they aim at ruling out the teleological aspect, which is implicit in Lukács' formulation of totality.

Allowing for his scepticism of human reason as such, Adorno's attack on Lukács is based on the analysis of enlightenment rationalism. In Adorno's sense, the

¹⁸⁵ See *ibid.*, p. 51.

¹⁸⁶ Theodor W. Adorno, *Hegel: Three Studies*, trans. by Shierry Weber Nicholson (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1993), p. 109.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁸ For this theoretical similarity, see Dieter Kliche, 'Kunst gegen Verdinglichung: Berührungspunkte im Gegensatz von Adorno und Lukács', in *Materialien*, p. 243. Kliche claims that Adorno's theory of

conceptualisation of totality is nothing less than “*Nachkonstruktion*”, as much as in the case of Freudian *Nachträglichkeit*. For Adorno, the concept of totality cannot reach non-conceptuality. Adorno’s theoretical pursuit does not allow any claim for realism, but rather argues the autonomy of the work of art, in line with rejecting the concept of totality. In addition, Adorno’s sceptical attitude towards Lukács is precisely related to the way in which Adorno grasps reification as an iron web that is totally universalised in administrative society. In this sense, Adorno argues that the omnipresence of repression is unperceived.¹⁸⁹

Far distinguished from Lukács, who presupposes capitalist commodity-structure as a cause of reification, Adorno understands reification as a by-product of the enlightenment rationalism that constitutes the modern institution and power. In *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno argues as follows:

Scientific objectification, in line with the quantifying tendency of all science since Descartes, tends to eliminate qualities and to transform them into measurable definitions. Increasingly, rationality itself is equated *more mathematico* with the faculty of quantification. While perfectly corresponding to the primacy of a triumphant natural science, this faculty is by no means inherent in the concept of the *ratio* itself, which is blinded mainly when it balks at the idea that qualitative moments on their part are susceptible of rational conception.¹⁹⁰

For Adorno, reification does not arise simply from the commodity structure, but rather from the principle of thought thereby identifying nature with reason. The identification is the very faculty of the mimetic impulse that Benjamin conceptualises in his consideration of the relationship between art and technology. In contrast to

mimesis fundamentally presumes the “symptomatic character” of reflection, which constitutes the structure of analogies.

¹⁸⁹ See Theodor W. Adorno, *Gesammelte Schriften, Vol. 8* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1972), p. 377.

¹⁹⁰ Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 43.

Benjamin, Adorno suggests that the mimetic faculty of technology is the ideological mechanism, which is related to the demand for self-preservation.

A significant factor in Adorno's consideration of mimesis lies in the way in which he denotes the demand for self-preservation as the logic of man's dominance of nature. With progressive enlightenment that alienates man from nature, the mimetic mode of human behaviour and mythical and metaphysical mode have declined. This gradually changing historical phase leaves the old modes to be thought of as secret and props up a paradoxical condition that realism still stays at the centre of the cultural power. In particular, the mimetic behaviour yet constitutes the baleful belief of rationalism, which identifies nature with reason. This identifying principle of thought gives rise to the exchange system in which values are identified with the materiality of commodity.

Adorno's scepticism regarding rationality leads to a rejection of any possible autonomy of subjectivity in the administrative society. To quote Adorno and Horkheimer:

Subjectivity has given way to the logic of the allegedly indifferent rules of the game, in order to dictate all the more unrestrainedly. Positivism, which finally did not spare thought itself, the chimera in a cerebral form, has removed the very last insulating instance between individual behavior and the social norm. The technical process, into which the subject has objectified itself after being removed from the consciousness, is free of the ambiguity of mythic thought as of all meaning altogether, because reason itself has become the mere instrument of the all-inclusive economic apparatus.¹⁹¹

For Adorno, the social situation in which human beings become a mere functional instrument of a total system produces the death of the subject. In other words, the autonomy of the subject that Kantian philosophy proclaimed no longer

¹⁹¹ Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. 30.

exists in the administrative society. The subject becomes an object – the very status that Lukács calls reification. This reified state can be regarded as completely totalised immanent relations whereby the distance between the subject and the object totally disappears: put it in Adorno's own terms, it is the "*ausweglos geschlossene Immanenzzusammenhang* (hopelessly unified immanent connection)".¹⁹² For Adorno, the administrative society means a total system not allowing any self-consciousness. Interestingly, Adorno's understanding of reification is based on Lukács' formula; Adorno also uses this notion to indicate the situation in which the qualitative is measured by the quantitative. Although Adorno is interested in the way in which the exchange principle is related to the identifying thought in his analysis of reification, whereas Lukács stresses the identification of the subject and the object in the process of achieving totality.

In Lukács' sense, reification can be overpowered only by 'constant and constantly renewed efforts to disrupt the reified structure of existence by concretely relating to the concretely manifested contradictions of the total development, by becoming conscious of the immanent meanings of these contradictions for the total development'.¹⁹³ Adorno criticises this formulation as the violence of identity thinking thereby ruling out the possibility of non-conceptuality; the concept of totality deliberately implicates the forced identification of the subject and the object. Furthermore, Adorno strategically emphasises an epistemic rupture that results from the issue of Auschwitz; Adorno's theoretical pursuit is based on the philosophical shift from the ontological problematic to the cognitive one. According to Adorno, 'an imperceptible change has taken place in the philosophical need: from a need for

¹⁹² See Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialektik* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1966), p. 395.

¹⁹³ Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, p. 197.

substance and solidity it has turned into a need to avoid the spiritual reification which society has carried out and categorically dictated to its members'.¹⁹⁴

This is a far different position from what Lukács suggests in *History and Class Consciousness*: 'only when the consciousness of the proletariat is able to point out the road along which the dialectics of history is objectively impelled, but which it cannot travel unaided, will the consciousness of the proletariat awaken to a consciousness of the process, and only then will the proletariat become the identical subject-object of history whose praxis will change reality'.¹⁹⁵ That is to say, for Adorno there is no subjectivity to achieve self-consciousness such as class-consciousness in the administrative totalising system.

In contrast to Lukács who endorses Marx's dialectical consideration of capitalism, a consideration that capitalism produces 'its own grave-diggers',¹⁹⁶ Adorno plainly rules out any important role of working class in the administrative society. This is a symptomatic turning point in Marxist theory, in the sense that Adorno's theoretical revision intrinsically rejects the category of the working class as the weapon of destruction for the capitalist system: the working class is no longer revolutionary, while the media of the consumer society effectively paralyses the individual workers. From this perspective, Adorno grasps experience rather than form as the most significant element in the process of the subjective perception; form is already always contaminated by enlightenment rationalism: form inherently contains the paradoxical aspect of technology.

Adorno's sceptical argument of the subject arises from the presupposition that there is nothing to do for the subject, even if recognising the structure of repression in the modern society. What Adorno describes as the symptomatic example of

¹⁹⁴ Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 90.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

desperation, which the subjective perception of the structure produces, is the philosophy of Existentialism. Adorno argues that 'if society could be seen through as a closed system, a system accordingly unreconciled to the subject, it would become too embarrassing for the subject as long as they remain subjects in any sense'.¹⁹⁷ In this respect, the existential anxiety is 'the claustrophobia of a systematized society'.¹⁹⁸

An important point in this consideration lies in the way in which Adorno suggests a new way to step out of reification in late capitalism, insofar as his theoretical pursuit aims at reformulating Lukács' conceptualisation of class-consciousness with the privileged concept of experience. In Adorno's sense, experience is not positive conceptualisation but rather Benjamin's notion of "Erlebnis", the discontinuous experience;¹⁹⁹ Adorno's concept of experience strictly designates the sensuous mimesis of the object that is not distorted by the identifying principle of thought. For Benjamin, experience cannot be reconstructed – 'experiences are lived similarities'.²⁰⁰ Furthermore, Benjamin claims that 'what is decisive here is not the causal connections established over the course of time, but the similarities that have been lived'.²⁰¹ In this respect, it is not difficult to see that Benjamin's theory of experience strongly repudiates the positivistic realism that has recourse to the idea of "Erfahrung", the continuous experience, the very idea that paves a way to the identifying principle of thought. What is implicit in Benjamin's consideration is that to learn by experience is the way to break the web of reification.

As has been discussed, for Benjamin the masses' habitual beliefs of reality repudiate any sensuous experience. Thus, the urgent philosophical task is to make the

¹⁹⁶ Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (London: Verso, 1998), p. 50.

¹⁹⁷ Adorno, *Negative dialectics*, p. 24.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ See Benjamin, 'On Some Motifs in Baudelaire', p. 180-5.

²⁰⁰ Benjamin, 'Experience', in *Selected Writings, Volume 2*, p.553.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

masses learn by experience, a task to restore lived similarity in the moment of mimesis. In this sense, it is not far wrong to say that Benjamin's theory of experience is closely related to his consideration of the mimetic faculty. Adorno theoretically draws on Benjamin's formulation to support his argument of the way in which the subject can escape from the iron web of reification. Adorno applies Benjamin's conceptualisation of experience for his reformulation of class-consciousness. On the condition that the working class no longer exists in its own right, the category of class-consciousness, which defines the identity of proletariat, cannot be properly reserved. The society that Adorno assumes in his discussion does not allow any conflict between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, but rather the administrative relation between the elite and the mass. Therefore, it is important that the subject decides to awake himself out of the habitual cognition of the object. This is the point where Adorno adopts Benjamin's category of habit in relation to mimesis.

Adorno's strategy of de-reification specifically belongs to the subjective decision, the decision to learn by experience without any attempt to identify subjectivity with the object; the subject is not so much an element of the constituted objectivity but rather an agency of the object. This is what is different from Lukács' formulation in Adorno's account of the relationship between the subject and the object. Adorno reveals his intention to substitute the category of experience for that of class-consciousness by retaining the object's preponderance in formulation. In this respect, for Adorno realism is an aesthetic category that resorts to the identifying principle of thought, precisely because realism reinforces the habitual cognition. On the other hand, the resistance against realism means that art can promise social emancipation; realism is the aesthetic form of a typical instrumental reason. Adopting Benjamin's presumption of mimesis, Adorno regards real cognition as something

related to sensuous experience: mimesis is the instinctive mimicry behaviour immanent in all lives. This is where Adorno endorses Benjamin's conceptualisation of the mimetic faculty to legitimise his criticism of realism throughout his theory of the relationship between mimesis and art.

This perspective of mimesis crucially leads Adorno to the way in which he considers enlightenment as a paradoxical process of civilisation itself, a process precipitating the intellectual regression. For Adorno, the enlightenment project increasingly destroys the sensuous mimetic faculty, while fortifying reification and instrumental reason; however, Adorno finds the remnants of the preserved sensuous mimesis in art; art is a mutated mimesis through the process of the modern rationalisation, by which rationality is combined with the sensuous mimetic faculty. In this respect, Adorno argues that 'art is a refuge for mimetic comportment'.²⁰² Here, Adorno chooses a different way from Benjamin: he does not agree with Benjamin, who conceptualises the autonomy of artworks as a magical aura. It is interesting that Adorno specifically points out the paradoxical character of art by which 'the subject exposes itself, at various levels of autonomy, to its other, separated from it and yet not altogether separated'.²⁰³ When considering that modern subjectivity is closely related to the Cartesian *cogito*, what Adorno implies with his analysis is that art is a rational device to disavow magical practices – the mimesis of art is possible by its rational feature. More importantly, yet, the paradoxical mimetic faculty of art leads to irrationality by means of its rationality, in the sense that all rationality aims at necessarily achieving something irrational. Therefore, it is not surprising that art is 'a response to the faulty irrationality of the rational world as an overadministered

²⁰² Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 53.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*

world'.²⁰⁴ From this perspective, Adorno describes the paradoxical aspects of art as follows:

To speak of "the magic of art" is trite because art is allergic to any relapses into magic. Art is a stage in the process of what Max Weber called the disenchantment of the world, and it is entwined with rationalization ... Nevertheless, the cliché about the magic of art has something true about it. The survival of mimesis, the nonconceptual affinity of the subjectively produced with its unposited other, defines art as a form of knowledge and to that extent as "rational".²⁰⁵

In this respect, 'art is rationality that criticizes rationality without withdrawing from it'²⁰⁶ – art is not prerational or irrational. The mimetic faculty of art endows art with the privileged character whereby artworks preserve a spiritual mode of conduct. In this sense, the character of art as knowledge is precisely based on the way in which 'art completes knowledge with what is excluded from knowledge'²⁰⁷ – the non-conceptuality of the sensuous experience. This is where an emancipating element of art comes to exist in its own right. For Adorno, it is only art that can lead the subject to the objective experience, the experience that 'is not directly accessible to discursive conceptualization'.²⁰⁸ This character allows artworks to have a paradoxical function in a totalising society. As Adorno puts it, 'if it holds true that the subjective rationality of means and ends ... requires spurious irrational enclaves and treats art as such, art is nevertheless the truth of society insofar as in its most authentic products the irrationality of the rational world order is expressed'.²⁰⁹ No doubt, this is the very way in which the dialectic of art reveals its truth through its participation of enlightenment.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 54.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 55.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 84.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

Adorno raises the critical issue of realism in his analysis of the character of artworks, an issue of how the subject breaks the deadlock of reification in late capitalism. However, it seems to me that Adorno simply overlooks the fundamental distinction between artworks and reality. What Adorno attempts to do in his discussion of art lies in the way in which he challenges the conventional difference between the subject and the object. To legitimise his theoretical reformulation of this dualism, Adorno also draws psychoanalytic categories into Marxist theoretical contexts, while secretly communicating with Schopenhauer and Nietzsche,²¹⁰ as in the cases of other theorists like Althusser and Žižek.

Adorno regards concepts as mental tools, 'tools for the adjustment and domination of reality by a subject motivated essentially by desire for self-preservation'.²¹¹ Adorno comes to focus on the system-generating ego principle, 'the connecting link between the unity of the subject'.²¹² Therefore, the de-reification is possible only through its own mediation of concept, precisely because it is the concept that 'turns against the reifying tendency of conceptual thought'.²¹³ More importantly, Adorno signifies this self-conquering character of the concept as the combination of a mimetic moment and conceptuality. Adorno explains the way in which artworks paradoxically reveal truth by their autonomy – their non-conceptuality of the mimetic moment. In other words, subjectivity, whereby art constitutes its autonomy, can speak of truth, insofar as the subjective rationality of means and ends, which contains the irrational character within it, truly produces artworks overcoming the irrationality of rationalisation.

What is implicit in Adorno's analysis is that art symbolically constitutes its cultural logic of the real in the process of its imitating capacity. From Lukács'

²¹⁰ For these influences, see Albrecht Wellmer, 'Truth, Semblance, Reconciliation: Adorno's Aesthetic Redemption of Modernity', trans. by Maeve Cooke, *Telos*, 62 (1984-85), pp. 89-115.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

²¹² *Ibid.*

standpoint, this is not the problem of the artistic form as such, but rather that of reality. On the other hand, for Adorno the reality of artworks is nothing less than a by-product of its image feature; thus, truth is hidden under the imaginary nexus of meanings. In Adorno's sense, whether art could speak of social truth depends on its negation of the conventional cultural code system; by means of this negative strategy, the autonomous artwork comes to exist as a critique.

Nevertheless, it must be stressed that Adorno's idea of art presupposes the incorporation of philosophy and art. This seems as if Adorno also deserves his own criticism of Brechtian and Sartrean committed plays. Adorno denounces those plays as 'vehicles for the author's ideas'.²¹⁴ Even though Adorno stresses the mediated function of form, he does not elucidate the way in which the work of art finds its own path to step out of traditional philosophical ideas. It goes without saying that this is the paradox of Adorno's formulation; his aesthetic theory cannot provide the proper category to consider the non-philosophically realistic tendency of the contemporary cultural politics such as postmodernism. In short, Adorno's aesthetic judgements cannot be free from the suspicion of traditionalism. This other side of Adorno's aesthetic raises an interesting problem of realism, the problem of the relationship between memory and representation.

6. The Mimetic Moment

Endorsing Benjamin's understanding of experience, Adorno reformulates the utopian possibility of "mimesis" in late capitalism. Adorno's defence of mimesis is far different from Lukács' realism – Adorno mainly focuses on the technical aspect of art in his analysis of the relationship between mimesis and knowledge. In Adorno's

²¹³ Ibid.

sense, what must be repudiated in the classical realistic mode of representation is the identifying principle of thought, which Benjamin criticises in terms of the philistine's conviction of experience.

Adorno's presupposition is that the artistic logic of realism is another technological adaptation of the identifying principle of capitalism: realism reinforces the conviction of the subjective experience by means of its category of reality. This is squarely in concord with the perspective of modernism in which artistic experiments finally end up in the technical impasse, as one of the characters in *The Waves* acknowledges. It is the utopian impulse towards truth that perplexes these technical pursuits in the aesthetic production of modernism. Bernard, the phrase-maker in this novel, confesses:

After a long lifetime, in a moment of revelation, I may lay hands on it, but now the idea breaks in my hand. Ideas break a thousand times for once that they globe themselves entire.²¹⁵

For Adorno, the revelation of the "true story" is related to the incessant experiments of artistic techniques against worldly realism: 'the anti-realistic moment in the modern novel, its metaphysical dimension, is called forth by its true subject matter, a society in which human beings have been torn from one another and from themselves'.²¹⁶ No doubt, the way in which Adorno finds the utopian moment in these aesthetic pursuits resides in the paradoxical characteristic of experience raised by Benjamin. For Benjamin, experience must be grasped as paradoxical; 'it can be hostile to spirit and destructive to many blossoming dreams', and at the same time 'it

²¹⁴ Theodor W. Adorno, 'Commitment', in *Aesthetics and Politics*, trans. by Rodney Livingstone and others (London: Verso, 1980), p. 182.

²¹⁵ Virginia Woolf, *The Waves* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 129.

is the most beautiful, most untouchable, most immediate because it can never be without spirit'.²¹⁷

The fundamental discrepancy between dream and experience results from the idea of representation, the idea of something that cannot be represented in what we know in our knowledge of experience. Representation always already presupposes the sublime object in its own right; representation is a symbolic system in which the individual fantasy comes to be combined with the collective ideology. In a similar tone, Benjamin argues that 'absolute experience is ... language':²¹⁸ language is systematic and symbolic framework by which our knowledge of experience is constituted. Interestingly, Lukács alludes to this aspect of experience in his later consideration of realism, in the way that encapsulates different meanings. To quote Lukács:

If we are speaking of the concept of realism, what I mean by this is a kind of literature which, in polemical writings about the Soviet era, I called realism from Homer to Gorky. I took this in a literal sense, without wishing to compare Gorky with Homer, rather in order to say that a common tendency is involved, which is not one of techniques of expression, of style, etc., but rather an orientation to the real, essential nature of mankind, persisting through a developmental process. The problem of realism is related to this, and so realism is naturally not a stylistic concept. Rather, the art of any time – and this is the essential thing – relates the immediate problems of its age to the general development of mankind and links them with it, a connection which may of course be quite hidden from the writer himself.²¹⁹

For Lukács, the work of art becomes the memory of humanity through the symbolic systematisation of experience. It may be said that this similarity between

²¹⁶ Theodor W. Adorno, 'The Position of the Narrator in the Contemporary Novel', in *Notes to Literature, Vol. 1*, trans. by Shierry Weber Nicholsen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), p. 32.

²¹⁷ Walter Benjamin, 'Experience', in *Selected Writings, volume 1: 1913-1926*, trans. by David Lachterman, Howard Eiland and Ian Balfour (London: Belknap, 1996), p. 5.

²¹⁸ Walter Benjamin, 'On Perception', in *Selected Writings, Volume 1: 1913-1926*, trans. by David Lachterman, Howard Eiland and Ian Balfour (London: Belknap, 1996), p. 96.

²¹⁹ Lukács, *Conversations with Lukács*, p. 37.

Lukács and Benjamin derives from their early career decisively developed in the neo-Kantian mood,²²⁰ in the sense that neo-Kantian aesthetics defines the work of art as a symbolic form associated with the logic of *Weltanschauung*. However, there is an undeniable difference between them: Lukács and Benjamin plainly presuppose that the mode of production imposes the change of a category of reality, while neo-Kantian aesthetics postulates the transcendental category of *Weltanschauung* to explain the formal transformation. Like Lukács, Benjamin also distances himself from the tradition of neo-Kantianism.²²¹

What Lukács strives to manifest with the notion of “an orientation to the real” means the way in which the writer himself consistently searches for reality, stepping out of the habitual category of reality. In this way, realism is not so much an aesthetic ideology as methodological stance serving as the process of totalisation, a totalising process in which writers or artists find the hidden connection between their artistic activity and the general development of mankind. Therefore, Lukács believes that realism is the only aesthetic expression of Marxism, in the sense that the realistic mode of representation promises the criterion of the scientific perspective, the category of totality. This aspect of realism is specifically related to the problem of knowledge, which is necessarily acquired through the process of “imitation”.²²²

There is no doubt that Lukács’ formula, from the outset, presupposes a theoretical norm different from Adorno’s. To put the problem of imitation as the central category in his consideration of realism, Lukács particularly postulates artistic production as a way of making a “likeness” through the process of imitating nature.

²²⁰ In his first curriculum vitae, Benjamin writes that he attended the lectures delivered by Cassirer and Simmel. See Walter Benjamin, ‘Curriculum Vitae (I)’, in *Selected Writings, Volume 1: 1913-1926*, trans. by David Lachterman, Howard Eiland and Ian Balfour (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 422.

²²¹ See Howard Caygill, *Walter Benjamin: The Colour of Experience* (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 1.

This seems to be different from Adorno's formulation of art, for Adorno stresses the technical aspect of the artwork that immanently desires to become nature as such. It may be easy to see that Adorno's theory of the aesthetic sets forth the idea that the art does not aim at producing a replica of nature, but rather a creature to rival nature. However, a more important point is that Adorno explicitly stresses the mimetic moment in the process of the artistic production. For Adorno, art is not so much the replacement of mythology, but reification of the mimetic moment. The way in which Lukács' understanding of "imitation" as a significant category of art, whereby art historically becomes an element in the totality of human activities, is surprisingly similar to what Adorno glimpses in his consideration of the mimetic moment.

Lukács at once admits the technical characteristic as an essential part of artistic form, but also claims that art is ultimately independent of technique. For Lukács, the performed aspect of content is more important than formalistic technique – the future perspective of artworks. Unlike Adorno, Lukács does not find the utopian impulse in the technological aspect of mimesis as such, but rather a typical figure of human lives that appears in the process of history. In a sense, mimesis is a libidinal investment concentrating on the object. Adorno believes that this desire can allow an understanding of desire itself through its utopian goal.

What Adorno suggests in his defence of the mimetic moment is similar to the Freudian conceptualisation of sublimation – an activity that leads desire to the non-sexual object. Mimesis is the identifying desire with the object, and at the same time, the disenchantment of the object. In this way, "writing", whereby 'second nature recognizes itself as first nature', is a process in which the mimetic activity proceeds in

²²² For Lukács' own discussion of this problem, see Georg Lukács, *Ästhetik I* (Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1972), p. 160.

several dimensions towards imitating the object.²²³ For Adorno, mimesis is not an image itself but the condition of the image; the mimetic process becomes duplicated through its conscious reflection of the object, separating the loved object from the hated object.

The desire for identification comes into conflict with a longing for difference, the demand for novelty in Benjamin's terms. Mimesis secretly points to something differently new, while reinforcing the existing knowledge of reality. However, there arises the question about Adorno's defence of the mimetic moment for cognitive emancipation, when considering the aestheticisation of the culture industry. For the paradoxical mimetic moment of artistic technique, which functions as both opportunities of semblance and difference, seems impotent when it comes to finding a way out of reification that broadly influences our recognition of reality in consumer society.

The differentiation of products by commercial branding is analogous to the way in which artistic technique provides a new style to the old form in the process of artistic production. The technicality of artistic form is always ready for external commodification to seize on it. Adorno's criticism aims to attack this commercial use of the artistic technique in the culture industry; yet, it is difficult to find today those thriving technical experiments free from the iron cage of commercial aestheticisation. In the situation of late capitalism, where the autonomy of artworks is no longer possible, the utopian impulse towards truth, which is immanent in the mimetic moment, seems to square the circle, in the sense that the identifying desire of mimesis cannot create the new category of "novelty". Unfortunately, the differences floating on the surface of this new situation are not based on the distinction between the old

²²³ See Theodor W. Adorno, 'The Essay as Form', in *Notes to Literature, Vol. 1*, trans. by Shierry Weber Nicholsen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), p. 20.

and the new as much as Adorno assumes. This is the very circumstance that Jameson regards postmodernism as the cultural logic of late capitalism.

Undermining the ground on which realism stands in its own right, Adorno's attack on realism aims at disenchanting the principle of realism, transforming the reality, the truth of realism, into appearance. After Adorno, this demystification of realism continues on its way throughout various theoretical considerations of realism and representation. Consequently, this pursuit discloses that 'the concept of modernism, realism's historical counterpart and its dialectical mirror-image, is not equally contradictory';²²⁴ modernism historically arose from the ruin of realism as an aesthetic symptom, tactically responding to the transformation of the cultural condition of realism.

The introduction of technology into aesthetic production gives rise to the transition of the traditional category of reality. In this way, realism loses its proper aesthetic position, in the sense that the totalising system of the culture industry deconstructs the distance between the work of art and the spectator.

Adorno's formulation of the culture industry seems to serve as the theoretical analysis of how the identifying principle of thought underpins the aesthetic production in the situation of late capitalism, in which the real subsumption of labour under capital comes to dominate the system of production. In this sense, Adorno's formulation of the work of art provides the way in which the problem of the relationship between reality and representation moves from an ontological category to an epistemological category. That is to say, Adorno pushes Benjamin's notion of experience beyond Lukács' concept of totality to the utopian dimension of cognition.

²²⁴ Jameson, 'Reflections in Conclusion', p. 198.

Adorno's theory assumes the way in which writers give up the classical representation paradigm, which is supported by the belief that the subjectivity properly reflects the object, adapting the anti-realistic perspective. To theoretically legitimise his argument, Adorno draws on Benjamin's presupposition of experience throughout his analysis of mimesis. Adorno suggests that mimesis is nothing less than the objectification of subjectivity in order to create the new knowledge of reality against the old one. Adorno attempts to find the possibility of emancipation in this process of creation – the new knowledge or category of reality can promise the liberating space for the subject. In this formula, the classical concept of representation is no longer sustainable, insofar as the dichotomy of the subject and the object incessantly supports the way in which realism is possible. As a result, Adorno attempts to clear up the condition of artistic production through the investigation of mimesis. However, his pursuit remains utopian in the newly emerged state of postmodernism, in the sense that, in this new circumstance, novelty as such simply precipitates into the commodity by the total system of late capitalism.

CHAPTER THREE

REALISM AND METHOD: BRECHT AND SARTRE

Introduction

There is no doubt that one cannot delineate the whole contour of the Marxist debates revolving around realism without Brecht; he is the thinker who suggests not only the idea but also the method in a series of aesthetic disputes. Epic theatre is the method that embodies the Brechtian idea of realism.

The Brechtian conceptualisation of epic theatre suggests that the category of realism can be achieved by rejecting old literary and theatrical apparatuses. For Brecht, a specific form is nothing less than a part of “Great Method”, a method that is consistent with the way of living.¹ In this way, the Brechtian category of method always already includes an ethical and a political as well as an epistemological dimension: this is the precise goal which Brechtian realism aims at accomplishing throughout its aesthetic practice. Therefore, the Brechtian concept of technique reveals the way in which one can produce a particular effect in the process of cultural practice, and invents a mode of perception.

The Brechtian idea of realism is woven in with various practical dimensions, in particular, the pedagogy of theatre. Brecht stresses the pedagogical function of realism, which can be carried out by the effect of estrangement. Sartre, however, repudiates the Brechtian pedagogy; for Sartre, Brechtian epic theatre mainly provides a judgement, rather than a communicative correlation between actors and audience. Sartre raises not the question of the pedagogical function of theatre, but rather the question of the way in which the audience’s intellection can be re-educated by the

image in theatre; in Sartre's formula, the most important element in theatre is to expose the contradictory aspect of subjectivity through action.

Sartre's formulation of theatre presupposes the transcendental unity of actors and audience; everybody shares the equal capacity to think and to communicate with each other; there is no distinction between actors and audience. In Sartre's sense, actors can be the audience and vice versa; they can achieve a communicative correlation through the analogical image of the other.

In this chapter, I contend that Sartre's criticism of Brecht raises several important issues about realism. More importantly, my concern in this chapter is to explore the way in which Brecht and Sartre constitute the logic of realism against the conventional category of reality. First, the chapter examines Brecht's idea of realism that is embodied in his formulation of epic theatre. Second, my discussion investigates the interrelation between Brecht's concept of estrangement-effect and Benjamin's conceptualisation of dialectical image, in considering the Brechtian category of method in his formulation of realism. Finally, the chapter provides an argument about Sartre's criticism of Brecht, emphasising Sartre's attempt to reformulate the issue of Brechtian realism in a changed situation, a situation in which actually existing socialism loses its authenticity, and bourgeois cultural dominance totalises the realm of aesthetic production as well as the mode of production.

1. Theatrical Realism

The point at issue in Brecht's discussion of realism can be defined in relation to theatre. Brecht's idea of theatre arises from the cultural context of Marxist aesthetics; his argument aims at attacking Lukács' formulation of realism, which is

¹ See Fredric Jameson, *Brecht and Method* (London: Verso, 1998), p. 109.

based on the traditional framework of representation; hence, Brecht's theory of realism cannot be considered separately from the aesthetic debates among other Marxist theorists. An important element in Brecht's aesthetic resides in the way in which his conceptualisation of realism rightly reveals the problem of Lukácsian genre criticism. Brecht claims:

The formalistic nature of the theory of realism is demonstrated by the fact that not only is it exclusively based on the form of a few bourgeois novels of the previous century (more recent novels are merely cited in so far as they exemplify the same form), but also exclusively on the particular genre of the *novel*. But what about realism in lyric poetry, or in drama?²

Here, what Brecht calls "the formalistic nature of the theory of realism" alludes to Lukács' argument of realism, a theory that regards "a few bourgeois novels" as the standard form of realism. For Brecht, Lukács' theory of realism is too ideal, and then cannot be actually applied to the revolutionary aesthetic production. Brecht criticises Lukács' conceptualisation of realism in the sense that such realism merely provides an inert criterion for academic literary critics. In addition, it is for Brecht that Lukács' theory of realism ignores the possibility of formalistic experiments and fails to serve any applied example except novels.

What Brecht points out in his criticism of Lukács seems a valid argument insofar as Lukácsian realism can simply be limited to the genre criticism. However, Lukács also implies the practical aspect of realism and plainly presupposes the practical dimension of his theory of realism throughout his aesthetic works, focusing not on an author's political tendency but his or her attitude towards reality. As Eugene Lunn stresses, there is a similarity between Brecht and Lukács in such a way that

² Bertolt Brecht, 'Against Georg Lukács', in *Aesthetics and Politics*, trans. by Rodney Livingstone (London: Verso, 1980), p. 70.

‘their dispute remained, with all its freedom from Stalinist crudities, within the parameters of Communist cultural discussion and political militancy’.³

In this respect, what Brecht intends to point out in Lukács’ theory of realism is that Lukács limits the various practices of realism to a specific literary genre, especially the novel. Therefore, it is difficult to see that Brecht can be an alternative to Lukács; but rather Brecht’s idea of realism serves as a supplementary formula for Lukácsian realism, providing the expanded theory of realism to other genres such as lyric poetry and theatrical drama. That is to say, as Lunn properly elucidates, ‘the tendencies to divide the field up between them and to see the two positions as antithetical and mutually exclusive are real errors, ones made frequently in the many attempts to reconstruct their “debates” as a means of championing Brecht’s contributions’.⁴

From this perspective, Brecht’s rejection of Lukács can be regarded as an aesthetic attempt to establish a new method beyond bourgeois literary conventions. Brecht sees traditional literary technique as a bourgeois cultural legacy that revolutionary artists must abolish. For Brecht, the individual dimension of aesthetics is nothing less than an ideology. As Adorno says, Brecht seeks ‘to translate the true hideousness of society into theatrical appearance, by dragging it straight out of its camouflage’.⁵ In Brechtian realism, the form of theatre is a vessel, a temporary usefulness, in which the vortex of real contradictions is revealed as such without any representational apparatus.

³ Eugene Lunn, *Marxism and Modernism: An Historical Study of Lukács, Brecht, Benjamin and Adorno* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), p. 77.

⁴ Ibid. Lunn’s argument rests on the consideration of the historical situation in which the aesthetic debates in West and East German, which revolve around the contrast between Brecht and Lukács, were produced. Throughout those debates, Brecht was commonly used as an anti-Lukácsian figure. For a detailed discussion of this, see Karin Brenner, *Theorie der Literaturgeschichte und Ästhetik bei Georg Lukács* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1990), p. 10.

⁵ Theodor W. Adorno, ‘Commitment’, in *Aesthetics and Politics*, trans. by Rodney Livingstone and others (London: Verso, 1980), p. 183.

What is relevant to Brecht's idea of realism is that the alternative aesthetic, the revolutionary principle of cultural production, must be a critique of the traditional system of representation. In Brecht's sense, realism is not only for literature: 'it is a major political, philosophical and practical issue and must be handled and explained as such'.⁶ When regarding such an important problem, which is an independent matter of general human interest, Brecht strives to reformulate the traditional discourse of realism constituted by the principle of representation.

Like Benjamin's case, Brecht's position seems quite simple: realism must be linked not to 'the good old days but to the bad new ones'.⁷ Brecht's aesthetic experiments, of course, aim at abolishing the aesthetic convention of the old descendant class, the bourgeois cultural legacy, and his theory of realism purports to defend the premature aesthetic of the working class. Brecht's idea of realism is fundamentally different from Lukács' formulation of realism, which stresses the revolutionary mediation between bourgeois culture the proletarian culture. What Brecht warns Lukács about is that if artists regard the classical form of the artwork as an aesthetic standard for their contemporary aesthetic production, it is strategically wrong and not useful for the production of an appropriate aesthetic practice for the new historical situation. In other words, form is not a universal and transcendental entity independent from its own historical situation; thus, form must be changed in line with newly constructed aesthetic demands.

As Fredric Jameson claims, the important point of Brechtian realism resides in the category of 'usefulness'.⁸ For Brecht, the useful is related to learning something from aesthetic practice, a learning that not only belongs to philosophical speculation but also to amusement; Brecht argues that 'if there were not such amusement to be

⁶ Brecht, 'Against Georg Lukács', p. 76.

⁷ Ibid., p. 69.

had from learning the theatre's whole structure would unfit it for teaching'.⁹ This is where Brecht formulates his theory of the epic theatre, a theory that the realistic theatre must provide a distance between the spectator and the artistic apparatus. Brechtian epic theatre does not aim at producing a harmonious form for resolving social contradiction, but rather at showing the contradictions, which exist.

The essential point of the epic theatre is that the pre-given artistic apparatus is an obstacle for realising the real, an ideological illusion whereby the spectator cannot come to grasp things. *Verfremdungseffekt*, defamiliarisation or, better still, the effect of estrangement, is nothing less than a moment of *Erlebnis*, the shock of dialectical thinking in Benjamin's terms. Brecht applies this theory for his dramas; he designs the role of a narrator or an announcer who interrupts the audience's empathy to the actor's performance and gives rise to the effect of estrangement. In the opening scene of *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui*, for instance, Brecht seems to show this quite explicitly:

THE ANNOUNCER:
Friends, tonight we're going to show –
Pipe down, you boys in the back row!
And, lady, your hat is in the way! –
Our great historical gangster play
Containing, for the first time, as you'll see
The truth about the scandalous dock subsidy.
Further we give you, for your betterment
Dogsborough's confession and testament.
Arturo Ui's rise while the stock market fell.
The notorious warehouse fire trial. What a sell!
The Dullfeet murder! Justice in a coma!
Gang warfare: the killing of Ernesto Roma!
All culminating in our stunning last tableau:
Gangsters take over the town of Cicero!
Brilliant performers will portray
The most eminent gangsters of our day.¹⁰

⁸ See Jameson, *Brecht and Method*, p. 1.

⁹ Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, ed. and trans. by John Willett (London: Methuen, 1964), p. 73.

¹⁰ Bertolt Brecht, *Plays: Three*, trans. by John Willett and others (London: Methuen, 1987), p. 119.

Alongside this, Brecht also draws on classical techniques such as the singing of the chorus to produce a distance between the theatre and the audience. Similarly, Brecht appropriates the way in which actors directly speak to the audience, as is the case with *The Threepenny Opera* and *The Mother*. In *The Threepenny Opera*, Brecht sets up Peachum's opening speech to the audience in line with a large sign lowered from a grid.¹¹ This technique allows the character to have a conversation with the audience and, at the same time, lets them know that this is nothing less than a dramatic performance. In this sense, it is difficult to say that such a speech is simply a monologue that is common in any traditional theatre. Brecht endows the character speaking to the audience with an independent role from other actors, thereby explaining the procedure of dramatic events and synthesising the subject matter.

This effect reminds the audience that they should recognise the theatrical apparatus in advance and does not attempt to solve any social contradiction with the symbolic meaning of dramatic performance. In this way the Brechtian concept of estrangement-effect is based on the assumption that 'a contradiction is not an opinion or an ideology in that sense; an estrangement is not exactly a philosophical concept, let alone a system; change may make you act, and even think, but perhaps it is not itself something you can teach'.¹² Brechtian pedagogy is nothing less than learning without teaching. In this respect, Brecht argues that the epic theatre appeals 'less to the feelings than to the spectator's reason'.¹³

Brecht does not follow the traditional criterion, a criterion that audience's empathy with theatrical characters is necessary in the performance; but rather

¹¹ See Bertolt Brecht, *Plays: One*, trans. by Peter Tegel and others (London: Methuen, 1988), p. 68.

¹² Jameson, *Brecht and Method*, p. 90.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

suggests that the emotional compliance with apparatuses must be renounced for creating a new category of reality. To quote Brecht:

The modesty of the avant-garde's demands has economic ground of whose existence they themselves are only partly aware. Great apparatus like the opera, the stage, the press, etc., impose their views as it were incognito. For a long time now they have taken the handiwork (music, writing, criticism, etc.) of intellectuals who share in their profits – that is, of men who are economically committed to the prevailing system but are socially near-proletarian – and processed it to make fodder for their public entertainment machine, judging it by their own standards and guiding it into their own channels ... Their output then becomes a matter of delivering the goods. Values evolve which are based on the fodder principle. And this leads to a general habit of judging the apparatus by its suitability for the apparatus without ever judging the apparatus by its suitability for the work.¹⁴

This is the presupposition on which Brechtian realism is based: the critique of established aesthetic judgement. Brecht believes that so-called great art hides its interests in the guise of transcendental form, 'great art serves great interests' and 'epochs without great interests do not have great art'.¹⁵ For Brecht, those interests belong to intellectuals who desire to seize the cultural power, and the category of reality in a specific era is a mode of ideology accidentally crystallised by a particular group or class. Brecht argues:

In our epoch there are several classes of human beings who have quite different interests and correspondingly different intellectual response. So if great art were to be produced today, it could only ever be produced for one of these classes; it would then promote the interests of this class, and this class alone would respond to it.¹⁶

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 34.

¹⁵ Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht on Art and Politics*, ed. by Tom Kuhn and Steve Giles, trans. by Laura Bradley, Steve Giles and Tom Kuhn (London: Methuen, 2003), p.33.

¹⁶ Ibid.

Brecht does not approve of the presupposition that there is a universal foundation of aesthetic production entirely free from any material interests. From this standpoint, Brecht criticises Lukácsian realism as an inert aesthetic useful only for academic critics.

However, it is to be noted that Brecht's way of understanding the relationship between intellectuals and aesthetic production seems to be less elaborated than the way in which Antonio Gramsci draws a distinction between "traditional" intellectuals and "organic" intellectuals. In a Gramscian sense, the concept of traditional intellectuals means the group of professional intellectuals, which has an inter-class status in society, the group that Brecht assumes tries to universalise the interest of a particular class across the whole of society.

Seemingly, a famous Gramscian proposition, 'all men are intellectuals',¹⁷ alludes to the contradictory situation in which 'not all men have in society the function of intellectuals'.¹⁸ This is where a Gramscian pedagogical strategy comes to exist in its own right; organic intellectuals are those who struggle to transform non-intellectuals into intellectuals. The Gramscian idea of intellectuals seems to be based on the category of mediation: 'the relationship between the intellectuals and the world of production is not as direct as it is with the fundamental social group but is, in varying degrees, "mediated" by the whole fabric of society and by the complex of superstructures'.¹⁹

In contrast to the Gramscian conceptualisation of intellectuals, Brecht criticises the idea of mediation as an ideology in his conceptualisation of "great art". However, paradoxically, Brecht's consideration of aesthetic production as a

¹⁷ Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. and trans. by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971), p. 9.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

pedagogical procedure seems to assume the mediated relationship between artists and spectators. As Adorno points out, the process of Brechtian aesthetic reduction of the political truth involves innumerable mediations, which Brecht's own formulation rejects.²⁰ This is where Brecht's idiosyncratic idea of actors and audience in theatre raises an interesting issue about realism, to which I now turn.

2. Realism as a Method

The logic of Brechtian realism is clearly revealed in his argument about the relationship between popularity and reality. Brecht claims that 'the workers judged everything by the amount of truth contained in it; they welcomed any innovation which helped the representation of truth, of the real mechanism of society; they rejected whatever seemed like playing, like machinery working for its own sake, i.e. no longer, or not yet, fulfilling a purpose'.²¹ The way in which Brecht stresses the role of the working class in aesthetic judgement precisely constitutes his idea of realistic artwork, the work of art in which the real situation of social contradictions is completely represented.

Today, Brecht's presupposition about realism, whereby he postulates the category of the working class as a good criterion of aesthetic judgement, might be regarded as the naivete of orthodox workerism. However, I would like to suggest that the way in which he sets up the category of the working class as a guideline of realism implies a more philosophical meaning like Lukács' conceptualisation of class-consciousness. While the Lukácsian concept of class-consciousness denotes an absolute category of collective cognition in capitalist society, Brecht stresses the actual experience of the working class, the detailed experience of everyday life under

²⁰ See Adorno, 'Commitment', p. 183.

capitalism. Brecht does not endorse the early Lukács' workerism, but rather develops his own way of understanding realism: the working class is the very agent of changing the category of reality, as is the case with Benjamin's consideration of the relationship between the habitual perception of reality and the epistemological category of reality.

Like Benjamin's dialectical image, the standstill moment of shock, Brechtian realism aims at breaking the habitual perception whereby the masses reproduce the dominant category of reality; on the other hand, unlike Benjamin, Brecht endorses workerism in his formulation of realism. However, it is difficult to say that Brecht's workerism is the by-product of utopianism as in the case of the early Lukács: for Brecht, the working class stands for a new need. In Brecht's sense, historical progress derives from a new need, while regress only gratifies old needs with new stimuli.²² That is to say, the most important point of progress is to create a new object of mimetic desire, the new objectivity. Brecht focuses on the dialectical way in which a new object creates a new need and vice versa. In this sense, the working class, an innovative bearer of new needs, should be located in the heart of cultural production and regarded as the new criterion of art. This is the Brechtian idea of cultural revolution: positive about form but negative about content.

Brecht argues that literature should give the working class truthful representations. The meaning of truthful representation in Brecht's formulation is nothing less than an aesthetic practice showing raw social contradictions by distancing the audience from literary or artistic apparatuses. For Brecht, realism functions as a shock of dialectical thinking. In Brecht's terms, truthful representation mean "usefulness" to the working masses. Such representation should be intelligible

²¹ Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, p. 110.

²² See Brecht, *Brecht on Art and Politics*, p. 102.

and acceptable to the people.²³ This may let us conjure up a simple idea that the realistic is the popular; but Brecht suggests a more complex layer of popularity. By explaining the linguistic context of *Volkstümlich*, he sets out an ideological struggle revolving around the term of popularity. To quote Brecht:

We shall remind ourselves that powerful institutions have long prevented this 'folk' from developing fully, that it has been artificially or forcibly tied down by conventions, and that the conception *Volkstümlich* has been stamped as a static one, without background or development ... Our conception of 'popular' refers to the people who are not only fully involved in the process of development but are actually taking it over, forcing it, deciding it. We have in mind a people that is making history and altering the world and itself. We have in mind a fighting people and also a fighting conception of 'popularity'.²⁴

Here Brecht attempts to demystify the traditional usage of the word "popularity" in the German cultural context. A significant point in Brecht's definition is that the popular means something discernible to the extensive masses, 'taking over their own forms of expression and enriching them / adopting and consolidating their standpoint / representing the most progressive section of the people in such a way that it can take over the leadership'.²⁵ This statement gives a clue to understanding the Brechtian idea of realism in relation to usefulness; Brecht classifies professional artists and actors in the Gramscian category of functional intellectuals. Distinguishing amateur actors from professional ones in his formulation of pedagogy, Brecht argues that 'professional actors, together with the existing theatre apparatus, should be used in order to weaken bourgeois ideological positions in the bourgeois theatre itself, and the audience should be activated'.²⁶

²³ See Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, p. 107.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Brecht, *Brecht on Art and Politics*, p. 88.

As Jameson claims, this Brechtian pedagogical tactic gives rise to the way in which ‘the spectacle as a whole should try to demonstrate to the audience that we are all actors, and that acting is an inescapable dimension of social and everyday life’.²⁷ Undoubtedly, this is the primary principle of Brechtian realism, the principle that intellectuals function as educational instruments to educate people to be statesmen and philosophers. For Brecht, true philosophy is true politics: ‘politicians have to be philosophers, and philosophers have to be politicians’.²⁸ No doubt, this is the kernel of Brecht’s theatrical realism that Benjamin insightfully observes in his study of epic theatre: the aesthetic effort to fill in the orchestra pit, ‘the abyss which separates the actors from the audience like the dead from the living’.²⁹ For Benjamin, Brecht’s epic theatre is an attempt to change ‘the functional relationship between stage and public, text and performance, producer and actors’.³⁰

This presupposition leads Benjamin to analyse the task of epic theatre: the rational utilisation of gesture. To quote Benjamin:

The gesture has two advantages over the highly deceptive statements and assertions normally made by people and their many-layered and opaque actions. First, the gesture is falsifiable only up to a point; in fact, the more inconspicuous and habitual it is, the more difficult it is to falsify. Second, unlike people’s actions and endeavours, it has a definable beginning and a definable end. Indeed, this strict, frame-like, enclosed nature of each moment of an attitude which, after all, is as a whole in a state of living flux, is one of the basic dialectical characteristics of the gesture. This leads to an important conclusion: the more frequently we interrupt someone engaged in an action, the more gestures we obtain. Hence, the interrupting of action is one of the principal concerns of epic theatre.³¹

²⁷ Jameson, *Brecht and Method*, p. 25.

²⁸ Brecht, *Brecht on Art and Politics*, p. 89.

²⁹ Walter Benjamin, *Understanding Brecht*, trans. by Anna Bostock (London: Verso, 1998), p. 1.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

In this way Brecht claims that 'plays and production style should turn the spectator into a statesman; that's why one should appeal not to the emotion in the spectator which would permit him to abreact aesthetically, but to his rationality'.³² This is where, unlike Lukács, Brecht does not criticise modernism as the illness of representation; Brecht probably knows the positive side of rationalisation, the reification of modernism. In addition, Brecht is interested in re-adopting modernist experiments, the usefulness of its apparatus.

It is interesting that this idea gives rise to Brecht's positive attitude towards technology and influences Benjamin's famous technology essays. As Jameson remarks, Benjamin's understanding of the relationship between technology and realism is indebted to Brecht, and furthermore Brecht is an influential source for the Marxist Benjamin who is notably distinguished from the early mystical Benjamin.³³ Benjamin's emphasis on non-sensuous experience through the dialectical image is couched in the Brechtian idea of realism, realism as a method.

The Brechtian idea of the relationship between the artwork and technology bears no relation to the positivistic view of technological progress that Benjamin criticises in his theses on history.³⁴ Brecht's conceptualisation of progress seems to be influenced by his understanding of dialectic: 'dialectic is a method of thinking, or, rather, an interconnected sequence of intellectual methods, which permit one to dissolve certain fixed ideas and reassert praxis against ruling ideologies'.³⁵ It is palpable that Brecht rejects official dialectical materialism by claiming that nature does not work dialectically. For Brecht, dialectical methods are better applied to societal conditions than natural ones, in the sense that the nature of society is

³² Brecht, *Brecht on Art and Politics*, p. 88.

³³ See Jameson, *Brecht and Method*, p. 38.

³⁴ See Walter Benjamin, 'On the Concept of History', in *Selected Writings, Volume 4: 1938-1940*, trans. by Edmund Jephcott and others (London: Belknap, 2003), p. 394.

dialectical. Thus, if Brecht is another guidance for Benjamin's Marxism, The Brechtian conceptualisation of the dialectic influences Benjamin's idea of historical materialism, 'which has annihilated within itself the idea of progress'.³⁶

On the other hand, the way in which Benjamin understands Brecht serves as an insight which can be used to approach the precise Brechtian idea of realism, realism as the shock of thinking. Brechtian realism aims at provoking the thinking of shock throughout the interaction between theatre and audience; it always already presupposes the theory of pedagogy. What Brecht expects with pedagogical realism is to produce a new knowledge, a new category of reality, by changing the way in which the masses think about the world. A significant factor in Brecht's pedagogical idea of realism resides in his conceptualisation of a theatre in which there is no distinction between actors and spectators; actors are simultaneously students.³⁷ Interestingly, this is the point where Brecht meets Sartre with the notion of "commitment".

3. Sartre's Critique of Brecht

There is a similarity between Brecht and Sartre in their conceptualisations of commitment. For both Brecht and Sartre, the category of commitment arises from their convictions that the work of art is definitely related to history. However, there is an undeniable difference between their ideas of commitment. In contrast to Brecht, who definitely presupposes the militant way of participating in the historical process, Sartre's formulation of commitment is based on the phenomenological conceptualisation of subject; the self is not completed with the Cartesian *cogito*, but rather through an ongoing project of engaging in the world.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 104.

³⁶ Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (London: Belknap, 1999), p. 460.

³⁷ See Brecht, *Brecht on Art and Politics*, p. 88.

Unlike Brecht, Sartre is a theorist who is more concerned with the reification of language, and draws an elaborated distinction between poetry and prose: for Sartre, poetry is beyond the utility of language, while prose is within it. Sartre argues that 'the empire of signs is prose; poetry is on the side of painting, sculpture, and music'.³⁸ For Sartre, a poet is 'certain of the total defeat of the human enterprise and arranges to fail in his own life in order to bear witness, by his individual defeat, to human defeat in general'.³⁹ In Sartre's sense, this is the precise way in which a poet partakes in the world, the way of the loser winning, whereas a prose-writer does it through 'a greater success'.⁴⁰ It seems to me that this presupposition constitutes a backdrop of Sartrean realism, the realism of analogical representatives.

In *The Psychology of the Imagination*, Sartre argues that the work of art is something 'to make an object 'appear''.⁴¹ By this argument, Sartre describes the way in which 'while perception is observation of a real thing (three faces of cube) and while conception gives us at once the knowledge of the object (the cube has six faces), imagination gives us only a profile, an *Abschattung*, which cannot be investigated further'.⁴² No doubt, this presumption constitutes the very kernel of Sartrean realism rejecting the Cartesian correspondence between subject and object, in such a way as to separate the self from consciousness.

As formulated in *The Transcendence of the Ego*, which constitutes the preliminary ideas of *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre claims that 'the ego is not directly the unity of reflected consciousness'.⁴³ This is followed by the assumption that

³⁸ Jean-Paul Sartre, *What is Literature?*, trans. by Bernard Frechtman (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 4.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Psychology of the Imagination*, trans. by Bernard Frechtman (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 20.

⁴² Benjamin Suhl, *Jean-Paul Sartre: The Philosopher as a Literary Critic* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), p. 19.

⁴³ Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Transcendence of the Ego: An Existentialist Theory of Consciousness*, trans. by Forrest Williams and Robert Kirkpatrick (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000), p. 60.

There exists an *immanent* unity of these consciousnesses: the flux of consciousness constituting itself as the unity of itself. And there exists a *transcendent* unity: states and actions. The ego is the unity of states and of actions – optionally, of qualities. It is the unity of transcendent unities, and itself transcendent. It is a transcendent pole of synthetic unity, like the object-pole of the unreflected attitude, except that this pole appears solely in the world of reflection.⁴⁴

For Sartre, a state is the intermediary category between the body and *Erlebnis*, while an action is nothing other than a transcendent object.⁴⁵ In this sense, it is not difficult to say that a method can be regarded as an action, a transcendent object of reflective consciousness. What is implicit in Sartre's defence of the self is that the category of subject is necessary in the mode of representation. Based on this presupposition of subject, Sartre postulates the concept of *analogon*, the mode of analogous representatives. This idea is constituted by Sartre's phenomenological formulation of an imaginative consciousness and a reflective consciousness: 'an imaginative consciousness is a consciousness of an object *as an image* and not consciousness of *an image*', and a reflection consciousness is 'a second consciousness' whereby the belief in the existence of the image appears.⁴⁶ Sartre goes on to explain:

It is then that I say: I have an image of a dog; I 'see' the Pantheon. The contradiction of which we just spoke is a phenomenon of belief which is placed in the realm of reflection. What does one mean when one reports 'having an image'? One means that one has an intervening object before consciousness which functions as a substitute of the thing. This belief, if it does not go beyond a belief, is justified: the object exists, it is the analogue.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ See Ibid., p. 69.

⁴⁶ Sartre, *The Psychology of the Imagination*, p. 99.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

This is Sartre's idea of realism, the realism that tells the truth through fiction. Sartre retains this idea of analogous representation in his formulation of writing. In a Sartrean sense, literature is 'the work of a total freedom addressing plenary freedoms and thus in its own way manifests the totality of the human condition as a free product of a creative activity'.⁴⁸ Sartre argues that the most important task for writers today is not to destroy words but to construct words.

In this way Sartre seems to remind us of the Brechtian idea of realism, when he claims that 'the function of a writer is to call a spade a spade'.⁴⁹ However, in Sartre's sense, what is called a spade is not an actually existing spade. For Sartre, the designated spade is nothing less than a justified object as an analogue. Sartre applies this idea only for prose, not for theatre. Sartre acknowledges that theatre is a different mode of aesthetic production, which uses action rather than language. For Sartre, a word is not an image:

The function of the acoustic or optic phenomenon which we call the word has no resemblance whatsoever to the physical phenomenon, the picture. The only common trait between the consciousness of a sign and that of an image is that each is directed in its own way towards an object through another object. But in the one the intercalated object functions as *analogue*, that is, fills consciousness *in place of* another object, which is, in short, present by proxy; in the other type of consciousness it is restricted to directing consciousness on certain objects which continue to be absent.⁵⁰

In the dramatic representation, an action is just an image, whereas a word is an analogue in the literary representation. This distinction applies to the way in which Sartre distinguishes a dramatic performance from a literary writing. For Sartre, only poetical language functions in the same way as images. In such a case, language is

⁴⁸ Sartre, *What is Literature?*, p. 206.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 210.

⁵⁰ Sartre, *The Psychology of the Imagination*, pp. 94-95.

nothing less than a mirror of the world, a thing alienated from both a poet and the world. That is to say, Sartre regards an image as ‘the physical aspect of the word’.⁵¹

Sartre argues that ‘the way in which we hear ourselves speak is not exactly the same as the way in which we speak’.⁵² For Sartre, what cannot be reached by our recognition is ‘not an object but an image’.⁵³ The image is not a by-product of reflection because it has not an object. The image is a non-reflected picture because it is out of reach; the image is out of objective judgement, but rather the consequence of self-justification and self-judgement. In *On Dramatic Style*, Sartre argues that an action is related to a moral life in such a way that ‘every act comprehends its own purposes and unified system; anyone performing an act is convinced that he has a right to perform it; consequently, we are not on the ground of fact but of right’.⁵⁴ This means that the individual who decides to act must justify his own action by reason and believes ‘he is right to undertake it’.⁵⁵ This means that an action is always carried by the moral judgement and needs to be reflected by reason to discover its own moral implication.

Sartre’s formulation of the image repudiates a traditional view to the relationship between image and thing in itself, a view that gives the image the status of thing, a thing that is a lesser version of an original thing. According to Peter Caws, Sartre redefines the conventional preconception of image as follows: ‘the thing perceived is in-itself but not for-me; perceived it is in-itself and for-me; in image it is for-me but not in-itself’.⁵⁶ In this respect, Sartre argues that ‘for consciousness, to exist is to be conscious of its existence. It appears as a pure spontaneity, confronting a

⁵¹ Sartre, *What is Literature?*, p. 7.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 87.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Sartre on Theatre*, ed. by Michel Contat and Michel Rybalka, trans. by Frank Jellinek (London: Quartet Books, 1976), p. 13.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

world of things which is sheer inertness'.⁵⁷ Here, it is not far wrong to say that Sartre endorses the Hegelian category of being in-itself and being for-itself to explain the interaction between consciousness and object. Caws explains:

The qualities of the sheet of paper do not depend on me, they present themselves to me, they are 'for-me' (*pour moi*) but at the same time they are inert, and inertia is the defining characteristic of the in-itself. The in-itself has no spontaneity, neither mine nor that of others. But the thing-like character of the in-itself cannot be shared by my consciousness, whose mode of being is self-awareness; consciousness is in the first instance for-me – but that amounts to saying that it is for-itself.⁵⁸

According to this, the correspondence between subject and object is impossible. There is the reification of the image in the process of representation, which is produced by the reflection of consciousness. Therefore, in Sartre's sense, art is nothing less than the compensation for the impossible representation of individuals; individual men are not real objects to each other, but rather images. This is what Sartre presupposes when he refers to the impossibility of representation: 'arts exist because you never wholly manage to see a man face to face; so you have images; and you have images, you have special relations to them, relations of participation'.⁵⁹

In Sartre's sense, an image is a particular relationship between individuals; an image is produced by a certain form, an action, 'a movement intended to show something else'⁶⁰ as in any performance of theatre. As has been discussed, this is an ironic situation in which fiction conveys the truth through its image. In this way, Sartre's idea of realism – strictly speaking, it is nothing other than another side of his philosophical project which pursues something beyond the conventional binary of

⁵⁶ Peter Caws, *Sartre* (London: Routledge, 1979), p. 32.

⁵⁷ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Imagination*, trans. by Forrest Williams (London: Cresset Press, 1962), p. 2.

⁵⁸ Caws, *Sartre*, p. 32.

⁵⁹ Sartre, *Sartre on Theatre*, p. 90.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

realism and idealism – assumes that “otherness” is objectivity. We are permanently objectified by other people; our relationship with other people is always already reified by our own perceptive process. In this way, Sartre considers an image not as a mental picture but the consequence of an intentional object, the activity-based visual perception. This image can necessarily be produced by man’s commitment.

This image does not contain any prejudicial meaning, because it is a thing that ‘sends back to the poet his own image, like a mirror’.⁶¹ This is a quite different position from what Brecht takes in his formulation of epic theatre; Brecht clearly stresses the important role of rational explanation, which causes the estrangement-effect throughout dramatic performances. For Brecht, an image is a by-product of empathy that must be disenchanted by the thinking of shock.

Not surprisingly, Sartre criticises Brechtian epic theatre, precisely because Brecht compels the spectator ‘to judge rather than participate’.⁶² Sartre regards such a Brechtian tactic as an obstacle to commitment. For Sartre, judgement is ‘an adherence of my will and a free commitment of my being’;⁶³ judgement rules out ‘neutral and floating ideas which are neither true nor false’.⁶⁴ To put it in another way, Sartre argues that the Brechtian theatre does not allow us to join in the way in which we freely engage into our being, because it endows us with a judgmental criterion, a criterion that precludes the unbiased ideas. In Sartre’s sense, the impartial ideas lead us to establish the communication between men and the reciprocal correlation between actors and spectators. Sartre applies this idea to his own political drama, *Les Mains Sales*. This drama sets out from a prologue, in a similar structure to Brecht’s

⁶¹ Sartre, *What is Literature?*, p. 8.

⁶² Sartre, *Sartre on Theatre*, p. 78.

⁶³ Jean-Paul Sartre, ‘Cartesian Freedom’, in *Literary and Philosophical Essays*, trans. by Annette Michelson (London: Rider and Company, 1955), p. 171.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui, yet the effect of the prologue is designed in a quite different way. The voice of a radio announcer says:

German troops are retreating along the whole front. The Red Army has captured Kischner, forty miles from the Illythian frontier. Wherever possible, Illythian troops are refusing to engage; several detachments have already deserted to the Allies. Illythians, we know you were forced to take arms against the U.S.S.R., we know the deeply democratic feelings of the Illythian people, and we ...⁶⁵

This is a very Sartrean technique for the constitution of dramatic effect; this is a speech-act whereby Sartre attempts to convey the implication of words through the surface meaning. At the outset, this announcement reminds the audience of such a familiar historical context in which those events really happened, and is subsequently followed by the revelation that the surface meaning is merely a political camouflage hiding a deeper sense. As Rhiannon Goldthorpe claims, 'the apparent straightforwardness of the information results from a curious combination of a readily available external context for the spectator or reader'.⁶⁶ However, such a familiar external context is increasingly faded by a series of actions, 'while the textual context will become more and more complex, making the retrospective ascription of significance to those two opening sentences more uncertain'.⁶⁷ From time to time, Hugo's actions and verbal events disclose the hidden message of the play. No doubt, this is what Sartre posits in his formulation of realism: realism is nothing less than an attempt to find a more complex meaning of events beneath the purely informative meaning of words. In this respect, this play shows that the real message of the play is located in actions, not words.

⁶⁵ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Crime Passionnel*, trans. by Kitty Black (London: Methuen, 1961), p. 7.

⁶⁶ Rhiannon Goldthorpe, *Sartre: Literature and Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 117.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

From this standpoint, Sartre rejects the way in which Brecht draws a distinction between epic theatre and dramatic theatre. For Sartre, insofar as we rule out bourgeois individualism and pessimism, it is not difficult to bring out 'the dual aspect of all individual acts, that is to say that each individual is only an expression of what Brecht called the social *gestus*, the totality, the social totality, of the contradictions within which the person concerned lives'.⁶⁸ As is the case with dramatic theatre, it is undeniable that epic theatre also expresses the social *gestus* throughout the individual adventure, though Brecht does not concern the category of subjectivity in his formulation of epic theatre. Sartre rather argues that Brecht was never able to find 'room for subjectivity'.⁶⁹

Furthermore, for Sartre, there is a more important problem than this: the conditions assumed by Brecht in his idea of epic theatre have changed; Sartre stresses that 'the bourgeoisie has now been in control of the theatre for about a hundred and fifty years'.⁷⁰ Sartre remarks:

It controls it in the first place through the price of land, which rose so high in the nineteenth century that the workers, as you know, had to leave the inner city, and offices and bourgeois buildings are there now and all, or nearly all, the theatres too are in the center of town. The bourgeoisie also controls the theatre through the price of seats, which has constantly to be raised if the theatre is to show a profit ... And lastly, it controls it through the critics.⁷¹

What Sartre implies here is that the circumstance surrounding theatre today is more complicated than the one in which Brecht produces his theory of theatre. In contrast to Brecht, Sartre's idea of theatre presupposes a condition in which bourgeois cultural power dominates all aesthetic production, and where the totalising system of

⁶⁸ Sartre, *Sartre on Theatre*, p. 114.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 120.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

the culture industry does not allow any possibility of revolutionary cultural production and operationalises people's ideas of culture. As Sartre claims, this is the milieu within which 'the bourgeois dictatorship over the theatre has created a bourgeois theatre'.⁷² From this standpoint, Sartre does not identify dramatic theatre as such with bourgeois theatre; but rather regards bourgeois theatre as the reification of dramatic theatre. For Sartre, Brecht's epic theatre is an attempt to solve the reification of bourgeois theatre, in which there is nothing else but the image of madness, the reification of participation.

According to Sartre, Brecht does not understand what is really problematic in bourgeois theatre; Sartre argues that 'the bourgeois audience is mad, not because it participates, but because it participates in an image that is an image of lunatics'.⁷³ In other words, the image in which the audience participates is crucial; the problem is how to change the image, because participation is a general and necessary activity in any theatrical performance; yet, Brecht is concerned not just to change the image, but to produce a distance between audience and theatre by interrupting empathic participation. To resolve the reification of participation in bourgeois theatre, Sartre turns his attention to the possibility of communication between actors and spectators, repudiating Cartesian realism, the idea of correspondence between consciousness and reality. It is not difficult to see that Sartre still endorses his early formulation of perception to explain the communicative aspect of aesthetic realism. To quote Sartre:

We shall best account for the original phenomenon of perception by insisting on the fact that the relation of the quality to us is that of absolute proximity (it "*is true*," it haunts us) without either giving or refusing itself, but we must add that this proximity implies a distance. It is what is immediately out of reach, what by definition refers us to ourselves as to an emptiness. Contemplation of it can only

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid., p. 79.

⁷³ See *ibid.*, p. 97.

increase our thirst for being as the sight of the food out of reach added to Tantalus' hunger. Quality is the indication of what we are not and of the mode of being which is denied to us.⁷⁴

From this standpoint, Sartrean realism always already implies the category of the subject that should carry on the participation of being; the realistic perception of the object cannot be immediate, and it must be mediated by action. It should be noted that Sartre tacitly abolishes the Brechtian pedagogy of theatre with this presupposition; Sartre conceptualises "gesture" as an individual image, while Brecht regards it as something collective. As Jameson points out, what is lacking in Sartre's formulation is the category of history, even though Sartre shares the idea of "Erlebnis" with Brecht and Benjamin.⁷⁵ For Brecht, the pedagogy of *gestus* is 'more than a mere theme or motif, and begin to appreciate the structural originality of its relationship to form as such'.⁷⁶ Brecht's conceptualisation of *gestus* presupposes clearly the way in which the collective audience recognises social contradictions through a theatrical performance. Therefore, the Brechtian concept of gesture always implicates the pedagogical methodology, in such a way that 'the dramatic representation is the showing of showing, the showing of how you show and demonstrate'.⁷⁷ Sartre, however, regards gesture as just a movement; the gesture refers to an act that actors intend to denote. From this standpoint, Sartre maintains that 'since gestures signify acts in the theatre, and since theatre is image, gestures are the image of action'.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, trans. by Hazel E. Barnes (London: Routledge, 1969), p. 187.

⁷⁵ See Fredric Jameson, *Sartre: The Origins of a Style* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), p. 208.

⁷⁶ Jameson, *Brecht and Method*, p. 93.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

⁷⁸ Sartre, *Sartre on Theatre*, p. 91.

Unlike Sartre, Brecht does not consider gesture as a neutral image, but rather as a method whereby actors transmit the new way of thinking. In other words, the Brechtian conceptualisation of gesture plainly supposes the objective image, the dialectical image at a standstill, but it is not related to Sartre's idea of image, the image that shows the truth through its fiction, whereby individuals can be in communication with each other. This is where Adorno's criticism of Brecht and Sartre can be seen to be valid: if Brecht's gesture is not an image in the sense that actors show social contradictions through their actions, Brecht has to accept Adorno's criticism, the criticism that Brecht simply reduces aesthetic truth to political truth without any consideration of mediation. Sartre would know this problem, when he claimed that 'intellection is not the mechanical result of a pedagogic procedure, but rather that its origin lies solely in my deliberate willing, my application, my refusal to be distracted or hurried, in the undivided attention to my mind – to the radical exclusion of all external forces'.⁷⁹ However, Sartre cannot be free from Adorno's criticism that the Sartrean principle of commitment 'slides towards the proclivities of the author, in keeping with the extreme subjectivism of Sartre's philosophy, which for all its materialist undertones, still echoes German speculative idealism'.⁸⁰ This constitutes the problem of Sartrean realism, that the Sartrean idea of realism is not related to reality outside subjectivity. Considering an action as a by-product of contradictions, and as a generator that sets up further contradictions, Sartre argues:

A man – or a group of men – only acts insofar as internal contradictions are the driving force of his action; he thereby severs himself from them, and consequently these initial contradictions will give the actual meaning and purpose of the act he wishes to perform; and from a different angle, by severing himself from them he throws light on them.⁸¹

⁷⁹ Sartre, 'Cartesian Freedom', p. 170.

⁸⁰ Adorno, 'Commitment', p. 181.

⁸¹ Sartre, *Sartre on Theatre*, p. 110.

As an action arises from contradictions, so is it necessarily contradictory, that is to say, as Sartre maintains, there are several of actions at the same time, 'assembled and inseparable because a number of elements are pressing forward simultaneously'.⁸² For this reason, the most significant aim of Sartrean realism is not pedagogy but communication between men, in the sense that thinking is not so much a by-product of education as of a creative act, which can be seen as the assemblage of man's contradictory driving forces.

No doubt, Sartre's idea of realism is based on his notion of man as 'the being through whom truth appears in the world'.⁸³ For Sartre, realism is nothing less than the way in which man commits himself totally in order that 'the natural order of existants may become an order of truths'.⁸⁴ In short, the Sartrean commitment is a natural born task for man. As in the case of Descartes, there is no difference between the epistemic and the ethical in Sartre's formulation: the action of commitment always includes the category of morality, the freedom of choice. In this respect, 'commitment is not relative',⁸⁵ but rather an absolute act for man's freedom, in Descartes' terms, the equal capacity among men, thereby judging correctly and distinguishing the true from the false.⁸⁶

Although he renounces Cartesian realism, Sartre still retains the category of monadic man, the free being of reason, in his formulation of commitment. In this way, as Adorno critically observes, Sartre's conceptualisation of commitment seems deeply rooted in the legacy of Husserlian philosophy: 'the constitution of the world

⁸² Ibid., pp. 110-11.

⁸³ Sartre, 'Cartesian Freedom', p. 171.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 172.

essentially involves a “harmony” of the monads’.⁸⁷ In Husserl’s formulation, the monads are metaphysical inventions and hypotheses; hence, there are difficulties in the process of experiencing the other ego. In other words, ‘the other has not yet attained the sense “man”’.⁸⁸

It seems to me that this phenomenological presupposition leads Sartre to hold onto the Cartesian category of monadic man. Nevertheless, in his reading of Descartes, Sartre stresses the way in which Descartes searches for his own method. For Sartre, a method is more crucial than thinking as such. Sartre argues that a method is the way in which we construct our freedom.⁸⁹ For Sartre, it is not monads but methods that can be invented according to a specific situation of practice. There is no doubt that this is Sartre’s own position, which is therefore precisely distinguished from what Husserl assumes in his phenomenology.

As for Brecht, the problem is to be located in the more materialistic ambience: Brecht does not endorse the Cartesian ideal assumption of monadic subjectivity, of the man whose thinking can be free from any material condition. For Brecht, there is no neutral thinking independent of the material relations of interests. Brecht argues that ‘even if I couldn’t think I might still exist, but I couldn’t verify that myself’.⁹⁰ Interestingly, Brecht’s materialisation of *cogito* negates what Žižek calls ‘the obsessional compulsion to think’⁹¹ in Cartesian philosophy: if I stop thinking, I will cease to exist. However, it is difficult to say that here Brecht aims at revealing the psychoanalytic dimension of modern subjectivity; but rather, Brecht’s materialistic

⁸⁶ See René Descartes, *Discourse on Method and the Meditations*, trans. by F.E. Sutcliffe (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), p. 27.

⁸⁷ Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*, trans. by Dorion Cairns (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1999), p. 108.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ See ‘Cartesian Freedom’, p. 175.

⁹⁰ Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, p. 93.

⁹¹ Slavoj Žižek, ‘Introduction’, in *Cogito and the Unconscious*, ed. by Slavoj Žižek and Renata Salecl (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), p. 2.

interpretation of the Cartesian *cogito* is an attempt to provide a holistic approach to the relationship between individuals and social conditions. For Brecht, the way in which man verifies himself is the self-legitimation of his material life. In this sense, Brecht claims that 'it has simply been asserted that thought is a kind of being; but there are many more kinds of being'.⁹²

4. From Representation to Representative

Interestingly, Sartre's criticism of Brechtian epic theatre discloses another aspect of Brechtian realism. As has been discussed, Brecht overlooks the mediation between actors and spectators; Brecht is not interested in the reciprocal aspect of realism, but rather the shock of thinking, the dialectic image in which social contradictions as such are revealed. That is to say, Brecht also regards theatre as representative rather than representation. For Brecht, more important is not so much representation as social contradictions that are revealed by representation. In this sense, Brecht implicitly regards representation as the aesthetic representative of reality as in the case of Sartre. From this perspective, Brecht's idea of epic theatre is simply based on the belief that theatrical representation 'can present society as an object to the audience'.⁹³ For Brecht, such representation is a methodological vessel that enables spectators to obtain "new" intellection. As to this pedagogical aspect of Brecht, Jameson points out that 'the emergence of new social possibilities is suggested by the excitement in sheer intellection itself'.⁹⁴ Not surprisingly, the newness of change produces the excitement in Brechtian realism. To quote Jameson:

⁹² Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, p. 93.

⁹³ Sartre, *Sartre on Theatre*, p. 120

⁹⁴ Jameson, *Brecht and Method*, p. 92.

One is tempted, therefore, to pursue this line of speculation even further, and to assert that in Brecht, what is taught, what is shown, is ultimately always the New itself, and thus somehow, modernity in its most general (rather than specific and technological) acceptance. Learning thus displays the breaking in of the *Novum* upon the self: a dawning both of a new world and of new human relations. It thereby becomes inseparably associated with the great theme of change as such, and reinforces Brecht's insistence that change always brings the new, and his unwillingness to conceive of a change that would be purely retrogressive or degenerative.⁹⁵

This idea endows Brecht with a presupposition that 'objective transformations are never secure until they are accompanied by a whole collective reeducation, which develops new habits and practices, and constructs a new consciousness capable of matching the revolutionary situation'.⁹⁶ In contrast to Brecht, Sartre's idea of aesthetic production is constituted in the more reified condition of late capitalism; Sartre has recognised that change is not always new, but rather at times regressive, as is the case with actually existing socialism. In this sense, Sartre emphasises creativity in the production of new intellection. Sartre sees that official dialectical materialism turns out to be another metaphysics, and attempts to offer a third synthetic category between materialism and idealism. In the respect that materialism simply reduces mind to matter, Sartre argues that 'I conclude in all good faith that it is a metaphysical doctrine and that materialists are metaphysicians.'⁹⁷

For Sartre, both individualism and pessimism are symptoms of a bourgeois dominated society: the bourgeois class imposes its own specific cultural taste on other classes and universalises its particular value system in modern society. Sartre's statement highlights a situation in which Western intellectuals have become increasingly disillusioned with actually existing socialism, and strive to find an alternative way to end capitalism.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

Sartre's defence of dramatic theatre can be understood to mean that finding a solution to the reification of the image is a more urgent task than abolishing the image as such. Here, Sartre's conceptualisation of the duplicated aspect of the image does not seem far from the way in which Benjamin formulates the principle of dialectics: the image is a dream image at a standstill; the commodity provides the image as fetish.⁹⁸ In this way, Sartre still acknowledges the apparatus of traditional theatre and the realistic effect of empathy, which Brecht attacks as old cultural residues. More importantly, in Sartre's idea of realism, including his conceptualisation of commitment, the subjective intention is a more significant element in the process of aesthetic production. Brecht, on the other hand, stresses the objective condition from which such intentions derive. In the changed cultural circumstance, Sartre's category of monadic man, the contradictory unity of subjectivity, has been denounced by structuralism and poststructuralism ever since. However, it is difficult to say that Sartre is a "dead dog" of old philosophy, but rather a precursor who formulates a shift from the representation to the representative. This Sartrean idea of analogous realism influences Barthes and Jameson's formulations of realism.

⁹⁷ See Jean-Paul Sartre, 'Materialism and Revolution', in *Literary and Philosophical Essays*, trans. by Annette Michelson (London: Rider and Company, 1955), p. 187.

⁹⁸ See Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, trans. by Harry Zohn (London: Verso, 1973), p. 171.

CHAPTER FOUR

REPRESENTATION WITHOUT REALISM: THE POST-STRUCTURALIST CRITIQUE

Introduction

A radically new way of understanding realism was advanced by structuralism in the 1950s and subsequently by poststructuralism in the 1970s. This reformulation of realism precisely resides in the way in which the classical model of representation comes to be replaced by the linguistic model. The shift of the focal point is prompted by the claim that one will understand cultural systems better if one analyses them in terms of linguistics. There are several seminal influences to the rise of such a new paradigm.

Ferdinand de Saussure's posthumously published work, *Course in General Linguistics*, is the first attempt to elaborate the idea of linguistics; Saussure recognises that one should isolate the suitable object for study if one wants to develop one's research. In this respect, Saussure argues that 'language is a well-defined object in the heterogeneous mass of speech facts'.¹ Saussure separates language (*la langue*) from speaking (*la parole*) to create the suitable object of linguistics. For Saussure, language is social and essential, while speaking is individual and accidental. In this sense, Saussure argues that 'language is a system of signs that express ideas'.² This idea enables Saussure to say that 'by studying rites, customs, etc. as signs, I believe that

¹ Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. by Wade Baskin (London: Fontana, 1974), p. 14.

² *Ibid.*, p. 16.

we shall throw new light on the facts and point up the need for including them in a science of semiology and explaining them by its laws'.³

Alongside Saussure, Russian Formalism also crucially influences the theoretical transformation from the classical idea of representation to the semiological idea of representational structure.⁴ Before Roland Barthes' formulation of reality effect, Roman Jakobson regards realism as 'a system of artistic (linguistic) conventions designed to replace an earlier system of conventions that is no longer capable of providing the reader with fresh image of reality'.⁵ Like Saussure's science of language, Russian Formalism arises from the way in which one detaches the suitable object for study. Formalism regards literature as a specialised mode of language, distinguished from the practical use of language. Formalism aims at defining the object of literary science as "literariness", which is able to make a given work as a literary work. In this sense, Fredric Jameson points out that 'the Formalist began ... with the isolation of the intrinsic itself, with the disentanglement of their specific object of study from those of the disciplines'.⁶ Jameson's claim seems to say that the birth of linguistics has come about through the separation of a specific element from other fields of study rather than a holistic approach to totality, on the condition of isolation. This is where the problems of Saussure and the Formalist come to exist. As Tzvetan Todorov points out, 'in the same way that Saussure reduced the components of language to *signifiant* and *signifié*, without including syntax in his

³ Ibid., p. 17.

⁴ For the historical context of Russian Formalism, see Victor Erlich, *Russian Formalism: History-Doctrine* (Hague: Mouton, 1969).

⁵ Galin Tihanov, *The Master and the Slave: Lukács, Bakhtin, and the Ideas of Their Time* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), p. 104.

⁶ Fredric Jameson, *The Prison-House of Language: A Critical Account of Structuralism and Russian Formalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), p. 43.

classification, the Formalists simplified the literary system to its syntactic and verbal aspects without accounting for semantics'.⁷

Linguistics based on a synchronic approach to language, on the other hand, gives rise to the structural study of social and cultural systems. For instance, structural anthropology originated by Claude Lévi-Strauss is based on the assumption that all social and cultural forms can be understood as the relationship of signifier and signified – the signification of language. Understanding language as a fundamental element of the social individual, 'all the practices that make up a social totality take place in language, it becomes possible to consider language as the place in which the social individual is constructed'.⁸ In other words, structuralist linguistics and semiology provide the way in which 'a subject is produced in language able to represent his/herself and therefore able to act in the social totality'.⁹

In particular, the conventional conceptualisation of realism sees language as a transparent medium that transmits the reflection of the object; this is rejected by the structuralist approaches that prioritise the linguistic structure of the realistic text. The study of language, which overwhelmingly governed French intellectuals in the post-war period, has brought about one of the most significant changes in the way in which we understand realism today; realism is meaningless, because literature no longer reflects the object; but rather it constructs the object.

Not surprisingly, this new theoretical tendency attacked the aesthetic of realism as an epistemological illusion. The hidden impetus behind the study of language was the demand for a science of literature, in particular, a scientific

⁷ Tzvetan Todorov, 'Some Approaches to Russian Formalism', in *Russian Formalism: A Collection of Articles and Texts in Translation*, ed. by Stephen Bann and John E. Bowlt (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1973), p. 19.

⁸ Rosalind Coward and John Ellis, *Language and Materialism: Developments in Semiology and the Theory of the Subject* (London: Routledge, 1977), p. 1.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

approach towards the mode of writing. Seeing language as the fundamental materiality of the human world, a significant philosophical factor in this structuralist perspective of language seems to lie in the way in which realism is nothing less than a psychical identifying mode whereby the subject produces a symbolic system to invest its libidinal desire. No doubt, the structuralist formula of realism seems to challenge the Hegelian and the phenomenological presuppositions imbued in Lukács and Sartre, who regard realism as an aesthetic mode in which the artist's intention articulates the mediation between form and content. In other words, what is rejected in the structuralist formula is the category of intention, the agency of aesthetic creativity.

My concern in this chapter is with the essential characteristics of a structuralist understanding of realism and reality, particularly focusing on Roland Barthes' discussion of the reality effect. The chapter does not aim at dealing with the whole scope of Barthes' theory, but rather focuses on his formulation of the reality effect, which is based on his structuralist perspective of language, and provides a critical view of the way in which Barthes underestimates the category of mediation. The central focus of my argument is that Barthes' idea of representation is postulated by replacing Sartre's notion of responsibility with the concept of pleasure.

Furthermore, the chapter investigates a poststructuralist approach such as Michel Foucault's, and recounts the way in which the poststructuralist conceptualisation of representation differs from the structuralist one. The chapter argues that the poststructuralist reformulation of representation still retains Barthes' problem. My discussion is followed by an investigation of the similarity between Foucault's idea and neo-Kantianism, and a criticism of their underestimation of mediation between the mode of representation and the mode of production.

1. Against Convention

Roland Barthes is a key figure who marks a theoretical turning point in the Marxian conception of realism as an aesthetic resolution to social contradictions. After Barthes, realism is defined as a reality effect, that is to say, the effect that is produced not by an author but by language itself.

Although Barthes always postulates the category of history in his formulation, his methodology is far from that of structuralist Marxists such as Lucien Goldmann, whose theory, genetic structuralism, aims at combining Marxism with psychoanalysis.¹⁰ The problem is that Goldmann's formulation does not pay attention to the distinction between the psychological and the socio-economic category of reality. This reductionism causes a mechanical analysis that simply regards form as a by-product of social circumstance. The presupposition of Goldmann's genetic structuralism is that 'all human behaviour is an attempt to give a meaningful response to a particular situation and tends, therefore, to create a balance between the subject of action and the object on which it bears, the environment'.¹¹ No doubt, Barthes' formulation does not endorse Goldmann's idealistic Hegelian hypothesis, even though they share a similar idea of structure, the idea that an old structure is reformed by new form. However, Barthes no longer retains the category of subject which is firmly embodied in Goldmann's formula.

There is no doubt that Barthes' argument involves a criticism of Sartre, in particular, the Sartrean idea of literary writing as commitment, as well as Goldmann's framework of genetic structuralism. Sartre's understanding of literature, argues Barthes, does not take account of the reified aspect of language under capitalism.

¹⁰ See Lucien Goldmann, *Towards a Sociology of the Novel*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (London: Tavistock, 1975), p. 156.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

There is no natural object which the mode of writing is supposed to reflect, but rather language, which is commonly regarded as a medium, or a material of writing, comes to be nature as such.

Rejecting the idea of objective reality outside language, Barthes' analysis of literature sets out from the presupposition that the mode of writing is independent and self-sufficient: 'writing is a hardened language which is self-contained'.¹²

Interestingly, what Barthes' formulation implies here is the reification of language; language produces the very effect of objectivity. However, Barthes does not follow the Lukácsian formulation of reification, but rather redefines the effect of reification in such a way that language constructs a ghostly objectivity. Barthes argues that 'a language is a kind of natural ambience wholly pervading the writer's expression, yet without endowing it with form or content'.¹³ For Barthes, language is a matrix in which writing is produced in a familiar gesture. Barthes describes the way in which a specific style of writing is produced by the whole system of language as follows:

At the very moment when general History proposes – or imposes – new problematics of the literary language, writing still remains full of the recollection of previous usage, for language is never innocent: words have a second-order memory which mysteriously persists in the midst of new meanings. Writing is precisely this compromise between freedom and remembrance, it is this freedom which remembers and is free only in the gesture of choice, but is no longer so within duration.¹⁴

In this way, Barthes does not approve any possibility of subjective action against reification, which constitutes a kernel of Lukácsian realism. Barthes' idea bears no relation to the notion of realism, precisely because his formulation aims to

¹² Roland Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero & Elements of Semiology*, trans. by Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (London: Jonathan Cape, 1984), p. 18.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 16-17.

reject the idea of mimesis which is based on the subject-object dialectic. However, Barthes does not believe that one can step out of the iron web of representation. In Barthes' sense, language is something to impose Necessity on subjects; no subject can step out of the iron cage. This means that language is structured by the logic of representation which is independent of any mediation between subject and object. Stated another way, what is repudiated by Barthes' formulation is the Sartrean hypothesis that there is a magical resemblance between the word and the thing signified.¹⁵

Barthes' definition of style as a Necessity designates the aspect of reified language that gives rise to the absolute autonomy of writing. For Barthes, the reification of language lies in the correlation between the old form and the new form. Considering Flaubert as a writer who founded the concept of writing as craft, Barthes explains the way in which the reification of writing is structured in capitalist society:

What this Gregorian codification of literary language aimed at was, if not the reconciliation of the writer to a universal condition, at least the conferment upon him of the responsibility for his form, the transmutation of the writing handed down to him by History into an *art*, in other words, into an obvious convention, a sincere pact which would enable man to adopt a position he was familiar with in a nature still made of ill-matched realities. The writer then gives to society a self-confessed art, whose rules are visible to all, and in exchange society is able to accept the writer.¹⁶

What is at issue in this argument is that literature is a conventionalised activity, in such a way that the radical language of revolutionary culture becomes institutionalised into habitual social system. Barthes regards this function of literature

¹⁵ See Jean-Paul Sartre, *What is Writing?*, trans. by Bernard Frechtman (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 7.

¹⁶ Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero & Elements of Semiology*, p. 54.

as an institutionalisation of subjectivity.¹⁷ In this respect, Barthes claims that 'it is not granted to the writer to choose his mode of writing from a kind of non-temporal store of literary forms', but rather he is 'under the pressure of History and Tradition that the possible modes of writing for a given writer are established'.¹⁸

Here, it is not difficult to find a remarkable similarity between Barthes and Benjamin. For example, Barthes' argument is similar to the way in which Benjamin criticises the conformism of German Social Democrats that 'managed to erase the name of Blanqui almost entirely'.¹⁹ It is indubitable that Benjamin metaphorically draws on the name of Blanqui to indicate radical utopianism in general whereby the class struggle, the subject of history, pushes the category of reality beyond the old mode of representation.

However, there is an undeniable difference between them: Barthes does not assume social reality outside the system of language. In other words, Barthes' concept of history bears no relation to the class struggle; Barthes' formulation is based on the idea that history has become the total system of simulacra in which one cannot find any agent of fundamental change. Unlike Marxist critics, the premise of Barthes' formula is that history is no longer anything but language; 'the whole of History stands unified and complete in the manner of a Natural Order'²⁰ behind a language.

What Barthes is concerned with, therefore, is not the process of writing as such; but rather an already composed textuality which has been laid in front of readers. This is precisely opposed to what Sartre formulates, a formulation that we are never free of our situational condition, but we have responsibility to negate the obstacle of freedom. Against this Sartrean thesis, Barthes replaces responsibility with

¹⁷ See Jameson, *The Prison-House of Language*, p. 154.

¹⁸ Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero & Elements of Semiology*, p. 16.

¹⁹ Walter Benjamin, 'On the Concept of History', in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Vol. 4. 1939-1940*, trans. by Edmund Jephcott and others (London: Belknap, 2003), p. 394.

pleasure. Barthes' formulation is that pleasure is nothing but temporal and then the freedom of writing produced by the pleasure of writing is unable to be restored in the process of reading.

The theoretical shift caused by Barthes' idea of representation emerges in such a way that the Sartrean idea of realism, more precisely, of "analogical representatives", which is based on the rejection of the conventional dichotomy between realism and idealism, is criticised as an unscientific understanding of narrative. This tendency leads Barthes to focus on description rather than narration in his argument of narrative.

2. The Reality Effect

In a short essay on reality, Barthes claims that description has 'an aesthetic function' in Western culture.²¹ While narration is a 'circuit of choices and alternatives which makes narration look like a vast traffic control centre, provided with referential (and not merely discursive) temporality',²² description has no predictive aspect in this sense; description's structure is 'analogical' and 'purely additive,' that is to say, 'insignificant notation'.²³ In short, description appears to be "useless details" by which narrative is brought to the question as to whether everything in narrative is meaningful, or significant. The purpose of Barthes' essay is to examine the characteristics of description, in the sense that it does not have a communicative but an aesthetic function; Barthes formulation of narrative rejects any possibility of narration involving goal-oriented activity. The point of Barthes' investigation lies in

²⁰ Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero & Elements of Semiology*, p. 11.

²¹ Roland Barthes, 'The Reality Effect', in *French Literary Theory Today*, ed. by Tzvetan Todorov (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 12.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

the way in which it reveals the logic of description in terms of not only semiotics in particular, but also realism in general.

Even if, for Barthes, realism is the 'totalitarian ideology of referent', reflecting a type of writing associated with nineteenth-century materialism, what he presupposes in terms of realism is that readers would undermine the self-referentiality of realist writings. In *S/Z*, Barthes argues that '*the narrative tells itself*',²⁴ while admitting the role of the reader's voice. Barthes suggests the following:

What we hear, therefore, is the *displaced* voice which the reader lends, by proxy, to the discourse: the discourse is speaking according to the reader's interests. Whereby we see that writing is not the communication of a message which starts from the author and proceeds to the reader; it is specifically the voice of reading itself: *in the text, only the reader speaks*.²⁵

With a cursory reading, Barthes' presentation seems to give rise to two aspects of narrative: self-referentiality and reader-responsiveness. As Lilian Furst suggests, Barthes' analysis indicates that 'intransitively and reflexively the narrative may tell itself; but only transitively, through its production by active readers outside its parameters can it be actualized'.²⁶ It is in this sense that realism can be seen as the particular way in which an author chooses to register his/her interests in the narrative. Even though the realist narrative results from a specific mode of representation, its actualisation rests on the reader's interest. This is where the question of the reader's interest arises. According to Furst, 'the locus of interest is displaced from the product of reading, the signification of the text through the retrieval of meaning, onto the

²⁴ Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. by Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974), p. 213.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 151.

²⁶ Lilian R. Furst, *All is true: The Claims and Strategies of Realist Fiction* (London: Duke University Press, 1995), p. 20.

process itself'.²⁷ This statement seems to provide a way in which we can understand the structuralist conceptualisation of reality.

From a structuralist perspective, it is a “notary institution”, a systematic arrangement of differences, through which the writer manages narrative – there is no longer a category such as the communication proceeding from the author to the reader. Thus what constructs narrative is not a specific author but a structure dominating society, a structure which is constructed by a language. In this respect, Barthes observes that reality in the literary text is an effect. For him ‘concrete detail’ in the sense of reality is the ‘referential illusion’, in that ‘eliminated from the realist utterance as a signified of denotation, the ‘real’ slips back in as a signified of connotation’.²⁸ According to Barthes, ‘it is the category of the ‘real’, and not its various contents, which is being signified’²⁹; or, to put it another way, the absence of the signified is the signifier of reality, in the sense that a reality effect is the basis of ‘*vraisemblance*’. This ‘*vraisemblance*’ contains the intention that attempts to make ‘a pure encounter between the object and its expression’³⁰ in terms of description.

What is interesting in Barthes’ analysis is that he proposes realism as the basis of modern literature including modernism. The modernist premise is the discrepancy between the signifier and signified; thereby one may understand this as a crisis of the sign; hence, every attempt to create a new literary form is nothing less than the re-making of a new reality effect to replace an older one. Even though Barthes does not presuppose any possible mediation which can be effected by reality outside of language, his idea of representation is not very different from those Marxist theorists who were discussed in previous chapters.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Barthes, ‘The Reality Effect’, p. 16.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

Considering the early Barthes who wrote about Brecht, it is not surprising that Barthes' conceptualisation of the transformation of reality as a category seems parallel to Brecht and Benjamin's ideas of realism: the category of reality not fixed at any specific moment of history, but rather transformed by the change of habitual thinking. Barthes is interested in the category of reality rather than realism. In this sense, Jameson points out the Brechtian influence on Barthes' idea, an idea that the mode of reality can be changed by the estrangement-effect.³¹ Barthes' formulation assumes the realisation of reification by formal experiments, though the realisation is rather related to the category of mediation that Barthes' theory aims at rejecting.

The realistic mode of constructing narrative operates beyond ideologies of realism; the realistic mode is the way in which the knowledge of empirical subjectivity – in Lukács' sense, the autonomous illusion of abstraction – should be undermined by mediation. What is important is that the epistemological impulse prompts the dialectical correlation between subject and object. Realism cannot be severed from the epistemological claims that articulate a new category of reality. This epistemological aspect of realism is not far from what Barthes points out in his argument about language: 'a language is nothing but a human horizon which provides a distant setting of *familiarity*, the value of which, incidentally, is entirely negative'.³² According to Barthes' conceptualisation of language, realism can be called an attempt to defamiliarise the familiar signification of language. No doubt, this is the way in which the Brechtian idea of realism teaches audiences through the shock of thinking, insofar as Barthes presupposes the socio-economic contradictions, the reality of the mode of production and of the class struggle, beyond the linguistic structure.

³¹ See Fredric Jameson, *Brecht and Method* (London: Verso, 1998), p. 38.

³² Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero & Elements of Semiology*, p. 12.

Karatani Kojin also points out in his discussion of Japanese modern literature that realism is ‘relentless defamiliarization of the familiar’.³³ In analysing Japanese literary history, Kojin sees the concept of realism and romanticism as only the modern way in which description takes a key role as the principle of art. For Meiji artists, as Kojin claims, description was not a process of describing something, but rather the emergence of the thing itself.³⁴ The problem of realism is, therefore, not only aesthetic but also political, in the sense that it seems to be connected closely to the process of modernisation. This is where Barthes sees a reality effect as the basis of *vraisemblance* which forms ‘the aesthetic of all standard works of modernity’.³⁵

The real cannot exist in narrative by means of description, since descriptive notation is empty content in which the real has been eliminated. Suffice it to say that the real has always-already happened in the past. As has been discussed, it is in this sense that Lukács endorses the epic narrative rather than description in his defence of realism. For Lukács, description is superficial technique enacted by observation. In Jameson’s sense, the descriptive notations are “the strategies of containment” inherent in the ideological inversion. Jameson thus defends Lukács’ achievement in which these strategies ‘can be unmasked only by confrontation with the ideal of totality which they at once imply and repress’.³⁶

Barthes’ consideration of realism underestimates the role of narration in realism whereby the “auto-manifestation” of narrative in realism – but not in romanticism or symbolism – essentially comes to be equivocal. It seems that Barthes’ understanding of realism tends towards description rather than narration, because his

³³ Karatani Kojin, *Origins of Modern Japanese Literature*, trans. by Brett de Bary, et. al. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), p. 29.

³⁴ See *ibid*, pp. 30-31.

³⁵ Barthes, ‘The Reality Effect’, p. 16.

³⁶ Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), p. 53.

formulation rejects the category of mediation between subject and object. This might be said to be the consequence of the “bending stick”, as is the case with Althusserian Marxism, which repudiates any possibility of mediation caused by its anti-humanistic mood. As Paisley Livingston maintains, ‘to say that events involving agency must figure in every narrative utterance need not be taken as an especially severe restriction, particularly if one recalls that in the context of a narrative’s content, the most diverse array of items can appear as agents’.³⁷ In other words, there is not only one agent in a narrative; therefore, the important point does not lie in the question about whether narratives represent the agency truthfully, but rather whether their logic of form truly includes ‘some representation of agents and their purposive strivings’.³⁸

Unlike Barthes’ consideration of realism, the Marxist aesthetics of realism appears to focus on a “narrator” who is a historical agent of narrative, an agent who intends to achieve something like communication between writers and readers, or actors and audiences. No doubt, Barthes’ formulation of realism is caused by his structuralism; it seems to me that such an understanding of realism results from the way in which the structuralist perspective understands history and reality.

Even though structuralism provides the basis for criticising idealism, paradoxically speaking, it is not able to stand on the ground of reality but on its own scientific position. On the other hand, the problem of structuralism arises in its scientific perspective of the signifier as such. This is where Barthes also acknowledges the limitation of structuralism as follows:

On all levels – that of the argument, that of discourse, that of the words – the literary work thereby offers structuralism the image of a structure perfectly homological (present-day investigations tend to prove this) to the structure of

³⁷ Paisley Livingston, ‘Narrative’, in *The Routledge Companion to Aesthetics*, ed. by Berys Gaut and Dominic McIver Lopes (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 278.

³⁸ Ibid.

language itself; derived from linguistics, structuralism encounters in literature an object which is itself derived from language. Henceforth, it will be understood that structuralism may attempt to found a science of literature, or more exactly a linguistics of discourse, whose object is the “language” of literary forms, apprehended on many levels: a new project, for hitherto literature has been approached “scientifically” only in a very marginal fashion – by the history of works, or of authors, or of schools, or of texts (philology).³⁹

Alongside Barthes, Jameson points out that ‘the originality of Structuralism lies in its insistence on the signifier’.⁴⁰ As the object of study is the signifier as such isolated from what it signifies, so ‘the essential place of structure is that of the organization of signifiers among themselves’.⁴¹ According to Jameson, ‘the privileged objects of structuralist investigation are very often non-verbal sign-systems’.⁴² Jameson’s criticism leads us to conclude that the scientific perspective is interested not in reality but in knowledge about reality. A problem seems to lie in the way in which this structuralist formula is applied to the analysis of the relationship between narrative and history.

Even though he discards realism and mediation, Barthes still retains the category of representation; in short, Barthes’ conceptualisation of aesthetic production is nothing less than an idea of representation without realism; crucial is that representation is the mode of cultural production, the code system producing narratives. Barthes argues:

Representation is not defined directly by imitation: even if one gets rid of notions of the ‘real’, of the ‘vraisemblable’, of the ‘copy’, there will still be representation for so long as a subject (author, reader, spectator or voyeur) casts

³⁹ Roland Barthes, ‘From Science to Literature’, in *The Rustle of Language*, trans. by Richard Howard (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), p. 6.

⁴⁰ Jameson, *The Prison-House of Language*, p. 111.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

his *gaze* towards a horizon on which he cuts out the base of a triangle, his eye (or his mind) forming the apex.⁴³

According to this formula, any subject can constitute the sovereign position in the mode of representation; the system of representation, the geometrical paradigm of the linear perspective vision, always already contains a slot into which any subject can be inserted. Inversely, this means that no subject can be a creator, only a spectator: more important is the gaze of the spectator, precisely because the mode of representation does not need a subject but a meaning.⁴⁴ Barthes' conceptualisation of the relationship between gaze and representation anticipates the return of representation in a postmodern phase. In the following, my discussion seeks to investigate the way in which poststructuralism reformulates the structuralist idea of representation in Foucault's analysis of classical representation.

3. Foucault's Reformulation of Representation

In *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, Michel Foucault analyses Velázquez's *Las Meninas* in order to unveil the secret of classical representation that is raised around the problem of the gaze, before starting his argument of the metaphysical condition of humanity. What is explained by Foucault's analysis of this picture lies in the way in which the sovereignty of power influences the constitution of cultural forms. This is a different point of view from Barthes' position; Foucault denies the neutrality of subject and the equality of each subject in the mode of representation. From this standpoint, Foucault stresses the function of the

⁴³ Roland Barthes, 'Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein', in *Image Music Text*, trans. by Stephen Heath (London: Fontana, 1977), p. 69.

⁴⁴ See *ibid.*, p. 75.

concealing power through which cultural form comes to exist. More importantly, Foucault considers power as what is outside form. To quote Foucault:

In the great volute that runs around the perimeter of the studio, from the gaze of the painter, with his motionless hand and palette, right round to the finished paintings, representation came into being, reached completion, only to dissolve once more into the light; the cycle was complete. The lines that run through the depth of the picture, on the other hand, are not complete; they all lack a segment of their trajectories. This gap is caused by the absence of the king – an absence that is an artifice on the part of the painter.⁴⁵

Throughout his analysis of the picture, Foucault raises the question of the relationship between representation and power. Interestingly, Foucault's idea of representation presupposes something outside the mode of representation, in such a sense that linguistic and social codes are designed to repress the corporeal impulses and drives.⁴⁶ In this sense, Foucault's presupposition of something outside text has no relation to the Marxian idea of reality. Like Barthes, Foucault also maintains that the picture reveals the structure of classical representation and the definition of the space that it constitutes in front of us; Foucault's analysis follows the structuralist disenchantment of the way in which representation provides us the knowledge of reality at the mimetic moment.

In this way, Foucault deconstructs the presupposed condition of classical representation, which is commonly regarded as "transparency" between reference and referent. Foucault's attempt cannot be said to be something new, because Barthes and other structuralist methods had already argued it. However, unlike Barthes, Foucault's

⁴⁵ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage, 1994), pp. 15-16.

⁴⁶ This is a general tenet which can be found in various poststructuralist attempts such as Gilles Deleuze and Jean-François Lyotard. About this, see Peter Dews, 'Power and Subjectivity in Foucault', *New Left Review*, 144 (1984) 72-95 (p. 72).

claim focuses on the sovereign gaze, the symbolic power of the code system that constituted the classical system of representation. Foucault notes:

Representation undertakes to represent itself here in all its elements, with its images, the eyes to which it is offered, the faces it makes visible, the gestures that call it into being. But there, in the midst of this dispersion which it is simultaneously grouping together and spreading out before us, indicated compellingly from every side, is an essential void: the necessary disappearance of that which is its foundation – of the person it resembles and the person in whose eyes it is only a resemblance. This very subject – which is the same – has been elided. And representation, freed finally from the relation that was impeding it, can offer itself as representation in its pure form.⁴⁷

What is implicit in Foucault's argument is that the hidden gaze of the sovereign is the most important element constituting the hierarchical order of representation. From this perspective, Foucault does not endorse what Barthes formulates in his analysis of representation; Foucault rejects the idea that narrative is a neutral spatiality in which any meaning can be produced by reading. In contrast to Barthes, Foucault's formula is more sceptical about the idea of realism.

Foucault's formula purports to reject the conventional presumption of mimesis since Plato's *Republic* – illusionism. Furthermore, Foucault's argument even rejects the dialectic of mimesis that is suggested by Benjamin and Adorno. In his discussion of the essay as form, for instance, Adorno implicitly reveals the way in which the dialectic of mimesis achieves truth. In Adorno's sense, the essay serves as an image in which the object becomes visible through its mobility – the essay gains its truth from its untruth.⁴⁸ Mobility, the lack of solidity, is the most significant element of the essay; the unstable feature of the essay does not allow mimesis to copy but recovers the object. Adorno's formulation of essay is partly rejected by Barthes' idea of

⁴⁷ Foucault, *The Order of Things*, p. 16.

writing: the mode of writing has no object to be restored. However, Barthes does not abolish the creative reproduction of meanings in style.

The mimetic process of recuperation in Adorno's formulation of representation can be grasped in historical terms in relation to the utopian impulse. In this sense, Barthes still retains the utopian aspect of style. Unlike Barthes who does not accept the category of material historicity, Adorno bases his consideration of representation on the historical transformation of the mode of production. However, adapting an anti-realistic perspective, Adorno's theory resides in the way in which writers give up the classical representation paradigm that is supported by the belief that subjectivity properly reflects the object. Adorno also acknowledges that the classical concept of representation is no longer sustainable, insofar as the dichotomy of the subject and the object incessantly supports the way in which realism is possible. In contrast to Barthes' stress on the production of meanings by readers, Adorno clearly emphasises the condition of artistic production through his formulation of mimesis.

Similar to Barthes' analysis of the reality effect, undermining the ground on which realism stands in its own right, Adorno's attack on realism aims at disenchanting the principle of realism, transforming reality, the truth of realism, into appearance. Alongside Adorno, this demystification of realism continues on its way throughout various theoretical considerations of realism and representation in non-Marxian aesthetics. As Jameson points out, for example, E.H. Gombrich's consideration of the technique of realism as the generator of the realistic illusion is another attempt to injure realism's truth-value, like Barthes' conception of the reality

⁴⁸ See Adorno, 'Essay as Form', in *Notes to Literature, Vol. 1*, trans. by Shierry Weber Nicholsen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), p. 20.

effect.⁴⁹ However, paradoxically, the possibility of realism could not have been ruled out by their criticisms. The contradictory aspect of realism is to say that ‘the concept of modernism, realism’s historical counterpart and its dialectical mirror-image, is not equally contradictory, and in ways which it will be instructive to juxtapose to the contradictions of realism itself’.⁵⁰ As Jameson claims, this critical analysis of realism reveals that ‘neither of these sets of contradictions can be fully understood, unless they are replaced within the broader context of the crisis of historicity itself’.⁵¹

Foucault’s idea of representation, the idea that there is representation in the visible state, yet at the same time no foundation that enables representation to exist in its own right, can be grasped as such a formulation that is imbued with the crisis of historicity. Unlike Barthes and Adorno, Foucault totally defies the possibility of cognition through the mimetic process and the production of meanings; Foucault rejects the presupposition that man has a mimetic faculty, and that the style of his writing is the symptom of a utopian impulse.

For Foucault, representation as such is the very embodiment of sovereign power; hence, the most important point is to resist the representational system as such. However, it is not difficult to criticise Foucault’s analysis of representation; the category of transparency can be grasped as “coding” for the foundation of communication in a particular society. The process of achieving the communicative code system is not a one-way traffic as Foucault describes. The system of representation is not simply constituted by the gaze of the powerful sovereign, but rather by something real like class struggle. In other words, a specific representational system is the mediated correlation between sovereignty and other powers. This is

⁴⁹ Fredric Jameson, ‘Reflections in Conclusion’, in *Aesthetics and Politics* (London: Verso, 1980), p. 198.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

where the idea of realism, which emphasises mediation between reality and artists, is still crucial to produce a particular mode of representation.

4. The Neo-Kantian Idea of Representation

It seems to me that Foucault's understanding of representation is an alternative version of the neo-Kantian conceptualisation of "perspective" in classical paintings, in the sense that Foucault's formula focuses on the homogenous spatiality produced by the totalising mode of representation. According to Craig Brandist, 'Foucault presents the most systematic poststructuralist attempt to develop a neo-Kantian scheme of regional validities and to relate this to discourse in life'.⁵² This neo-Kantian tendency in Foucault's analysis of representation results in 'no attempt to assess the adequacy of any historically generated form of social consciousness against a world existing independent of knowledge, but only an attempt to uncover the preconditions for historically specific oeuvres'.⁵³ A significant factor in the neo-Kantian idea of classical representation is that a specific *Weltanschauung* imposes a specific category of reality on aesthetic production. Therefore, it is necessary to consider the neo-Kantian idea of representation in order to understand the philosophical background of Foucault's formulation. Now, since it is beyond the scope of my thesis to describe all of the philosophical trends within neo-Kantianism, I will restrict myself to a discussion of Erwin Panofsky's formulation of representation, which is influenced by Ernst Cassirer.

In his essay 'Perspective as Symbolic Form', Panofsky argues that perspective is nothing less than that "symbolic form", by which the social code of homogeneous

⁵² Craig Brandist, 'Neo-Kantianism in Cultural Theory: Bakhtin, Derrida and Foucault', *Radical Philosophy*, 102 (2000), 6-16 (p. 11).

⁵³ *Ibid.*

and transcendental space is systematically structured in modern cultural production.

To quote Panofsky:

In a sense, perspective transforms psychophysiological space into mathematical space. It negates the differences between front and back, between right and left, between bodies and intervening space ("empty" space), so that the sum of all the parts of space and all its contents are absorbed into a single "quantum continuum." It forgets that we see not with a single fixed eye but with two constantly moving eyes, resulting in a spheroidal field of vision. It takes no account of the enormous difference between the psychologically conditioned "visual image" through which the visible world is brought to our consciousness, and the mechanically conditioned "retinal image" which paints itself upon our physical eye.⁵⁴

Encouraging the view that the advent of perspective was historically incidental, Panofsky critically investigates the effect of mathematically resituating reality in the symbolic form. He suggests that a significant problem of perspective springs from the 'fundamental discrepancy between "reality" and its construction' in the sense that the retinal image is 'a projection not on a flat but on a concave surface'.⁵⁵ This disparity between reality and its representation leads "aesthetic space" and "theoretical space" to a recasting of 'perceptual space in the guise of one and the same sensation: in one case that sensation is visually symbolized, in the other it appears in logical form'.⁵⁶

Panofsky's account of perspective theoretically employed Cassirer's conceptualisation of "symbolic form" in order to connect the history of perspective to the formation of a *Weltanschauung*. Cassirer was a philosopher who applied the Kantian critique of reason to the cultural field by considering the symbol as the

⁵⁴ Erwin Panofsky, *Perspective as Symbolic Form*, trans. by Christopher S. Wood (New York: Zone Books, 1997), p. 31

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

common category of forms of human thought, imagination and experience.⁵⁷ This attempt might be called a revised method of neo-Kantianism, aimed at investigating the reification of aesthetic ideology in the light of the horizontal scope of history. According to Galin Tihanov, Cassirer's *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* is 'a powerful attempt at redefining the Kantian forms of human experience into Hegelian stages in the historical growth of human consciousness and culture'.⁵⁸ The most significant factor in Cassirer's formula lies in the fact that it defines "science" as a symbolic form; "science" is no less the absolute standard of truth than a system of symbols, in the sense that all human experience occurs through the process of symbolisation. As Tihanov indicates, neo-Kantianism and *Lebensphilosophie*, which is one of its contemporary trends, are 'both hostile to positivism and willing to admit that the source of value lies in the singularity of individual phenomena rather than in abstract general laws'.⁵⁹ In this respect, it is not difficult to see that Panofsky's analysis of perspective was indebted to neo-Kantianism, which is sceptical of the ideology of science and technology.

Associating subjective experience with the experience of space, Panofsky proposes to disclose the secret of art history: perspective is not related to outside reality but rather the symbolic form of *Weltanschauung* whereby the *a priori* knowledge of reality is retrospectively reconstituted as reality. In other words, perspective is nothing less than the objectification of subject. Therefore, Panofsky's definition of perspective is to collapse the distinction between aesthetic perception and cognition in general.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ See Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, 3 vols, trans. by Ralph Manheim (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955).

⁵⁸ Galin Tihanov, *The Master and the Slave: Lukács, Bakhtin, and the Ideas of Their Time* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), p. 24.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

⁶⁰ See Christopher S. Wood, 'Introduction', in *Perspective as Symbolic Form*, p. 13.

In a similar tone, Robert D. Romanyshyn describes the way in which the aesthetic mode of perspective becomes identified with the epistemological mode of general cognition. According to Romanyshyn, the invention of linear perspective painting in fifteenth-century Italy has profoundly influenced our contemporary world;⁶¹ the linear perspective vision is the geometrical paradigm by which our eyes mathematically judge what is natural or artificial. As Romanyshyn describes the effect of perspective, 'when the vertical depth of the world as a matter of levels is replaced by a horizontal depth as a matter of spatial distance, the things which belong to this former depth retreat inside'.⁶² In the formulation of perspective, that is to say, 'everything that cannot be explained, that cannot be measured and made equal through the rule of number, disappears'.⁶³

The way in which perspective obtains the central position in aesthetic epistemology resides in its homogenising space through the absolute centric point of an observer imagined as standing on a horizontal dimension.⁶⁴ To ratify this centric point, perspective necessarily endows the human eye with a central function as the measure of reality. This is not very different from the way in which Barthes conceptualises the mode of representation: the mode of representation is constituted by the logic of geometrical perspective. In this respect, Barthes argues:

The 'Organon of Representation' (which it is today becoming possible to write because there are intimations of *something else*) will have as its dual foundation

⁶¹ See Robert D. Romanyshyn, *Technology as Symptom and Dream* (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 32.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 44.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ For more detailed discussion of the aesthetic invention of perspective, see Samuel Y. Edgerton, *The Renaissance Rediscovery of Linear Perspective* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), p. 43. Alberti's text, quoted in this book, explains the linear perspective as follows: 'as it passes through the centric point, this line may be called the centric line. This is why men depicted standing in the parallel furthest away are a great deal smaller than those in the nearer ones, a phenomenon which is clearly demonstrated by nature herself, for in churches we see the heads of men walking about, moving at the more or less the same height, while the feet of those further away may correspond to the knee level of those in front'.

the sovereignty of the act of cutting out [*découpage*] and the unity of the subject of that action. The substance of the various arts will therefore be of little importance; certainly, theatre and cinema are direct expressions of geometry (unless, as rarely, they carry out some research on the voice, on stereophony), but classic (readable) literary discourse, which has for such a long time now abandoned prosody, music, is also a representational, geometrical discourse in that it cuts out segments in order to depict them: to discourse (the classics would have said) is simply 'to depict the tableau one has in one's mind'.⁶⁵

According to Romanyshyn, this privileging of the human eye signifies precisely the symbolic centralisation of humanity.⁶⁶ This is the reason why both structuralism and poststructuralism centralise the problem of representation in the presupposition that the change of representational mode is nothing but the transformation of reality. However, it is difficult to admit that only the centralisation of the human eye imposes perspective as symbolic form, which produces the idea of homogenous space. Strictly speaking, the human eye is nothing less than one of the human body's organs that makes the individual gaze a subjective experience. Thus, what is inevitably demanded for its homogenising space is the duplicate mirror-structure of ideology in which the individual gaze is identified with the others.

Panofsky's neo-Kantian consideration of perspective as symbolic form can be criticised by the Althusserian formulation of ideology,⁶⁷ in such a way that his conceptualisation of symbolic form overlooks the ideological function of perspective whereby heterogeneous aesthetic experiences are absorbed into the transcendently homogeneous space. Unlike a few postmodernist arguments, all differences are not perfectly vanished in the homogeneous space produced by perspective. Paradoxically, Panofsky himself also acknowledges the differentiating aspect of the homogeneous space as follows:

⁶⁵ Barthes, 'Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein', p. 70.

⁶⁶ See Romanyshyn, *Technology as Symptom and Dream*, p. 44.

We shall speak of a fully “perspectival” view of space not when mere isolated objects, such as houses or furniture, are represented in “foreshortening,” but rather only when the entire picture has been transformed – to cite another Renaissance theoretician – into a “window,” and when we are meant to believe we are looking through this window into a space. The material surface upon which the individual figures or objects are drawn or painted or carved is thus negated, and instead reinterpreted as a mere “picture plane.” Upon this picture plane is projected the spatial continuum which is seen through it and which is understood to contain all the various individual objects.⁶⁸

A significant factor in Panofsky’s discussion lies in the function of perspective whereby “all the various individual objects” are supposedly contained in “the spatial continuum”. Insofar as the transformation of a mere picture plane into a “window”, through which the human eye looks at the world, can be regarded as an ideological effect, the question as to how the spatial continuum contains the individual objects inevitably is tied in with the problem of constructing a perspectival plane. In other words, the modulation of the perspectival homogeneity gives rise to an ideological edifice whereby the individual objects are essentially reduced to a single order. It seems to me that Althusser’s formula of ideology explains this properly: the reduction of the individual objects into the homogeneous singularity does not mean that all subjects are one-sidedly absorbed into the Absolute Subject.

It is rather that the duplicate mirror-structure of ideology effectively endows the individual subjects with the self-consciousness of themselves. In addition, the perspectival worldview in the seventeenth century was grounded on the conviction that ‘nature’s divine quality appeared in the harmony that linked its diversity to the

⁶⁷ For Althusser’s formulation of ideological effects, see Louis Althusser, ‘Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses: Notes towards an Investigation’, in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. by Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971).

⁶⁸ Panofsky, *Perspective as Symbolic Form*, p. 27.

fundamental unity constituted by God's own presence'.⁶⁹ The perspectival plane was closely related to the ideological illusion that makes us think nature or the world as the heavenly harmony of God. Thus, the homogeneous space is no less an actually existing space than an insulated abstractive idea of space – the physical reality in the homogeneous space is totally eclipsed by the idealisation of its spatiality. Therefore, the problem is not the structure of the abstractive idea of spatiality, but rather the way in which the isolated abstract comes to be realised by mediation. For me, neither poststructuralism nor the neo-Kantian formula of representation can fundamentally resolve this problem, precisely because both formulations deliberately eliminate the category of mediation between the mode of representation and the mode of production.

The poststructuralist view of cultural production does not reject the category of representation as such, as in the case of structuralism. Yet, the poststructuralist theory of representation discards the any utopian perspective of language which is embedded in structuralist formulas, endorsing the presupposition that representation is an iron web whereby the cultural power continuously reproduces its own category of reality. In this respect, it is true that the way in which poststructuralism understands representation is very different from a Marxian view of realism. Unlike the Marxist formulation of mediation between the abstract and the concrete as the dialectic of representation, poststructuralism grasps what is represented in cultural form as the mere artificial edifice that bears no relation to truth.

This is little more than a structuralist perspective of cultural production, a perspective that regards all cultural forms as the compound combination of signified and signifier. Based on such an aesthetic logic, postmodern cultural production in

⁶⁹ Louis Dupré, *Passage to Modernity: An Essay in the Hermeneutics of Nature and Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), p. 230.

general comes to recuperate the category of representation against modernism, whose purpose is to reject representation.

CHAPTER FIVE

REALISM AND CULTURAL THEORY: JAMESON

Introduction

It would be fair to say that the rise of cultural theory is related to the political frustration of Western Marxism. Paraphrasing Perry Anderson, Terry Eagleton observes that 'Western Marxism's shift to culture was born partly out of political impotence and disenchantment'.¹ Yet this is not the same as suggesting that the advent of cultural theory means the end of Marxian issues. It is rather a methodological adaptation of Marxism that emerges from the more reified condition of academic system. In this sense, Eagleton also acknowledges that the advent of cultural theory is a theoretical challenge to the way in which the humanities has collaborated with the reification of higher education.²

What is at stake for Eagleton is that cultural theory has eschewed the political dimension of Marxism to accommodate a changed condition. This means that it is better to forget the ideological aspect of Marxism for its methodological application, as in the case of *Tel Quel* group. Any kind of theory is thus 'a symptom of the fact that we can no longer take those practices for granted'.³ The inversion of the Marxian distinction between theory and practice is vital in cultural theory. Through this process, theory comes to be stressed as the pre-condition of historical change. Not surprisingly, this is the very procedure through which the Marxian idea of realism is abandoned.

However, it seems to me that Fredric Jameson has written against the grain of other cultural critics as he attempts to retain the ideas of realism in his adaptation of

¹ Terry Eagleton, *After Theory* (London: Allen Lane, 2003), p. 31.

² See *ibid.*, pp. 26-27.

cultural theory. As Sean Homer argues, Jameson is a theorist and cultural critic who 'can appropriate and incorporate the insights of alternative and non-Marxist theory while retaining Marxism's overarching historical narrative'.⁴ From this perspective, this chapter examines Jameson's idea of realism in relation to his formulation of dialectical criticism. In exploring *Marxism and Form* I will follow two directions. First, the chapter engages Jameson's text by analysing his dialectical method. Jameson's valorisation of form as the logic of content underwrites his dialectical criticism whereby theory is deconstructed by a dialectical style. Jameson's style is essentially connected with his idea of realism in relation to mediation. Jameson believes that a dialectical style would function in the same way as realism works in the process of human perception.

Secondly, the chapter considers the influence of Sartre and Lukács on Jameson, rather than that of Benjamin and Adorno, and distinguishes between their conceptions of totality. I want to argue that Sartre's theoretical framework gives Jameson a way of interpreting Lukács by means of his dialectical criticism. This chapter avoids the discussion of the relationship between Jameson and Benjamin and Adorno, because the aim of my discussion is to account for Jameson's formulation of realism, focusing on Jameson's theoretical idea of the dialectical relation between totality and narrative. In Jameson's argument about the relation of realism to the category of totalisation, Benjamin's and Adorno's preference for modernism rather than realism would not be significantly considered. What interests Jameson in Benjamin's and Adorno's writings on modernism is the category of utopian impulse, which is immanent in the structure of narrative. More significantly, Jameson's definition of form as the cultural logic of the mode of production is deeply motivated

³ Ibid., p. 27.

by Lukács' conceptualisation of form as the logic of content. As Steven Best and Douglas Kellner point out, Jameson's conception of cognitive mapping, which the chapter will later consider as the alternative realism in late capitalism, is nothing less than a continuing project of his earlier Lukácsian theory of narrative.⁵ For this reason, the chapter does not include a discussion of Benjamin's and Adorno's influences on Jameson's formulation of realism.

From this perspective, there are two further issues in my discussion of Sartre and Lukács in relation to Jameson's idea of realism. First, my intention in this chapter is to argue that these two theorists are the most influential models for Jameson's criticism. So, I will claim that Jameson's interest in form is related to his approach to Sartre and Lukács. Jameson argues that for dialectical thought there is no content except total content.⁶ Here is the point where Jameson relies on Lukács' concept of totality as well as Sartre's notion of totalisation in order to emphasise form.

Lukács and Sartre both stress form in order to solve epistemological problems. These problems emerge from the new socio-economic condition, in which the Kantian system, in Lukács' terms, 'classical middle-class philosophy', no longer succeeds in connecting to the totality. Lukács believes that 'class consciousness', through which Lukács aimed at laying the foundation of knowledge to obtain totality in capitalism, is 'the a priori limits or advantages conferred by affiliation with the bourgeoisie or the proletariat upon the mind's capacity to apprehend external reality'.⁷ Secondly, I move to Jameson's concept of form in relation to ideology. For Lukács, 'the concept of ideology already implies mystification, and conveys the notion of a kind of floating

⁴ Sean Homer, *Fredric Jameson: Marxism, Hermeneutics, Postmodernism* (New York: Routledge, 1998), p. 5.

⁵ See Steven Best and Douglas Kellner, *Postmodern Theory: Critical Interrogations* (London: Macmillan, 1991), p. 189.

⁶ See Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Form: Twentieth Century Dialectical Theories of Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), p. 306.

and psychological world view, a kind of subjective picture of things already by definition unrelated to the external world itself'.⁸ Even a proletarian worldview, therefore, is ideological, so that it must be interpreted in relation to historical reality. It is interesting that Jameson contrasts Lukács' concept of ideology with positivistic demands for the ultimate standard of truth. Jameson criticises such demands because it is impossible to understand anything in the world without subjective distortions or ideological transformations. I want to argue that this is where Jameson's formulation of mediation can be considered as a resolution to the reification of cultural theory.

Finally, the chapter investigates Jameson's theoretical intervention in the debates around postmodernism, focusing on his ambivalence towards the relationship between Marxism and postmodernism. My concern in this discussion is that Jameson's delineation of postmodernism is problematic, in the sense that his periodisation is overly applied to legitimise his own aesthetic presupposition of postmodernism. Alongside this, the chapter turns to consider Jameson's reformulation of realism in terms of narrative. Furthermore, I contend that Jameson's idea of realism can be found in his conceptualisation of cognitive mapping.

1. Form and Style

Fredric Jameson is a writer whose work seems to call for a dialectical reading, in the sense that his work is nothing less than the result of a process of dialectical thinking in which he accounts for everything in terms of mediation. This dialectical characteristic secures the way in which Jameson's commentary intervenes in other theories, since "metacommentary" is the most extrinsic feature in the dialectic. From *Sartre: The Origins of a Style*, which grew out of his doctoral dissertation, to recent

⁷ Ibid., p. 182.

work on Brecht, Jameson has consistently developed a rigorous critique of literature, culture, and contemporary philosophy. Although, paradoxically, his role in the theoretical arena seems to owe less to his Marxist orientation than to his engagement with the debate on postmodernism.

Indeed, most works dealing with Jameson's theory today focus on his analysis of postmodernism. As Jameson himself confesses, the combination of Marxism and postmodernism seems to be 'peculiar or paradoxical, and somehow intensely unstable', so that 'the two terms carry with them a whole freight of pop nostalgia images'.⁹ Jameson humorously reveals the incongruous image occasioned by a general preoccupation with Marxism and postmodernism, which is that of 'a small, painstakingly reproduced nostalgia restaurant – decorated with the old photographs, with Soviet waiters sluggishly serving bad Russian food – hidden away within some gleaming new pink and blue architectural extravaganza'.¹⁰ In the context of this atmosphere in which one always already understands Marxism as an old-fashioned ideology, the most pressing work for a contemporary Marxist critic is to deconstruct such prejudices. It is interesting that this argument alludes to the aim of Jameson's project: to elaborate Marxist methodology in the condition of "demarxification". To achieve this, Jameson tries to prove that Marxism serves as an absolute historical horizon for other theories; Marxism is a matrix of theory through which any theoretical idea is produced. In a sense, Jameson's whole project is little else than an attempt to substantiate this presupposition.

What Jameson clarifies here is not so much his conversion to postmodernism, but rather his dialectical position in relation to Marxism and postmodernism. He is

⁸ Ibid., p. 182-3.

⁹ Fredric Jameson, 'Marxism and Postmodernism', in *The Cultural Turn: Selected Writings on the Postmodern, 1983-1998* (London: Verso, 1998), p. 33.

¹⁰ Ibid.

adamant that 'this new topic is not alien to my earlier work but rather a logical consequence of it'.¹¹ According to Jameson, his inter- or cross-disciplinary thinking is no more than the realisation of dialectical thinking. Perry Anderson's estimation of Jameson seems to provide a proper defence of this; Anderson, in his recent book-length study on Jameson, has the following to say:

The Western Marxist tradition was attracted to the aesthetic as involuntary consolation for impasses of the political and economic. The result was a remarkable range of reflections on different aspects of the culture of modern capitalism. But these were never integrated into a consistent theory of its economic development, typically remaining at a somewhat detached and specialized angle to the broader movement of society: taxable even with a certain idealism, from the standpoint of a more classical Marxism. Jameson's account of postmodernism, by contrast, develops for the first time a theory of the 'cultural logic' of capital that simultaneously offers a portrait of the transformations of this social form as a whole. This is a much more comprehensive vision. Here, in the passage from the sectoral to the general, the vocation of Western Marxism has reached its most complete consummation.¹²

Anderson, who definitively accounted for the historical emergence of Western Marxism in his early works,¹³ now evaluates the significance of Jameson's accomplishment as the culmination of that tradition.¹⁴ What interests Anderson in Jameson's thinking is the way in which he correlates cultural forms and economic process, the very idea of mediation which is based on the Hegelian formulation of the relationship between essence and appearance: appearance belongs to essence. This idea leads Jameson to understand the cultural logic of capitalism in collaboration with socio-economic development. No doubt, as Jameson strongly argues, this results from an essential aspect of dialectical thinking, its holistic approach on method. Thus,

¹¹ Ibid., p. 34.

¹² Perry Anderson, *The Origins of Postmodernity* (London: Verso, 1998), p. 72.

¹³ See Perry Anderson, *Considerations on Western Marxism* (London: NLB, 1976), pp. 29-30.

¹⁴ See Anderson, *The Origins of Postmodernity*, p. 72.

Jameson seems to suggest that we cannot understand literary and cultural texts unless we work dialectically to understand the social whole, and vice versa.

In *Marxism and Form*, Jameson argues that ‘the tautological movement which we have described within the work of art, in which from a certain elevation intrinsically formal considerations suddenly dissolve into problems of content, is reproduced outside the work in the relationship between the content and its historical context’.¹⁵ The merely formal consideration of the work of art gives the way in which tautology in criticism happens, since form reserves its logic in relation to content.

As for other Hegelian theorists, who are taken as examples for dialectical thinkers in *Marxism and Form*, Jameson seems to rely on the principle that form must be understood in accordance with content and its historical context, since it always emerges as a reference to historical events and situations. Thus, Jameson argues that even for those writers, whose works appear to have no relation to historical reality, it must be supposed that their works are imposed by ‘the novelist, who despairs of evolving any genuine events from the colorless stream of experience itself’.¹⁶ That is to say, every text has its origins outside itself, whether it directly describes historical events or not. In Benjamin’s terms, those works cannot resist bearing ‘the marks of the situation which gave rise to it’.¹⁷ Similarly to Benjamin, who finds the remnants of historical situation within Baudelaire and Proust in terms of allegory, Jameson develops his thinking about the correlation between narrative and reality through the notion of allegory. As Benjamin suggests, allegory is a form of narrative in which

¹⁵ Jameson, *Marxism and Form*, p. 352.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 201.

¹⁷ See Walter Benjamin, ‘Some Motifs in Baudelaire’, in *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, trans. by Harry Zohn (London: Verso, 1997), p. 113.

history remains as a “trace”, so Jameson argues allegory happens when we know we cannot represent history, but we also cannot not do it.¹⁸

Jameson argues that history is always perceived in the form of narrative, since making narrative in order to understand the world is ‘the central function or *instance* of human mind’.¹⁹ Insofar as history can be considered narrative, it must be interpreted in other hermeneutic levels, because history always reminds us that narrative cannot be completed by itself, but rather it needs to be thought in relation to its given historical situation. Accordingly, as Jameson claims, the meaning that the world has a narrative structure does not suppose that we can tell a simple story about it, or that there are representational techniques existing for doing that.²⁰ It is not surprising, therefore, that for Jameson literary history, or even the history of philosophy, is nothing more than innovation in form, since history consists of interpretations, in which new narratives intervene in old narrative structures. In this respect, Jameson’s dialectical criticism includes the hermeneutic project, in which his emphasis on dialectical thinking is thinking about history in relation to totality.

Jameson’s idea of narrative cannot be separated from his formulation of totality. The concept of totality is the hidden impetus by which Jameson’s criticism formulates the correlation between narrative and history. It is interesting that Jameson understands dialectical thinking as the way in which we try to undo what we represent

¹⁸ See Fredric Jameson, ‘Marxism and Historicity of Theory: An Interview with Fredric Jameson’, *New Literary History*, 29 (1998), 353-83 (p. 376). For Benjamin’s argument about allegory, see *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. by John Osborne (London: Verso, 1998), p. 31. For Benjamin, representation is allegorical process whose activity is the place of truth. Allegory could not exist if truth were clearly realised. This activity, ‘representational impulse in truth’, does not suppose the whole presentation of truth, but rather must eternally represent itself. In this sense, just as Jameson argues that form is content, so Benjamin says that ‘form is meaning’.

¹⁹ Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (New York: Cornell, 1981), p. 13.

²⁰ Jameson, ‘Marxism and Historicity of Theory’ p. 376.

at every moment in a unified way, and ‘see the contradictions and multiplicities behind that particular experience’.²¹

Based on his reading of theorists from the Frankfurt School, and alongside Lukács and Sartre, Jameson challenges the preconception that Marxism can no longer provide concepts for the analysis of modern culture, that it is, in short, an out-dated ideology. Jameson’s antagonism toward positivism, in particular, is clearly revealed in his endorsement of Adorno’s difficult style. Jameson notes, first of all, the hostility of the Anglo-American tradition toward a dialectical style, and then criticises positivistic demand for clarity, simplicity and quick reading without any attention to the materiality of language and the form of sentence construction, in which real thought seems to be embodied.²² Jameson’s argument about style is compelling, and can be seen as a strategy against capitalist commodification and reduction. However, his justification of his difficult style is also questionable, as with Adorno’s criticism of popular culture, Jameson remains open to the charge of elitism. Considering the case of Adorno, how can we understand Jameson’s difficult style as an attempt to grasp the complicated reality of contemporary capitalism?

As Jameson indicates, his style is privately tied up with his pleasure in writing the hope that ‘we are not too alienated or instrumentalised to reserve some small place for what used to be called handcraft satisfaction’.²³ Yet this seems an inadequate explanation for Jameson’s writing in a difficult style. To a certain extent, his style is designed to stimulate us to think about reality, since his writing always draws attention to many parallel interactions between the subject and the world. In the last chapter of *Marxism and Form*, Jameson defends dialectical thought that tries ‘to

²¹ Ibid., p. 375.

²² See *Marxism and Form*, p. xiii.

²³ Fredric Jameson, ‘Interview’ with L. Green, Jonathan Culler and Richard Klein, *Diacritics*, 12 (1982), 72-91(p. 88).

widen its own attention to include them in its awareness as well'.²⁴ It is in this sense that dialectical thinking is faced with 'the operative procedures of the nonreflective one', since it refuses 'to complete the application of such procedures'.²⁵ For Jameson, dialectical thought aims 'not so much at solving the particular dilemmas in question, as at converting those problems into their own solutions on a higher level, and making the fact and the existence of the problem itself the starting point for new research'.²⁶

He continues as follows:

This is indeed the most sensitive moment in the dialectical process: that in which an entire complex of thought is hoisted through a kind of inner leverage one floor higher, in which the mind, in a kind of shifting of gears, now finds itself willing to take what had been a question for an answer, standing outside its previous exertions in such a way that it reckons itself into the problem, understanding the dilemma not as a resistance of the object alone, but also as the result of a subject-pole deployed and disposed against it in a strategic fashion – in short, as the function of a determinate subject-object relationship.²⁷

In other words, his writing attempts to be double-edged: on the one hand, it serves to present reality in light of totality; on the other hand, it aims to give pleasure by which we willingly participate in reading the dialectical sentence. Thus, the difficulty of reading Jameson is no less than the difficulty of comprehending total reality in our socio-economic condition as well as to give entertainment rather like solving a jigsaw. Here is the point where Eagleton's analysis of Jameson's style finds its mark.

As Eagleton says, 'language must be reinvested with the materiality of which one form of reification has robbed it, but the historical conditions are simply not as

²⁴ *Marxism and Form*, pp. 307-9.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*

yet ripe to do that without the risk of fetishizing it in another direction'.²⁸ So, Jameson's style can be seen as the reflection of this contradiction in which the concrete deconstructs the abstract in a dialectical way, since the dialectical thought is nothing but the elaboration of dialectical sentences.²⁹ More than a mere rhetorical strategy, therefore, Jameson's style must be understood in relation to his position regarding the dialectic as the only way in which one can realise the reified reality.

For Jameson, the task of dialectical criticism is not to do with constructing mediations between private and public, between individual and socio-economic realities, between the existential and history, but to do with making the meditative relationship visible.³⁰ For such mediation is the place of the concrete; in other words, two dimensions are always related in our experience. In short, dialectical criticism is concerned with the "representation" of reality.

Jameson introduces the notion of ideology as "optical illusion" in describing the act of a dialectical criticism as sort of correction for that distorted image. The "optical illusion" is an inverted relationship of form and content, which happens in the process of human perception. Clint Burnman's attention to this seems to be valid in terms of the way in which he relates "optical illusion" to "visual metaphors" that are, in Jameson's terms, utopian compensations for the reification of the senses caused by capitalism.³¹ Yet, more than a rhetorical device, Jameson uses the term "optical illusion" to suggest something that forestalls our perception of totality in capitalism. As Jameson quotes from *The German Ideology*, "optical illusion" is nothing but "ideology" in which men and their circumstances appear upside down as in a *camera*

²⁸ Terry Eagleton, *Against the Grain: Selected Essays, 1975-1985* (London: Verso, 1986), p. 69.

²⁹ See Jameson, *Marxism and Form*, p. xii.

³⁰ See *ibid.*, p. 406.

³¹ Clint Burnham, *The Jamesonian Unconscious* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), pp. 50-51.

obscura.³² This ‘ocular inversion as a figure for the seeming autonomy and self-sufficiency of the intellectual and cultural realm’ is ‘paradoxical to the degree to which in it a socially conditioned and historically determined mystification is described in terms of a permanent natural process’.³³ So, as Jameson says, ‘both class consciousness and that inherent and more natural tendency of consciousness toward a kind of unconscious idealism are still identified’.³⁴ In this sense, Jameson’s defence of *History and Class Consciousness* depends on Lukács’ concept of ideology. In Lukács’ terms, as Jameson claims, ‘ideology already implies mystification, and conveys the notion of a kind of floating and psychological world view, a kind of subjective picture of things already by definition unrelated to the external world itself’.³⁵

Jameson applies this idea of ideology to a more general explanation of human understanding, in order to emphasise form. Accordingly, what Jameson wants to say with Lukács is that ‘access to a totality is once again reinvented’ in form, since the privileged historical moments, in which practice itself breaks out, would disappear as soon as practice stops. Therefore, his hermeneutic project seems to proceed in the shadow of Lukács’ concept of ideology, to the extent that his emphasis on form is inspired by Lukács’ theoretical framework. In short, Jameson accepts Lukács’ insistence on the mediated relationship between reification and totality. In Jameson’s terms, Lukács’ defence of literary realism is related to the concept of totality.³⁶ For Lukács’ realism is not simply a matter of accuracy or reflecting, but it is characterised by ‘narration rather than description’.³⁷ For ideology as a natural process in human understanding already dominates the relationship of subject and object. Just as much

³² See Jameson, *Marxism and Form*, p. 369.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 182-83.

³⁶ See Jameson, ‘*History and Class Consciousness as an “Unfinished Project”*’, p. 49.

³⁷ Jameson, *Marxism and Form*, p. 196.

‘the retina of the eye’ creates an inverted figure of the world, as ideology does by means of “subjective distortions”.³⁸

It is important that we should stress the fact that this distortion is nothing to do with the real relationship of form and content. The real relationship must be represented as “visible” in itself. As Lukács believed, and Jameson also claims, this is the principle of realism. This “visible” means not so much transparency as in a mirror, but rather a mode of narrative which is followed by the category of totality.³⁹ Later on, this image of totality will be reformulated in Jameson’s concept of “cognitive mapping”. This idea seems to be close to Lukács’ concepts of totality and narrative. In this sense, Jameson regards history as the dialectical process not of the being but of the becoming, of a collectivity; to put in bald terms, it is an unpredictable dialectic moving towards totality. This is the reason why Jameson’s Marxism requires the formulation of realism for the totalisation of social reality using a dialectical method. My interest in the following is concerned with this area of Jameson’s criticism, and entails his conceptualisation of realism.

2. Jameson and Lukács

In his discussion of Lukács’ works, Jameson strongly refutes the view that Lukács’ works must be divided into two parts: the early Lukács who began with Hegel and the late Lukács who became a demagogue for the communist party.⁴⁰

Jameson challenges the critical emphasis on the discontinuity between Lukács’ early

³⁸ Ibid., p. 370.

³⁹ This is the way in which Lukács defines the mode of realism as reflection in proper proportion.

⁴⁰ For example, see Theodor W. Adorno, ‘Reconsideration under Duress’, in *Aesthetics and Politics*, trans. by Rodney Livingstone (London: Verso, 1980), pp. 151-52. After describing Lukács’ early works as the origin of autobiographical myth, Adorno’s criticism of Lukács’ late work becomes increasingly hostile arguing that ‘he took the crudest criticisms from the Party hierarchy to heart, twisting Hegelian motifs and turning them against himself; and for decades on end he laboured in a series of books and essays to adapt his obviously unimpaired talents to the unrelieved sterility of Soviet

works and later works. For Jameson, this biographical myth of Lukács, on which some critics depend in order to justify Lukács' discontinuous "periods", presents a two-fold disadvantage:

On the one hand, the passage from one period to another falls outside the myth proper. Thus the transitions from one position to another turn out either to exceed ... or to fall short of ... what even the most sympathetic historical consciousness may be expected to relive and to understand from the inside. On the other, the various periods may now be played off against each other without our having to commit ourselves to any of them. So the young Marx was used against the older one; and early Lukács ... serves to discredit the later theoretician of realism; indeed, the final Lukács, with his return to the beginning, is bound to suggest the failure and the vanity of the whole enterprise.⁴¹

For Jameson, however, textual inconsistencies in Lukács' works 'alert us to the possibility of conceptualising the relationship between the idea of "totality"' and the 'later account of realism in some other way than as break, substitution, compensation, formation'.⁴² The critics of Lukács, Jameson claims, 'came prepared to contemplate the abstract idea, but in practice they find themselves asked to sacrifice too much'.⁴³ According to Jameson, historical materialism is 'irreducible to pure reason or to contemplation',⁴⁴ thus Lukács' continuity cannot be conceived of in terms of abstract ideas, but rather "history" itself, the history from which Lukács' theory emerged, since coherence comes from "outside", not from "inside". In this sense, Jameson argues that 'Lukács' life work fails to be understood from the inside,

claptrap, which in the meantime had degraded the philosophy it proclaimed to the level of a mere instrument in the service of its rule'.

⁴¹ Jameson, *Marxism and Form*, pp. 162-63.

⁴² Fredric Jameson, 'History and Class Consciousness as an "Unfinished Project"', *Rethinking MARXISM*, no. 1 (1988), pp. 49-72. (p. 50).

⁴³ Jameson, *Marxism and Form*, p. 160.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

as a set of solutions and problems developing out of one another according to their own inner logic and momentum'.⁴⁵

Jameson keeps this position when he defends Sartre's "conversion" to Marxism. Turning against the customary description, which depicts Sartre's *Critique of Dialectical Reason* as an attempt to reconcile existentialism and Marxism, Jameson suggests that 'Marxism was not something to which Sartre came to after existentialism, but rather an interest concurrent with it, which has coexisted with the other philosophy throughout Sartre's career'.⁴⁶ Consequently, it is not enough to think of Jameson's devotion to Lukács and Sartre as merely the result of his private enthusiasm, even if he seems to be definitely fascinated by both theorists in his first study. It is rather much more plausible that Jameson's commitment to both is inevitable in his search for a method through which he can engage with American critical contexts.

Considering the dominant figure of Heidegger, which pervaded Western philosophy at that time, it seems somewhat unusual that Jameson took Lukács and Sartre for his theoretical models. When he studied in Germany in the early 1950s, the German intellectual scene was dominantly Heideggerian.⁴⁷ It seems to me that Lucien Goldmann's comparative consideration of Lukács and Heidegger can serve as a clue for Jameson's adaptation of Lukács rather than Heidegger.

As Goldmann remarks, Lukács and Heidegger stand for the two poles of the principal European philosophical currents.⁴⁸ In his argument Goldmann indicates the common basis of Heidegger and Lukács in their intellectual debt to Husserl.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid, p. 207.

⁴⁷ See Jameson, 'Marxism and the Historicity of Theory', p. 357.

⁴⁸ See Lucien Goldmann, *Lukács and Heidegger: Toward a New Philosophy*, trans. by William Q. Boelhower (London: Routledge, 1977), p. 2. For the problem of Goldmann's linking Lukács to

According to Goldman, and contrary to structuralism, Lukács and Heidegger believe that 'man is not *opposite* the world which he tries to understand and upon which he acts, but *within* this world which he is a part of, and there is no radical break between the meaning he is trying to find or introduce into the universe and that which he is trying to find or introduce into his own existence'.⁴⁹

It is undeniable that there is a marked similarity between Lukács and Heidegger in rejecting the transcendental subject upon which Husserl's phenomenology is founded. Even though these two theorists start from this common basis, there is a fundamental difference between Lukács and Heidegger. That is, Lukács considers the historical subject to be collective, whereas Heidegger supposes it to be the individual. For Jameson, therefore, Lukács seems to be the figure at that turning point where existentialism found the exit to history, just as Sartre tried to overcome his own philosophical limitations by means of Marxism, but ultimately failed. Thus, I contend that Lukács is the pivotal figure through which Jameson resolves his philosophical dilemma and develops his own dialectical criticism out of his existential formation.

To understand Jameson's criticism, we must go further into this discussion of the relationship between Lukács and Jameson; for Jameson, Lukács is a key model of the dialectical philosopher.⁵⁰ For example, the influence of Lukács' formulation on Jameson's criticism is mainly related to the notions of totality and narrative.

Alongside these, one of the most powerful Lukácsian concepts affecting Jameson's formulation is reification. In *History and Class Consciousness*, Lukács suggests using

Heidegger, see István Fehér, 'Lucien Goldman über Lukács und Heidegger', in *Jahrbuch der Internationalen Georg-Lukács-Gesellschaft, 1996* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1997), pp. 153-67.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁵⁰ Christopher Pawling suggests that Lukács is an undeniable linkage between *Marxism and Form* and *The Political Unconscious*. See Christopher Pawling, 'The American Lukács?: Fredric Jameson and Dialectical Thought' (forthcoming).

this concept in order to explain ‘the riddle of commodity-*structure*’.⁵¹ Lukács elaborates Marx’s idea of alienation in a criticism of the static relationship to objects in middle-class philosophy. As Jameson points out, Lukács launches an attack on the dilemma of classical philosophy, to put it in simple terms, the impossibility of its own perceptions, which never comes to terms with the thing-in-itself, in order to justify “proletarian thought”. For Lukács, this thought is the privileged capacity by which a worker can totalise reality, and this capacity is oriented by the nature of the worker’s situation. Due to his initial alienation, the worker sees ‘elements of the outside world as objects of his thought’, and even the worker perceives himself to be ‘an object’.⁵²

According to Jameson, Lukács’ conceptualisation of reification is a development of Marx’s description, not merely of commodity fetishism and exchange but of the commodity *form* itself, which is now enlarged to include Weber’s account of the rationalization process, and Taylorisation; furthermore it encompasses not merely the work process, but also the reification of mind, and scientific disciplines just as much as the psyche and the senses.⁵³ This conception of reification is crucial to the idea of totality. In Lukács’ words, totality is always already deconstructed by reification in capitalist society, so that we necessarily need to interpret form, which at times appears to be manipulated by the “optical illusion” of ideology, if we want to obtain totality.

As has been discussed, Lukács’ notorious criticism of modernism focuses on this ideological aspect of the aesthetic pursuit that attempts to attain eternity by means of abstraction. It is at this point, in his explanation of the basis of the chief conceptual opposition in Lukács’ criticism on the Hegelian opposition of the concrete and the

⁵¹ See Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, trans. by Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), pp. 83-110.

⁵² See Jameson, *Marxism and Form*, p. 187.

⁵³ See Jameson, ‘*History and Class Consciousness as an “Unfinished Project”*’, p. 52.

abstract, that Jameson accepts Lukács' examination of literature.⁵⁴ Jameson never takes Lukács' position against modernism, but rather elaborates what Lukács really wanted to say with his criticism of modernism. Lukács' emphasis on realism rather than modernism is related to his basic conceptual categories: a split between the subject and object in modern times. In short, Lukács' idea of literary realism is nothing more than the possibility of totality in the epistemic dimension.

In this sense, realism is a way in which writers resist reification. This is the point where Jameson agrees with Lukács in terms of realism. In considering the conceptualisation of reification, Jameson suggests that Lukács' *History and Class Consciousness*, the first systemic account of the logic of capitalism, is based on a paradox, given the way in which 'it insists on extreme fragmentation as a social norm'.⁵⁵ This is what Jameson indicates about Marx's *Capital*. As Jameson says, this is the sense in which Lukács' conception of reification invokes some radically different class logic – a 'collective project not merely capable of breaking the multiple systemic webs of reification, but which *must* do so in order to realize itself'.⁵⁶

In his discussion of this Lukácsian idea of realism, Jameson never hesitates to say that Lukács' attempt is not to involve 'some restoration of the "unity" between the subject and the object, some invocation of a "reconciliation" between these fragmented and damaged zones of being';⁵⁷ it is rather connected to a framework in which 'various kinds of knowledge are positioned, pursued and evaluated'.⁵⁸ Such a definition of totality will emerge in Jameson's later criticism through the concepts of "transcoding" and "cognitive mapping" as Jameson's attempts to theorise the logic of the postmodern reality. Jameson argues:

⁵⁴ See Jameson, *Marxism and Form*, p. 163.

⁵⁵ Jameson, 'History and Class Consciousness as an "Unfinished Project"', p. 52.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 53.

We cannot, however, return to aesthetic practices elaborated on the basis of historical situations and dilemmas which are no longer ours. Meanwhile, the conception of space that has been developed here suggests that a model of political culture appropriate to our own situation will necessarily have to raise spatial issues as its fundamental organizing concern. I will therefore provisionally define the aesthetic of this new (and hypothetical) cultural form as an aesthetic of *cognitive mapping*.⁵⁹

Consequently, here is the crucial point where Jameson strives to set Lukács free from the alleged criticism in which Lukács has been regarded as nothing but a failed communist theorist. For Lukács, realism is the way in which writers can refute reification by means of the dialectic working in the relationship between abstract and concrete. It is this sense that in the aesthetic realm realism has the same function as “the consciousness of the proletariat” in the socio-economic realm.

Needless to say, this is the reason why Jameson calls for a form of dialectical criticism whereby we can realise and totalise the capitalist reality that is always already reified by commodification and fetishisation. This sense seems to account for his commentary on Joyce’s Stephen, who describes history as a nightmare from which he is trying to awake; ‘one cannot awake’, observes Jameson, ‘until one has first measured the extent and the intensity of the nightmare’.⁶⁰ In this formula, Jameson reformulates the orthodox Marxian doctrine of the relationship between theory and practice, a doctrine that practice gives rise to theory and vice versa. The presupposition constituting such a reformulation is that reality is always already mediated. It is crucial to understand the structure of mediated correlation. Once encapsulated in abstractive form, it might be realised by the process of mediation between theory and practice.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 60.

As we have seen so far, Jameson's theoretical approach to Sartre and Lukács provides the methodology for a reformulation of the category of realism in the newly articulated cultural conditions after the 1960s. Throughout his theoretical intervention into the anti-realistic literary context, Jameson draws on the legacy of Marxism and realism in his method of dialectical criticism. However, the way in which Jameson attempts to retain the positive aspect of realism is different from the approaches of the previous theorists such as Lukács. This is where the question of Jameson's formula comes to exist in its own right. Jameson's consideration of realism is definitely linked to his own interest, raising the issue of form at the hermeneutic level. In this respect, Jameson's formulation of realism must be traced to the historical context of "demarxification" after the decline of Western Marxism.

In his defence of interpretation, Jameson indicates that, in the first place, the absolute historical and collective level of narratives is designed to achieve the final meaning.⁶¹ In a sense, only the act of reading can push the emptiness towards infinite interpretation as a process. Considering this argument symptomatically, it is remarkable that Jameson's attitude towards narrative seems to depend mainly on the act of interpretation rather than that of making narrative. Whereas previously Jameson drew on Lukács' realism in order to revise old-fashioned Marxist criticism, Jameson's concern now seems to be lacking a fully developed concept of narration which Lukács emphasised as the principle of realism; Jameson rather focuses on the epistemological claim of realism. Jameson's idea of realism is given in the concluding chapter, 'The Existence of Italy', to *Signatures of Visible*. In the following, my discussion turns to investigate the way in which Jameson reformulates the Marxian idea of realism in his

⁵⁹ Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), p. 51.

⁶⁰ Jameson, *Marxism and Form*, p. 305.

⁶¹ See Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, pp. 30-31.

dialectical consideration of the relationship between realism and modernism and postmodernism.

3. Jameson and Realism

Jameson refutes the Lukácsian formulation of realism in articulating his consideration of cultural production, and tactically draws on the semiotic analysis of structuralism to reject the classical mode of reflection theory. However, Jameson still reformulates the kernel of Lukácsian realism, the idea that a critic has to combine the examination of the writer's view of the world with the analysis of form. While Lukács sees the writer's attitude towards the world as the condition of aesthetic creation, the main concern in Jameson's formulation is that realism is an opposite category to the aesthetic formality. More recently Jameson argues that realism is 'a peculiarly unstable concept owing to its simultaneous, yet incompatible, aesthetic and epistemological claims'.⁶² Jameson continues:

These two claims then seem contradictory: the emphasis on this or that type of truth content will clearly be undermined by any intensified awareness of the technical means or representational artifice of the work itself. Meanwhile, the attempt to reinforce and to shore up the epistemological vocation of the work generally involves the suppression of the formal properties of the realistic "text" and promotes an increasingly naïve and unmediated or reflective conception of aesthetic construction and reception. Thus, where the epistemological claim succeeds, it fails; and if realism validates its claim to being a correct or true representation of the world, it thereby ceases to be an *aesthetic* mode of representation and falls out of art altogether.⁶³

It is interesting that Jameson's formulation of the antithesis between realism and aesthetics tacitly follows Sartre's idea of the relationship between reality and beauty. In his observation of "pure literature", Sartre argues that beauty is the height

⁶² Fredric Jameson, *Signatures of the Visible* (London: Routledge, 1992), P. 158.

of uselessness, which resists the bourgeoisie's ideology of utilitarianism.⁶⁴ This is constitutive for Sartre's formulation of the relationship between reification and the artwork: the pure beauty of the artwork can overcome the reification of the culture industry by denying the real.⁶⁵

However, the problem is that Sartre's formulation of the artwork is more metaphysical than other Marxist theorists; Sartre presupposes the pure category of beauty which can be accomplished by the authentic life of artists. For Sartre, pure beauty is an ideology that tells truth through its fictional form; it gives rise to pure negativity whereby artwork wears its ideological reification out by asserting its own autonomy.⁶⁶

Sartre's theory of the artwork assumes that the aesthetic dimension is established by epistemological frustration. The aesthetic is the absolute inverse of the epistemological. In this way, Jameson's formulation adapts the way in which Sartre sees the aesthetic dimension as an outcome of political and epistemological failure. Needless to say, Jameson does not endorse Sartre's existentialist presupposition; yet his formulation, which retains the Sartrean distinction between the epistemological and the aesthetic, too easily overlooks the fact that aesthetic perception also internalises an epistemological impulse as Benjamin's and Adorno's formulations of mimesis clearly show. In short, the aesthetic artifice is nothing less than a by-product of the epistemological impulse towards reality.

On the other hand, the position that Jameson takes for the understanding of realism appears to be equivalent to that of Barthes who sees realism as a historically specific mode of representation. In this sense, Jameson facilitates an understanding of

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ See Jean-Paul Sartre, *What is Literature?*, trans. by Bernard Frechtman (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 96.

⁶⁵ See *ibid.*, p. 97.

the condition of realism in which a rift between the epistemological and the aesthetic comes out of its differentiating periodisation. Jameson does much to encourage this view in order to articulate the dialectics of realism, modernism and postmodernism respectively, which correspond to the historical phases of market capitalism, imperialism and late capitalism. Emphasising a break between these different representational modes, Jameson draws on the periodisation of capitalism in order to support the relationship of narrative forms and their determination by the mode of production. In spite of Jameson's positive reception of the poststructuralist perspective, Jameson's own theoretical formation took place under the influence of Lukácsian realism, in which the dominant feature of narration is the unity of subject and object.

In his early writing, Jameson wrote that 'realism itself comes to be distinguished by its movement, its storytelling and dramatization of its content; comes ... to be characterized by narration rather than description'.⁶⁷ In this way, Jameson recounts Lukács' celebration of narration; narration 'presupposes neither the transcendence of the object (as in science) nor that of the subject (as in ethics), but rather a neutralization of the two, their mutual reconciliation, which thus anticipates the life experience of a Utopian world in its very structure'.⁶⁸ This statement seems to be indicative of Jameson's apparent approval of adopting the "structure" of narration suggested by Lukács. Although Jameson entertains Lukács' idea, it does not mean that he totally agrees with Lukács' realism. Adapting Lukács' theoretical category, Jameson supports his own arguments of non-realistic works such as modernism and postmodernism. Critically considering Jameson's acceptance of Lukács, these

⁶⁶ See *ibid.*, p. 90.

⁶⁷ Jameson, *Marxism and Form*, p. 196.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 190.

contradictory aspects of realism emerge from his theoretical framework. In *Marxism and Form*, Jameson himself explains Lukács' criticism of description as follows:

It is perhaps easiest to begin with the negative part of the definition, with that hostile diagnosis of symbolism which will be a constant throughout Lukács' career: for him, symbolism is not just one literary technique among others, but represents a qualitatively different mode of apprehending the world from the realistic one ... the symbolic mode is of course not so much the result of the writer's personal aesthetic as of the historical situation itself: in their origin, all objects have a human meaning.⁶⁹

The last sentence of this quotation clearly reveals how Jameson understands the symbolic mode. Considering symbolism, Jameson opens here a newly developed polemic on representation as such, that is to say, all representational modes could be understood as distinctive effects of history. His consideration of symbolism as a particular representational mode corresponding to a specific mode of production seems to be quite different from what Lukács wanted to teach in his criticism of symbolism.

Contrary to Lukács' criticism of symbolism, Jameson thus argues that 'in symbolic works of art, we strive for some meaningful relationship to the outside world, to objective reality, only to return empty-handed, having lived our life among shadows, having touched nothing but ourselves in the world around us'.⁷⁰ Jameson calls this tendency of symbolism an ambiguity coming out of the structural condition by which 'the modernist writer has some personal choice in the matter, and that his fate is not sealed for him by the logic of his moment in history'.⁷¹ The way in which Jameson tries to minimise Lukács' hostility to symbolism in order to emphasise a break between Lukács and us is compelling. To quote Jameson:

⁶⁹ Ibid., pp. 196-97.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 198.

If, therefore, we set aside that part of Lukács' work which constitutes a set of recommendations to the artist (and which is complicated by the fact that Lukács aims here at two publics at once – at the writers of socialist realism just as at the “critical realist” of the West), we find that his analysis of modernism is based on a fundamental fact of modern art: namely, the observation of a qualitative leap in recent times, of an absolute difference between that literature which is ours, and which began around the time of Baudelaire and Flaubert, and the classical literature which preceded it.⁷²

It is interesting that Jameson rules out Lukács' intention to provide a revolutionary instruction for writers; Jameson puts his stress on Lukács' periodisation of literary history. For Jameson, narrative is nothing less than a consequence of periodisation. In this sense, one can understand the way in which Jameson interprets Lukács' idea of narrative, a narrative that is constructed by the use of the past tense.⁷³ Nevertheless, this main feature of narrative, that is to say, the ideological synthesis of totality, seems not to be directly applied to Jameson's concept of narrative. Whereas Lukács draws on an epic narrator to support his privileging of narration, Jameson takes no such figure to explain the construction of narrative throughout his works. Jameson rather encourages the view that realism is better understood by the notion of “narrative”. Jameson claims as follows:

We ... now need to introduce yet another crucial concept, whose signal absence from many contemporary critiques of representation weakens and oversimplifies the theoretical problems at stake here: this is the notion of *narrative* itself, and it has the initial advantage of at once dispelling forever the temptations of the copy theory of art, and of problematizing beyond recognition many of the assumptions implicit in the notion of representation itself.⁷⁴

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid., p. 199.

⁷³ See Georg Lukács, ‘Narrate or Describe?’, in *Writer and Critic*, trans. by Arthur Kahn (London: Merlin Press, 1978), p. 130. According to Lukács, description contemporises everything, while narration recounts the past.

⁷⁴ Jameson, *Signatures of the Visible*, p. 165.

Rejecting the conventional pre-concept of realism – the ‘passive reflection and copying, subordinate to some external reality’,⁷⁵ Jameson concludes that ‘realism and its specific narrative forms construct their new world by *programming* their readers: by training them in new habits and practices, which amount to whole new subject-positions in a new kind of space; producing new kinds of action, but by way of the production of new categories of the event and of experience, of temporality and of causality, which also preside over what will now come to be thought of as reality’.⁷⁶ As Homer suggests, to take the notion of narrative rather than representation as such ‘avoids the debate over realism sliding into problems of reflection theories of art, as well as questions of verisimilitude, which seeks to identify the object in question with its representation’.⁷⁷ Endorsing the philosophical presupposition of subject and object, Jameson’s idea of realism is located in the tradition of Hegelian dialectics, which is produced by Lukács and Adorno, even though it also shares a didactic purpose of realism with Brecht. No doubt, Jameson’s formulation champions Adorno’s idea of the subject based on the category of mediation whereby subjectivity can be transformed into higher form by a Hegelian sublation.⁷⁸ This means that realism is *praxis* rather than theoretical criticism.

In a sense, this is where Jameson’s theoretical framework of realism unveils the other side of itself. Describing realism in terms of *praxis*, Jameson underscores readers rather than writers in his polemics against the conventional reflection theory of art. No doubt, Jameson’s formulation is influenced by Barthes’ theory of writing and reading. Interestingly, such an idea focusing on the role of readers seems to stem

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 162.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 166.

⁷⁷ Homer, *Fredric Jameson*, p. 121.

⁷⁸ Theodor W. Adorno, ‘Subject-Object’, in *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader* (New York: Continuum Press, 1982), p. 499.

from Sartre's conceptualisation of knowledgeable readers in modern civil society: 'for the present, the writer relied on an audience of specialists'.⁷⁹ However, Sartre's formulation still sheds light on the way in which writers establish the communicative correlation with readers. As Eagleton maintains, the theoretical shift from writers to readers in criticism is nothing less than a mirror image of a cultural transition that has been prompted by a political concern that 'the passive consumer of literature had to make way for the active co-creator'.⁸⁰ Eagleton continues:

The secret was finally out that readers were quite as vital to the existence of writing as authors, and this downtrodden, long-despised class of men and women were finally girding their political loins. If 'All power to the soviets!' had something of a musty ring to it, it could at least be rewritten as 'All power to the readers!'.⁸¹

This is the symptomatic phenomenon raised by the decline of realism in following the change of reality; the postmodern category of reality is now expanded to the field of non-realistic category such as fantasy, myth, exoticism and virtual reality.⁸² Jameson endorses Barthes' understanding of realism to the extent that the reality effect totally depends on readers' interest. The fact that Jameson's framework mainly focuses on theory causes indifference to the process of cultural production in the understanding of cultural texts. This tendency constitutes one of the most problematic aspects in Jameson's theoretical method marked by its overestimation of structural determination. Unlike Lukács and Sartre, Jameson emphasises the break of social transformation too much, and then does not reserve a place in which an author

⁷⁹ Sartre, *What Is Literature?*, pp. 96-95.

⁸⁰ Eagleton, *After Theory*, p. 53.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 53-54.

⁸² See *ibid.*, p. 67.

can establish a mediation with the audience. It seems to me that Jameson's periodisation causes this problem.

Jameson still retains this idea of narrative in his consideration of modernity: 'modernity is not a concept, philosophical or otherwise, but a narrative category',⁸³ in the sense that 'the terms 'modern' and 'modernity' always bring some form of periodizing logic with them'.⁸⁴ It seems to me that this argument clearly reveals the very kernel of Jameson's formulation: 'we cannot not periodize',⁸⁵ and a new narrative always contains the break with an old dominant narrative; hence, the act of periodisation is an impulse towards the alternation of present systems. However, as David Cunningham writes, nobody can easily deny that modernity is a periodising narrative, but 'this does *not*, in itself, justify the argument that modernity only has meaning as a 'projective' framework for so many 'storytelling possibilities'.⁸⁶ What Cunningham's criticism highlights is the way in which Jameson simply reduces the complexity of modernity to a one-dimensional facet. Even though Jameson's formulation always aspires to the level of the dialectic, it is undeniable that his own writing sometimes falls into the problem of reductionism.⁸⁷

However, Jameson's reformulation of realism raises an issue about the relationship between aesthetic ideologies and history. In *The Political Unconscious*, Jameson suggests that 'a narrative ideologeme whose outer form, secreted like a shell or exoskeleton, continues to emit its ideological message long after the extinction of its host'.⁸⁸ This is the way in which the narrative of literary realism still includes a genetic element of wish-fulfilling romance. From this perspective, Jameson closely

⁸³ Fredric Jameson, *A Singular Modernity: Essay on the Ontology of the Present* (London: Verso, 2002), p. 40.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

⁸⁶ David Cunningham, 'The Anxiety of Returns', *Radical Philosophy*, 120 (2003), 41-43 (p. 42).

reads Balzac's realism, focusing on the relationship of desire and history. A significant factor in Jameson's analysis of early realism lies in the way in which he distinguishes Balzac from Flaubert, for while wish-fulfilling fantasy is linked to history by Balzac, it is effaced in Flaubertian realism. In a sense, Jameson's analysis is concentrated on a psychological motivation that produces a difference between Balzac and Flaubert; the formula of desire for history in Balzac is conspicuously changed into the formula of desire to desire in Flaubert. Furthermore, these formulas are crucially substituted for the formula of a negation of the negation of desire in naturalism and modernism.

Following Lukács, Jameson defines the Balzacian narrative as a rhetoric of transparency in which the worldview of the bourgeois class in historically ascending moment dominates cultural power. According to Jameson's analysis, literary modernism is genetically originated by the political failure of bourgeois subjectivity – the bourgeois monadic self-confident subjectivity is subsequently declined by their repression of the proletariat.⁸⁹ It is in this sense that Jameson's formula is evidently a mixture of Hegel, inspired by Alexander Kojève's reading of Hegel, and Freud; Jameson attempts to analyse the psychological foundation of the ethical problem in Hegel's dialectic of master and slave.

We can see how this works as Jameson strives to reveal an ideologeme of Nietzsche's formula of "*ressentiment*". In his analysis of Gissing, for instance, Jameson suggests that the *ressentiment* manifested in Gissing's novel reveals a different condition from that of Balzacian realism, in the sense that the ethical solution to social conflicts in Gissing's novel stands for an ideological containment in

⁸⁷ For another criticism of this reductive tendency embodied in Jameson's formulation, see Homer, *Fredric Jameson*, 187.

⁸⁸ Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, p. 151.

⁸⁹ See *ibid.*, p. 222.

which 'the relative freedom of Balzacian modalization is no longer available'.⁹⁰ In a sense, the eventful situation of class struggle sharply requires the political position of working class in order to attack their class enemy. By confronting this social reality, literary naturalists such as Zola and Gissing more photographically described the aspect of class struggle than did Balzacian realism. According to Jameson, literary naturalism's moral solution to the real conflicts can be seen as a symptomatic consequence of the failure of totalisation. Relying on Lukács' argument about the novel hero as the epic individual, Jameson argues that the *Sollen*, a solution to bridge the gap between duty and being, cannot be attained by a single duty,⁹¹ in the sense that the subject is constitutive only when 'the ethical subject is constitutive'.⁹² In other words, the ethical subject comes to exist when 'the desire to know a world cleansed of all wanting and all willing transforms the subject into an a-subjective, constructive and constructing embodiment of cognitive function'.⁹³

Confronted with an insoluble logical paradox in an ideological contradiction, the political unconscious attempts 'by logical permutations and combinations to find a way out of its intolerable closure and to produce a "solution," something it can begin to do owing to the semic dissociations already implicit in the opposition'.⁹⁴ Therefore, Balzac's ideology provides the axiomatic of his narrative as the condition of possibility on which the mode of narrative contains the conflicts of ideology, desire and unconscious as in the case of the mode of production: the mode of production is a *structural combinatoire* in which various historical planes synchronically coexist.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 195.

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 194.

⁹² Georg Lukács, *The Theory of Novel: A Historico-philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature*, trans. by Anna Bostock (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1971), p. 65.

⁹³ Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, p. 195.

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 167.

For Jameson, it is the heterogeneity of narrative that allows Balzac's realism to register the hidden reality in history. Balzac's realistic narrative is properly operated by a psychic situation in which 'the centered subject has not yet emerged',⁹⁵ precisely because there is a discrepancy between Balzac's political position and historical reality that imposes a lack of wish-fulfilment on Balzac's imaginary ego. From this standpoint, what is at stake here is that Balzac's realism is not so much a realistic narrative in which the vivid historical reality is squarely reflected, but rather wish-fulfilling fantasy in which the friction of desire and reality principle always produces ideological closure. Therefore, the validity of Balzac's realism resides in the way in which the realistic narrative symbolically registers the real as a trace of ideological closure. Jameson's consideration of realistic narrative as wish-fulfilling fantasy symbolically recording insoluble psychic conflicts is followed by a new way of understanding the classical Marxian aesthetic criterion – the triumph of realism. To quote Jameson:

It then sometimes happens that the objections are irrefutable, and that the wish-fulfilling imagination does its preparatory work so well that the wish, and desire itself, are confounded by the unanswerable resistance of the Real. This is the sense in which Lukács is right about Balzac, but for the wrong reasons: not Balzac's deeper sense of political and historical realities, but rather his incorrigible fantasy demands ultimately raise History itself over against him, as absent cause, as that on which desire must come to grief.⁹⁶

From this perspective, the triumph of realism resides in the symbolic narrative of its frustrated utopian impulse contained in the wish-fulfilling imaginary narrative; paradoxically, there is no "realistic" in the triumph of realism. In this way, Jameson does not accept the classical notion of the triumphant aspect of realism in general, in

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 179.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 183.

the sense that the phenomenon is nothing but a consequence of premature realism and only appeared in the particular situation into which pre-capitalist subjectivity more freely involves than that of high capitalism does. That is to say, the reified condition of higher capitalism imposes the heavy weight on subjectivity, and consequently induces it to draw on an ethical judgement about reality. In Lukács' terms, this is the function of ethics by which 'the utopian longing of the soul is a legitimate desire'.⁹⁷

According to Jameson, it is in this respect that the imaginary narrative in Balzacian realism is interactively combined with Balzac's desire to realise the ideological axiomatic. To put it in another way, there appears to be no ethics in Balzacian realism in the sense that pre-reified Balzac's subjectivity gives rise to a variety of narrative modality symbolically registered his psychological conflicts in a deeper layer of his narrative. It is for this reason that Jameson regards narrative as a symptom of the repressed political unconscious in which a tension between epistemological demand and aesthetic containment produces the self-cancellation of realism.

Postulating History as an absolute horizon of narrative, Jameson accepts the model of repression by which Freud constructs his formula of psychoanalysis. However, Jameson never mentions here the question as to whether the Freudian psychoanalytic model can be applied to the analysis of the collective unconscious. Strictly speaking, there is a point missing in Jameson's eclecticism that leads to his overlooking some mediation between individual and collective dimensions; Jameson too easily presumes the link between the mode of production and narrative without any consideration of possible mediation; his identification of narrative with the

⁹⁷ Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, p. 115.

articulation of differential desires inevitably leads to the acknowledgement of accordance between fantasy and narrative.

For Jameson, the unstable subjectivity of Balzac endowing Balzacian narrative with heterogeneity cannot be severed from the historical situation. Subsequently, Jameson preserves this formula in his analysis of Gissing and Conrad, respectively corresponding to each stage of the mode of production from high capitalism to imperial capitalism. For this reason, Jameson simply neglects to investigate the relationship between individual fantasy as the effect of desire and the collective narrative as the representational system. Narrative cannot be simply identified with individual fantasy, in the sense that fantasy emerges from the closure of narrative. In short, fantasy does not need a narrator, insofar as it is like a still image as defined in Lacan's terms.⁹⁸ In fantasy, thus, there are no events and stories, but only frozen images to avoid demonstrating a traumatic scene.

It seems to me that Jameson's positive reception of psychoanalysis allows his formulation of realism to miss the distinction between fantasy and narrative. In this sense, the combination of the mode of production and narrative, of class and class-consciousness, is merely the effect of a psychic situation in which the political unconscious always betrays the narrator's intention. To exploit Jonathan Arac's terms, however, the political is not "below" but rather "beside" psychical articulation.⁹⁹ As Arac properly points out, 'the special danger of the "political unconscious" is to isolate the literary text just as classic psychoanalysis did the patient'.¹⁰⁰

Needless to say, the concept of the political unconscious may be used to repress the visible "consciousness" of the text for reading the invisible trace of

⁹⁸ See Dylan Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 60.

⁹⁹ See Jonathan Arac, *Critical Genealogies: Historical Situations for Postmodern Literary Studies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), p. 265.

unconscious. From this standpoint, "History", presupposed by Jameson's formula, symbolically designates the nightmarish reality principle whereby the pleasure principle must be frustrated. To put it another way, "History" is an unpredictable monster created by Dr. Frankenstein's desire that strives to destroy Frankenstein's autonomy. No doubt, this is different from what Lukács aims to do with his defence of the realistic triumph; it must be stressed that Lukács' realism obviously proposes to demonstrate how to overcome the pessimistic perspective on history. As Jonathan Arac points out, 'Jameson omitted the historical-political consciousness actually available in the work', standing in the modernist perspective that history as the realm of necessity is a nightmare.¹⁰¹

As has been discussed, the way in which Jameson focuses on the structure of narrative rather than the agencies of constructing narrative seems contradictory; Jameson suggests that our task is to construct narrative, while his analysis of narrative results from the attempt to yoke together such theoretically incommensurable systems such as Marxism, structuralism and psychoanalysis. Jameson does not properly explain how the gap between the construction of narrative and the analysis of narrative structure can be dissolved; he simply presupposes the category of *praxis* by which such a contradiction is realised. No doubt, this contradiction gives rise to Jameson's theoretical dilemma. Jameson confesses:

It seems to me that this framework that I have developed – for me an historical framework – is the one in which one best does that and best provides a coherent narrative even if it is a narrative that explains incoherence. This is what I think we have to do today. Then we come back to some of the things we have talked about, formal failure, for example.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Arac, *Critical Genealogies*, p. 276.

¹⁰² Jameson, 'Marxism and Historicity of Theory', p. 369.

In this way, Jameson acknowledges the impossibility of such a project in which narrative can be a constructing mediation between idea and realisation. Jameson's idea of narrative is still inclined to the Sartrean idea of writing, which asserts that the failure of the artist's life designates the truth of the artwork, to which I will return. As Homer points out, this dilemma partly emerges from the condition of late capitalism in which 'the promise the dialectic aspires to, the unity of subject and object, of theory and practice, the attainment of the concrete, of the totality itself, can never be realized and the levels of abstraction and difficulty inscribed in theoretical texts stand as a mark of that failure'.¹⁰³ This is the milieu in which an emergent aim is not to begin a battle against the ruling class in particular but rather to construct a new subject against the "de-humanisation" of capitalism in general.

Far from what Lukács observes, today there is no realism but a "realism effect" in the sense that description has become dominant in narrative and at the same time narration has disintegrated into monologue or stammering. As the principle of realism is realised more and more in everyday life, the aesthetics of realism declines more and more in narrative. In other words, realism comes to be the "effect" whereby narrative reveals itself as the utopian impulse in which the Lukácsean reconciliation of subject and object is consequently failed. This is where the idea of postmodernism has superseded the notion of realism in the contemporary cultural scene. In this sense, Jameson's theoretical intervention into the debates revolving around postmodernism can be regarded as his own attempt to investigate the condition of realism, precisely because he still retains the category of subject and object throughout his analysis of postmodern cultural production. In the following, my concern is the way in which Jameson reinstates the idea of realism in postmodern culture.

4. Jameson and Postmodernism

Today, Jameson is unquestionably the most important Marxist theorist concerned with the theoretical debates on postmodernism. Throughout a series of theoretical interventions into the debates of postmodernism, Jameson revitalises Marxism and its dialectical method. The postmodern rejection of modernism precisely arises from the contemporary scepticism of subjectivity. In the various forms of anti-rationalism, postmodernism attacks the modernist category of subjectivity. Against this, Jameson defends the Hegelian categories of subject and object, and endorses Adorno's criticism of any attempt to abandon the category of subject.¹⁰⁴

In a sense, the postmodern tendency arises from the way of rethinking the process of linguistic signification that serves as the unique style of modernism. As Jameson claims, 'the explosion of modern literature into a host of distinct private styles and mannerisms has been followed by a linguistic fragmentation of social life itself to the point where the norm itself is eclipsed'.¹⁰⁵ Therefore, the postmodern recuperation of realism raises the reconsideration of the communicative medium as such. In this way, Jameson's consideration of postmodernism leads to an analysis of the way in which the technique of postmodern aesthetics (for example, the postmodern logic of pastiche) validates its own category of reality.

In 'Postmodernism and Consumer Society', Jameson defines pastiche as one of the most significant features that appears in the postmodern phenomena. In particular, Jameson finds the distinctive feature of the technique of pastiche, which is revealed in postmodern visual art. Comparing pastiche to parody, Jameson attempts to

¹⁰³ Homer, *Fredric Jameson*, p. 26.

¹⁰⁴ See Christopher Wise, *The Marxian Hermeneutics of Fredric Jameson* (New York: Peter Lang, 1995), p. 87.

¹⁰⁵ Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, p. 17.

draw an aesthetic distinction between modernism and postmodernism. For Jameson, 'both pastiche and parody involve the imitation or, better still, the mimicry of other styles and particularly of the mannerisms and stylistic twitches of other styles'.¹⁰⁶

Jameson goes on to explain the aspect of parody as follows:

Now parody capitalizes on the uniqueness of these styles and seizes on their idiosyncrasies and eccentricities to produce an imitation which mocks the original. I won't say that the satiric impulse is conscious in all forms of parody: in any case, a good or great parodist has to have some secret sympathy for the original, just as a great mimic has to have the capacity to put himself/herself in the place of the person imitated. Still, the general effect of parody is – whether in sympathy or with malice – to cast ridicule on the private nature of these stylistic mannerisms and their excessiveness and eccentricity with respect to the way people normally speak or write.¹⁰⁷

Distinguished from parody's hidden motive that is prompted by such a satiric impulse, pastiche is 'a neutral practice of such mimicry, without parody's ulterior motive, without the satirical impulse, without laughter, without that still latent feeling that there exists something *normal* compared with which what is being imitated is rather comic'.¹⁰⁸ For Jameson, the fragmentation and privatisation of modern literature demolishes the linguistic norm thereby mocking the private languages and peculiar styles. This disappearance of the linguistic matrix for parody produces the cultural situation in which heterogeneously stylistic experiments have been appearing since the 1960s. In this respect, Jameson calls pastiche 'blank parody, parody that has lost its sense of humour'.¹⁰⁹

Jameson develops this conceptualisation of pastiche as a postmodern technique to considering the aesthetic comparison between Vincent van Gogh and

¹⁰⁶ Fredric Jameson, 'Postmodernism and Consumer Society', in *The Cultural Turn: Selected Writings on the Postmodern, 1983-1998* (London: Verso, 1998), p. 4.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 5.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

Andy Warhol; Jameson attempts to clear up an aesthetic difference that determines the meaning of textual representation through the contextually different technique of composing the visual images. For Jameson, the distinctive factor that separates Warhol from van Gogh lies in the way in which Warhol's painting 'no longer speaks to us with any of the immediacy of Van Gogh's footgear'.¹¹⁰ In fact, it is not difficult to signify the glossy image of Warhol's *Diamond Dust Shoes* according to the hermeneutic paradigm. In this way, Warhol's painting can be interpreted to the deeper degree that its image implicates the historicity of Auschwitz or the reality of the tragic fire in a dance hall. However, this contextually hermeneutic gesture cannot be completed by Warhol's textuality itself. The text is not fixed in a single meaning, in the sense that its surface meaning is freely floating from Auschwitz to the dance hall, as in the case of the images on the cover of commercial magazines. From this perspective, Jameson argues:

There are some other significant differences between the highmodernist and the postmodernist moment, between the shoes of Van Gogh and the shoes of Andy Warhol, on which we must now very briefly dwell. The first and most evident is the emergence of a new kind of flatness or depthlessness, a new kind of superficiality in the most literal sense, perhaps the supreme formal feature of all the postmodernisms to which we will have occasion to return in a number of other contexts.¹¹¹

Jameson's conceptualisation of depthlessness seems to properly explain the postmodern aspect in contemporary visual art. However, there still remains the question of mediation between text and artist's action or motivation for creating the category of flatness or depthlessness by means of his technical experiments. In other words, it is surely possible that Warhol's action influences the textual depthlessness in

¹¹⁰ Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, p. 8.

the process of reproducing actually existing images. Jameson presupposes the hidden mimetic impulse actually prompting Warhol's repetitive aesthetic production, yet avoids considering the artist's attitude towards reality, which may determine the logic of form.

Different from Jameson's analysis that posits pastiche as the non-intentional technique, thereby erasing the trace of the subjective action, Thomas Crow finds 'the reality of suffering and death' and 'straightforward expression of feeling'¹¹² underneath Warhol's glossy images of commodity fetishism. This interpretation seems to reveal the hidden political action originally producing Warhol's technique of pastiche; pastiche as a technique always already raises the problem of the subjective action, which is supposed to determine its formality. In this respect, Jameson's conceptualisation of pastiche as a neutral practice distinguished from the modernist technique of parody seems problematic, because it is difficult to say that pastiche aims at creating nothing through its own action. In short, pastiche also presupposes the category of mediation, insofar as the subject using the technique intends to involve with the object.

The problem is that Jameson's periodisation is too reductive, when drawing a distinction between modernism and postmodernism. As Homer points out, Jameson's periodisation of literary moments corresponding to the change of mode of production 'can be recapitulated at different levels and historical stages with a well-nigh Hegelian obsession for ternary schema', and is always 'at risk of collapsing into a mechanistic formalism'.¹¹³ Peter Nicholls also indicates the problem of Jameson's distinction between modernism and postmodernism; according to him, such a rigid line of

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

¹¹² Thomas Crow, 'Saturday Disasters: Trace and Reference in Early Warhol', in *Reconstructing Modernism*, ed. by Serge Guilbaut (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1990), pp. 313-17.

¹¹³ Homer, *Fredric Jameson*, p. 124.

demarcation between modernism and postmodernism gives rise to Jameson's controversial definition of postmodernism.¹¹⁴ In such a reductive way, Jameson simply forgets the presence of writers who do not fit in his definition, a definition that postmodernism is associated with spatiality, non-narrative, and immanence, while modernism is related to temporality, narrative and memory. As Nicholls writes, there is a question as to 'how otherwise to account for what we might regard as the main strand of recent American fiction – work by Toni Morrison, Robert Coover, Ishmael Reed, Jayne Anne Phillips, Bobbie Ann Mason, Don DeLillo (the list could be much longer) – which is distinguished above all by precisely its preoccupation with questions of narrative and memory'.¹¹⁵

Depending on this problematic periodisation, Jameson's formulation entertains the technique of pastiche as the new formal logic of realism responding to the postmodern category of reality. In this respect, Jameson celebrates Doctorow's literary strategy in *Ragtime*, in that Doctorow draws on the technique of pastiche to recuperate the historical consciousness, going beyond postmodern fragmentation and reification. Jameson argues that 'by turning the past into something which is obviously a black simulacrum he suddenly makes us realize that this is the only image of the past we have, in truth a projection on the walls of Plato's cave'.¹¹⁶ Jameson explains a specific effect of pastiche in such a way that the technique shows the loss of history. In Jameson's terms, the loss of history does not mean 'the disappearance of images of history'.¹¹⁷ Jameson goes on to say that 'it is effectively a way of satisfying a chemical craving for historicity with a product which is a substitute for it and which

¹¹⁴ Peter Nicholls, 'Divergences: Modernism, Postmodernism, Jameson and Lyotard', *Critical Quarterly*, 3 (1991), 1-18 (p. 3).

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ See Anders Stephanson, 'Regarding Postmodernism: A Conversation with Fredric Jameson', in *Postmodernism/Jameson/Critique*, ed. by Douglas Kellner (Washington: Mouton Press, 1989), p. 62.

blocks it'.¹¹⁸ In this way, *Ragtime* can be regarded as 'a seemingly realistic novel', but 'in reality a nonrepresentational work'.¹¹⁹ Jameson claims:

This historical novel can no longer set out to represent the historical past; it can only "represent" our ideas and stereotypes about that past (which thereby at once becomes "pop history"). Cultural production is thereby driven back inside a mental space which is no longer that of the old monadic subject but rather that of some degraded collective "objective spirit": it can no longer gaze directly on some putative real world, at some reconstruction of a past history which was once itself a present; rather, as in Plato's cave, it must trace our mental images of that past upon its confining walls.¹²⁰

For Jameson, such an effect of pastiche produced by Doctorow's novel is nothing less than 'a "realism" that is meant to derive from the shock of grasping that confinement and of slowly becoming aware of a new and original historical situation in which we are condemned to seek History by way of our own pop images and simulacra of that history, which itself remains forever out of reach'.¹²¹ Thus, the realism of pastiche is a homeopathic medicine thereby undoing postmodernism 'by the methods of postmodernism'.¹²² Jameson's idea of homeopathic realism seems to rely on Sartre's notion of *analogon* which constitutes the kernel of Sartrean realism. For Sartre, *analogon* is nothing less than a material substitution for the imaginary object. Jameson regards the concept of *analogon* as an emphasis on 'the operation of reading analogies off the allegorical object, rather than discovering them ontologically, as "realities" in the world'.¹²³ In this way, Jameson postulates the realistic aspect of postmodern art in that such an artistic technique as pastiche shows the real through unreal images.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 60.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, p. 23.

¹²⁰ Ibid., p. 25.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Stephanson, 'Regarding Postmodernism', p. 59.

However, what Jameson's explanation of the effect of pastiche reveals here is contradictory, in the sense that the Sartrean concept of *analogon* clearly presupposes the subject-object dialectic, the very methodology of modernism. Yet, Jameson's formulation is supported by the presupposition that pastiche is a by-product of an aesthetic dilemma caused by the death of the subject; Jameson regards the modernist category of individual subjectivity as the very condition of aesthetic production. It seems to me, however, that this problem only enhances Jameson's ambivalence towards postmodernism.

Without any consideration of the contradictory aspect of the combination of Sartre and postmodernism, Jameson defines postmodern art as 'the necessary failure of art and the aesthetic, the failure of the new, the imprisonment in the past'.¹²⁴ Again, Jameson's formulation reminds us Sartre's idea of poetry, the idea that 'poetry is a case of the loser winning'.¹²⁵ Jameson's adaptation of the loser winning, of course, is an inverted version of Sartre; Jameson formulates the winner losing rather than the loser winning. Jameson calls this as 'a strange quasi-Sartrean irony' that 'the more powerful the vision of some increasingly total system or logic ... the more powerless the reader comes to feel'.¹²⁶ To put this in another way, even though fully totalising postmodern reality, such an attempt cannot preserve the critical distance between subject and object. This formulation reinforces Jameson's idea of form, to be elaborated in his analysis of postmodernism: crucial is the ideology of form rather than content in that form is a symptom of political unconscious in which the absent cause of history is symbolically inscribed by figurative language.

¹²³ Ibid., p. 63.

¹²⁴ Jameson, 'Postmodernism and Consumer Society', p. 7.

¹²⁵ Sartre, *What is Literature?*, p. 24.

¹²⁶ Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, p. 5.

In this respect, Jameson explains the forms of modernism that 'inscribe a new sense of the absent global colonial system on the very syntax of poetic language itself'.¹²⁷ For Jameson, the aesthetic aspect of modernism shows that 'expression requires the category of the individual monad, but it also shows us the heavy price to be paid for that precondition, dramatizing the unhappy paradox that when you constitute your individual subjectivity as a self-sufficient field and a closed realm, you thereby shut yourself off from everything else and condemn yourself to the mindless solitude of the monad, buried alive and condemned to a prison cell without egress'.¹²⁸

In Jameson's sense, as postmodernism emerges, this self-sufficient monadic subjectivism stops existing. Jameson connects this postmodern phenomenon to the historical eclipse of the autonomous bourgeois ego that is prompted by the transition of the mode of production. Jameson argues that postmodernism implicates the end of modernist aesthetic style, 'the end of the distinctive individual brush stroke'.¹²⁹ Jameson regards this new component as the death of the subject – the end of the bourgeois individualism as such.¹³⁰ For Jameson, this is symptomatically shown in a series of new philosophical narratives which draw a distinctive line between the old and the new. This idea is closely combined with Jameson's formulation of periodisation. In this respect, observing the philosophical transformation that is mainly prompted by French philosophers such as Foucault, Derrida and Deleuze, Jameson argues that the notion of postmodernism is not 'another word for the description of a particular style', but rather 'a periodizing concept whose function is to correlate the emergence of a new type of social life and a new economic order'.¹³¹ To verify this historical transition, Jameson adopts Ernest Mandel's formulation of

¹²⁷ Ibid., p. 411.

¹²⁸ Ibid., p. 15.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Jameson, 'Postmodernism and Consumer Society', p. 5.

late capitalism. In this way, Jameson confirms that the new historical stage of capitalism, so-called post-industrial or consumer society, the society of the spectacle or multinational and global capitalism, has changed the condition of aesthetic production. In fact, what is implicit in Jameson's suggestion is that postmodernism must be grasped as the cultural logic of economic transition in light of the dialectic of form and content, not as the stylistic and aesthetic variation of modernism.

Therefore, for Jameson postmodernism cannot simply be regarded as something that happened only in the sphere of style, because its aesthetic practice is accomplished in abolishing the category of subject on which the style of modernism is based. Postmodernism emerges from the very ruin of modernist narrative, and can be called the symptom of the crisis of modernist representation. Hence, the postmodern phenomena as such are referring to something that happened in the dimension of socio-economic reality. From this perspective, Jameson looks back to define the old aesthetic narratives such as modernism. Here, it is interesting that the way in which Jameson delineates the narrative of modernism is inductive; Jameson's definition of modernism always already presupposes fully existing postmodernism in our time. In Jameson's formulation, postmodernism is a premise which proves the end of modernist ideology. No doubt, this simple syllogism also causes Jameson's theoretical problem throughout his argument on postmodernism.

According to Jameson, modernism is the first crisis of representation which corresponds to 'classical or market capitalism in terms of a logic of the grid'.¹³² However, 'the problems of figuration that concern us will only become visible in the next stage, the passage from market to monopoly capital, or what Lenin called the

¹³¹ Ibid., p. 3.

¹³² Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, p. 410.

“stage of imperialism”¹³³. This socio-economic condition prompts a contradiction ‘between lived experience and structure, or between a phenomenological description of the life of an individual and a more properly structural model of the condition of existence of that experience’.¹³⁴ Jameson’s contention proceeds with the presupposition that the rift between experience and structure is growing wider. In this way, ‘the truth of that experience no longer coincides with the place in which it takes place’.¹³⁵ For Jameson, this cultural condition that precipitates the discrepancy between experience and its material matrix precisely provides the paradoxical situation – ‘a situation in which we can say that if individual experience is authentic, then it cannot be true; and that if a scientific or cognitive model of the same content is true, then it escapes individual experience’.¹³⁶

From this perspective, it is evident that modernism must confront a situation that imposes the impossibility of formal containment – there is something missing from its representation. Therefore, the emergence of postmodernism can be considered the result of the deeper crisis of representation which is caused by the historical change of socio-economic conditions pushing the gap between experience and structure beyond imperial capitalism to late capitalism. In this way, what is implicit in Jameson’s analysis of the situation is to disclose the disappeared something, the absent cause of the aesthetic production in Althusserian terms: the logic of capital. For Jameson, postmodernism is an impasse of representation which results from the new multinational space in which ‘not merely the older city but even the nation-state itself has ceased to play a central functional and formal role in a process that has in a new quantum leap of capital prodigiously expanded beyond

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid., p. 411.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

them, leaving them behind as ruined and archaic remains of earlier stages in the development of this mode of production'.¹³⁷

Jameson emphasises the nightmarish aspect of postmodern spatiality as 'symptoms and expressions of a new and historically original dilemma', in the sense that it transforms individual subjects into schizophrenic experiences, that is to say, 'a multidimensional set of radically discontinuous realities, whose frames range from the still surviving spaces of bourgeois private life all the way to the unimaginable decentering of global capital itself'.¹³⁸ In short, both realms of conscious and unconscious are always already assimilated with the logic of capital. Therefore, what Jameson is interested in in his analysis of postmodernism is not the way in which socio-economic structure determines the construction of cultural forms, but rather the way in which the mode of production involves the aesthetic production. In this respect, Jameson's analysis of postmodernism ultimately aims at revealing the last stance of cultural production, that is to say, the logic of late capitalism. Precisely revolving around the hidden logic of the material phase, cultural production is mediated to the socio-economic stance.

Jameson presupposes that postmodernism is a qualitatively different feature from modernism, in the sense that the new spatiality, in which individual subjects lose their identities and become fragmented and schizophrenically decentred, overwhelmingly dominates the sphere of everyday life. By this transformation, "monadic relativism", whereby modernism can produce its unique styles to overcome the crisis of representation, is no longer possible, in conditions where the distance between representation and its object totally disappears. Seemingly, this desperate cultural condition allows the subject to confront only the situation in which 'each

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 412.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 413.

consciousness is a closed world, so that a representation of the social totality now must take the [impossible] form of a coexistence of those sealed subjective worlds and their peculiar interaction'.¹³⁹ The modernist formal practice that strives to overcome this uncommunicative situation finally reaches the literary value called "irony" whose 'philosophical ideology often takes the form of a vulgar appropriation of Einstein's theory of relativity'.¹⁴⁰ In this way, it is not surprising that Jameson simply considers postmodernism as a product of the modernist aesthetic impasse, which is caused by the emergence of late capitalist spatiality. The postmodern space is a new historical phase in which any possibility of mediation must be vanished.

Jameson's contention, which substantiates the form of postmodernism at the level of historical and economic materiality, presupposes that postmodernism is another attempt for representation: postmodernism is based on the aesthetic principle of realism. To quote Jameson:

The argument for a certain authenticity in these otherwise patently ideological productions depends on the prior proposition that what we have been calling postmodern (or multinational) space is not merely a cultural ideology or fantasy but has genuine historical (and socioeconomic) reality as a third great original expansion of capitalism around the globe ... The distorted and unreflexive attempts of newer cultural production to explore and to express this new space must then also, in their own fashion, be considered as so many approaches to the representation of (a new) reality (to use a more antiquated language). As paradoxical as the terms may seem, they may thus, following a classic interpretive option, be read as peculiar new forms of realism (or at least of the mimesis of reality), while at the same time they can equally well be analyzed as so many attempts to distract and divert us from that reality or to disguise its contradictions and resolve them in the guise of various formal mystification.¹⁴¹

The ontological presence of postmodernism is related to the paradoxical aspect of capitalism: the movement of capitalism is negative and positive all at once. In this

¹³⁹ Ibid., p. 412.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., p. 49.

way, Jameson argues that the dialectical consideration of postmodernism as 'progress and catastrophe all together'¹⁴² must be demanded. However, as Jamie Morgan argues, the way in which Jameson conceptualises postmodernism is quite ambivalent, in the sense that he uses this term in two ways: as an actually existing situation and as a social theory of such a situation. The problem is that Jameson does not consider the gap between these different dimensions. As Morgan argues, 'this entails the fatal error of conflation of an irrealist philosophy with the empirical it sets out to analyse'.¹⁴³

On this contradictory theoretical basis, Jameson regards postmodernism as a desperate pursuit of the mimetic impulse to map out the multinational space. The way in which Jameson delineates postmodernism as the products of the mimetic impulse in late capitalism raises the question about representation in general. That is to say, Jameson retains the category of subject and object, in the sense that the mimetic impulse of the subject is still a significant factor in the process of constituting cultural politics. In other words, the categories of subject and object effectively provide a cultural strategy in a situation in which, in Baudrillard's terms, critical distance totally disappears. Yet, it seems to me that Jameson's defence of the categories of subject and object is as contradictory as his ambivalence towards postmodernism. Let me explain this with Adorno's conceptualisation of the relationship between subject and object.

For Jameson, the postmodern rejection of the distinction between subject and object forces the subject to have schizophrenic experiences. However, the problem is that Jameson does not properly investigate the way in which the distance between subject and object disappears. Is it the consequence of objectifying the subject, or of subjectifying the object? Alternatively, is it the identification of subject and object? Is

¹⁴² Ibid., p. 47.

it rather the separation of subject and object that Adorno indicates? According to Adorno, 'the separation of subject and object is both real and semblance'.¹⁴⁴ Stated another way, the separation is cognitively real, but not historically; the divided category of subject and object is surely related to epistemology. To quote Adorno:

As soon as it is fixed without mediation, the separation becomes ideology, its normal form. Mind then arrogates to itself the status of being absolutely independent – which it is not: mind's claim to independence announces its claim to domination. Once radically separated from the object, subject reduces the object to itself; subject swallows object, forgetting how much it is object itself.¹⁴⁵

What is implicit in Adorno's argument is that the subject gives rise to the death of critical distance by announcing its own independence. In short, the death of critical distance is a subjective ideology, an ironic ideology that announces the non-independence of the subject. Jameson's attempt to combine postmodern ideas and Marxism, therefore, does not resolve this problem, but rather produces many questionable discourses revolving around postmodernism. In this respect, Best and Kellner criticise for the way he adopts the Baudrillardian implosion of the subject-object dialectic, which results in 'the demise of critical subjectivity and undermines a Marxian theory of praxis and a belief in the practical efficacy of the subject'.¹⁴⁶

For Jameson, postmodernism is an aesthetic symptom that implicitly signifies the transformation of the socio-economic reality. Thus, nobody can freely reject the category of postmodernism, even though he poignantly criticises the phenomena; the logic of postmodernism already constitutes itself beyond the ethical judgement.

¹⁴³ Jamie Morgan, 'Empire Inhuman?: The Social Ontology of Global Theory', *Journal of Critical Realism*, 2 (2003), 95-126 (p. 97).

¹⁴⁴ Theodor W. Adorno, *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*, trans. by Henry W. Pickford (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), p. 246.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Best and Kellner, *Postmodern Theory*, p. 192.

Following Baudrillard's conceptualisation of simulacra, Jameson presumes the new condition of cultural production in which the multinational spatiality destroys any conventional framework of representation. This means that Jameson regards postmodernism as evidence of the changed condition of aesthetic production; postmodernism symptomatically alludes to the situation in which the holistic reflection of realism towards totality is no longer possible. Yet, according to Best and Kellner, it is not difficult to find 'Jameson's claim that postmodernism is a cultural dominant to be overly totalizing in the sense that it exaggerates some tendencies – such as hyperreality or schizophrenia – which may only be emergent rather than dominant'.¹⁴⁷ Overwhelmingly influenced by Baudrillardian implosion of subject and object, Jameson seems to overestimate the postmodern situation. Nevertheless, it is difficult to accept the position that Jameson rejects the possible category of subjectivity as in the case of Baudrillard. Jameson's conceptualisation of cognitive mapping is nothing less than the consequence of such an attempt to solve the problem of postmodern formulation. In the following, I investigate Jameson's conceptualisation of cognitive mapping, and contend that it is a project for the constitution of an alternative idea of realism against the theoretical presupposition of postmodern thinking.

7. Cognitive Mapping as a Realist Alternative

Positing postmodernism as the new aesthetic production which still inscribes the mimetic impulse within its form, Jameson plainly argues that 'it would be inaccurate to suggest that all affect, all feeling or emotion, all subjectivity, has

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 188.

vanished from the newer image'.¹⁴⁸ That is to say, there is always the return of the repressed in postmodern culture, which is prompted by epistemological claims towards totality. In this respect, Jameson understands the death of the subject as the end of bourgeois individualism, which supported the idea of autonomous subjectivity, dominating a specific historical moment. The death of the autonomous subjectivity causes 'a virtual deconstruction of the very aesthetic of expression itself'.¹⁴⁹ For Jameson, this is the way in which the dilemma of postmodernism comes to exist in its own right. The postmodern phenomenon necessarily gives rise to the dilemma that the subject confronts a self-deconstruction, when producing the aesthetic style without the feeling of subjectivity. Jameson's attempt to retain the category of the subject is nothing less than Adorno's defence of the dialectic between subject and object. As Adorno says, the liberation from the subject is a 'destructive force which incorporates men only so much more into the spell of nature'.¹⁵⁰

For Jameson, the subject is not so much an individual as the collective which Lukács presupposes in his discussion of class consciousness. In this way, cognitive mapping is nothing less than the recuperation of collective subjectivity in a situation where the postmodern phenomenon dominates the cultural power. That is to say, cognitive mapping can be said to be realism in the condition of late capitalism. Therefore, it is not surprising that Jameson conceptualises cognitive mapping as the 'pedagogical political culture which seeks to endow the individual subject with some new heightened sense of its place in the global system'.¹⁵¹ In other words, the possibility of realism still remains, insofar as a revolutionary subject continuously searches for the way in which its epistemological claims obtain the collective

¹⁴⁸ Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, p. 10.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

¹⁵⁰ Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. by E.B. Ashton (London: Routledge, 1973), p. 241.

subjectivity in late capitalism. This point is made by realist claims in postmodern culture that decisively retains the utopian impulse, which is 'something positive in the attempt to keep alive the possibility of imagining such a thing'.¹⁵² In this sense, the condition of possibility of realism is late capitalism as such, which paradoxically prompts the crisis of expression, yet, at the same time, strengthens the epistemological claims. Therefore, the category of realism cannot be removed from the aesthetic horizon, insofar as subjective action pushes the mimetic impulse beyond ideology to the utopian cognitive category of reality. This is where Jameson formulates the validity of cognitive mapping, thereby retaining the dialectic between subject and object in the dominance of postmodernism.

Regarding the traditional mode of realism as the cultural logic of national capitalism, Jameson's contention leads to the political requirement for a proper aesthetic methodology to represent the postmodern reality. In this way, he postulates cognitive mapping as a reformulation of the classical mode of representation. To quote Jameson:

An aesthetic of cognitive mapping – a pedagogical political culture which seeks to endow the individual subject with some new heightened sense of its place in the global system – will necessarily have to respect this now enormously complex representational dialectic and invent radically new forms in order to do it justice.¹⁵³

The new mode of representation is not a repetition of the old realism; this is not 'a call for a return to some older kind of machinery, some older and more transparent national space, or some more traditional and reassuring perspectival or

¹⁵¹ Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, p. 54.

¹⁵² Jameson, 'Cognitive Mapping', in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (London: Macmillan, 1988), p. 356.

¹⁵³ Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* Ibid., p. 54.

mimetic enclave'.¹⁵⁴ The dialectic of subject and object, which is based on the assumption that there is an independent objectivity outside of the subject, is necessary for a reformulation of the mode of representation. In Jameson's sense, the mode of realism is narrative, not the Kantian correspondence of empirical realism, as in the case of Lukács' defence of realism. This idea of realism certainly sheds light on the possibility of realism in late capitalism.

Jameson regards classical realism as the old mode of representation, which is invented to map out the national capitalist spatiality in the specific historical moment. The different spatiality, which emerges from the multinational spatiality of late capitalism, demands a new type of totalisation, in Jameson's terms "cognitive mapping". Jameson's concept of cognitive mapping would be better viewed as the reformulation of realism, thereby still retaining the category of subject and object. Thus, cognitive mapping can be seen as 'a more modernist strategy'.¹⁵⁵ This is where the way in which Jameson conceptualises representation must be stressed, in the sense that Jameson grasps representation as 'the synonym of "figuration" itself, irrespective of the latter's historical and ideological form'.¹⁵⁶ In this respect, the concept of cognitive mapping is in opposition to the anti-totalising formula that theoretically legitimises poststructuralism and post-Marxism. Stated another way, cognitive mapping, which is strategically designed to retain the ideological aspect of Marxism, legitimises the discourses of socialism to the degree that those discourses become 'realistic and serious alternatives for people'.¹⁵⁷

In this way, as Lukács' realism implicates the category of class consciousness that endows the individual with the collective subjectivity that is able to conceive

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 409.

¹⁵⁶ Jameson, 'Cognitive Mapping', p. 348.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 359.

totality, so does Jameson's cognitive mapping as a new pedagogical methodology that allows subjects to communicate with each other through the aesthetic figuration of multinational spatiality. Cognitive mapping is a Marxist aesthetic for the production of a holistic narrative which delineates the expansion of spatiality to the global geographical scale. From this standpoint, Jameson affirms that cognitive mapping is 'nothing but a code word for "class consciousness" – only it proposed the need for class consciousness of a new and hitherto undreamed of kind', while also moving in the direction of that new spatiality implicit in the postmodern.¹⁵⁸ According to Jameson's explanation, it is not difficult to see that cognitive mapping is an aesthetic attempt, which is tied in with the modern mimetic faculty in Benjamin's terms and the mimetic impulse in Adorno's conceptions. Jameson argues that cognitive mapping is not the recuperation of classical mimesis: 'the cognitive map is not exactly mimetic in that older sense; indeed, the theoretical issues it poses allow us to renew the analysis of representation on a higher and much more complex level'.¹⁵⁹

What is implicit in Jameson's argument is that postmodern reality is more difficult to represent than modern reality, because postmodern spatiality has become more complicated. However, as Best and Kellner point out, the problem is that 'he does not consider the possibility that postmodern space is no more difficult to map than an earlier modern space'.¹⁶⁰ Interestingly, this problem discloses another aspect of Jameson's cognitive mapping: Jameson's conceptualisation of cognitive mapping can be regarded as a reformulated Marxian idea focusing on the tension between representation and reality, which is always intervened in by class struggle.

Jameson's concern with cognitive mapping is an extension of his interpretation of Lukács. For Jameson, all kinds of cultural production must be

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 417-18.

¹⁵⁹ Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, p. 51.

explained in relation to the category of narrative. For Jameson, narrative is an essential category in aesthetic production, which is independent of ideology or *Weltanschauung*. That is to say, narrative is a necessary systemic condition for the comprehension of reality through the dialectic of subject and object. In Jameson's sense, the narrative of representation enables us to restore 'the lost unity of social life, and demonstrate that widely distant elements of the social totality are ultimately part of the same global historical process'.¹⁶¹ Deriving from Lukács' formulation, Jameson posits a broader historical scope in which the crisis of representation repeatedly constitutes the aesthetic tendency in different ways. For Lukács, it must be stressed that such aesthetic changes are prompted by epistemological impulse towards totality.

As in the case of Lukács, the mimetic or the utopian impulse, the epistemological pursuit of total knowledge cannot be removed from the human historical horizon; such an action belongs to human nature, insofar as it is an action necessary for the maintenance of civilisation. In this way, just as Lukács regards modernism as an aesthetic symptom designating the decline of high capitalism, so Jameson's analysis of postmodernism presupposes that the schizophrenic aesthetic phenomenon is a new quality, which paradoxically reveals the possibility of representation through its aesthetic failure.

Therefore, it is not surprising that Jameson postulates cognitive mapping as a pedagogical strategy for the higher form of subjectivity, thereby delineating the possible mediation between the aesthetic production and socio-economic conditions, in light of the way in which the absent cause involves the cultural articulation. As Best and Kellner acknowledge, 'one can interpret the call for cognitive mapping as an

¹⁶⁰ Best and Kellner, *Postmodern Theory*, p. 189.

¹⁶¹ Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, p. 226.

answer to the poststructuralist critique of representation'.¹⁶² In this sense, cognitive mapping can be called an attempt directed against the postmodern issue of the ontological circumstance around the individual subject, to compose an aesthetic of realism that still retains the subject-object dialectic, the Marxian idea of realism, in the field of aesthetic production.

Even though postmodern cultural production seems to deny the realistic mode of aesthetics, the category of realism cannot be abandoned, insofar as the problem of aesthetic production requires its own condition. In this sense, Jameson's attempt to substantiate the Marxian idea of realism through the formulation of cognitive mapping is plausible. This can extend Lukács' idea of realism to the holistic analysis of postmodern cultural production. From this standpoint, Jameson entertains the utopian desire immanent in postmodernism. Jameson's presupposition can be supported by Mike Wayne's analysis of *Big Brother*, the reality TV show. Wayne argues that 'despite the postmodern qualities of *Big Brother*, it mobilises powerful Utopian desires'.¹⁶³ For Wayne, this utopianism of *Big Brother* is articulated by 'a desire for transparency in our relations with individuals and institutions, which the capitalist mode of production and its cultural spectacles are structurally quite unable to deliver'.¹⁶⁴

What Wayne implicates here is that postmodernism cannot be severed from the principle of realism, the drive towards totality. Indeed, Wayne's analysis shows that postmodern cultural production also retains the epistemological dimension of realism, an orientation to the real. The cognitive mapping aims to reveal this realistic impulse of postmodernism in an aesthetic figuration of postmodern spatiality. In this

¹⁶² Best and Kellner, *Postmodern Theory*, p. 189.

¹⁶³ Mike Wayne, *Marxism and Media Studies: Key Concepts and Contemporary Trends* (London: Pluto, 2003), p. 151.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

sense, Jameson's concept of cognitive mapping can be regarded as a realist alternative which is valid in postmodern cultural circumstances, in the sense that it can preserve the dialectic of subject and object, which ultimately endows artists with the utopian impulse towards totality – the continuous pursuit of the truth of late capitalist spatiality in a globalised world. Realism is a spectre still hovering over the mode of aesthetic and cultural production.

CONCLUSION

In this thesis I have investigated the aesthetic of realism in its relation to the theoretical development of Western Marxism, and sought to revitalise this aesthetic in order to articulate an alternative theoretical insight to the relativistic understanding of realism in the analysis of the cultural and aesthetic form. This required both accounts of the theoretical contexts in which such a Marxian idea of realism – or anti-realism – was constructed and subsequent examination of the discourses revolving around the conceptualisation of representation in general.

The most important and basic achievement of this study is that by challenging the long-lasting preconception of the dichotomy between realism and modernism in Western Marxist debates I have been able to produce a theoretical case for the plausibility of recuperating the role of an author in aesthetic production. This is not to say that the role of the author must be privileged as the priority of creative activity. This rather means that the category of mediation between an author and reality, of the subject-object dialectic suggested by the Marxian idea of representation, by which an author's drive towards the real plays a key role in his or her involvement in the historical process, is still significant for understanding the structure of narrative.

The contribution of my study lies in the way in which I have attempted to reassess the category of realism in light of an author's attitude towards reality, which current non-Marxian critical perspectives unwittingly underestimate. In so doing, I have applied the Marxian idea of realism to reveal that non-Marxist theories overlook the most important aspect of realism, a crucial motivation of aesthetic production, by focusing on the role of a reader rather than an author, the self-referentiality of

structure rather than the mediation between the subject and the object. The issue my study has raised is that realism is a fundamental and absolute problem of aesthetic production; realism is not only a method or a style but also an orientation towards the real, which determines an author's attitude to apply a specific artistic technique to the object. The reformulated presupposition of realism presented in this thesis allows the correction of misconceptions of the Marxian idea of realism, and the rediscovery of its theoretical utility for analysing the relationship between cultural form and the mode of production.

Exploring the Marxian idea of realism, my study demonstrated that from Lukács to Jameson there is not only one theoretical source for the various Western Marxian formulations of realism: neo-Kantianism and Hegelianism are major non-Marxian theoretical influences on the Marxian idea of realism. However, there is a fundamental difference between the Marxian and the non-Marxian idea of realism. The Marxist aesthetic of realism relates a work of art to politics, while non-Marxist aesthetics, for example, the neo-Kantian logic of a work of art, replaces politics with ethics.¹ For the Marxist theorists, a work of art can provide a critique of reification and is correlated with the transformation of the mode of production. Different from Marxism, neo-Kantianism presents 'the world as not 'given' but 'set as a task''.² In this sense, the neo-Kantian tendencies of aesthetic production, including Formalism, structuralism and post-structuralism, presuppose the mode of representation as an independent system of objective reality. This is the presupposition that I would like to question throughout my study. Against such a formulation of representation, I have argued that the idea of realism is necessary for the restoration of the political position of a work of art.

¹ See Craig Brandist, 'Neo-Kantianism in Cultural Theory: Bakhtin, Derrida and Foucault, *Radical Philosophy*, 102 (2000), 6-16 (p. 14).

In the course of reconsidering the ideas of realism in Western Marxism and other non-Marxian theories, I wanted to prove the way in which realism continuously emerges as the very problem of aesthetic and cultural production until now. Nobody can easily abolish the category of realism, even when criticising the normative aspect of the realistic representational mode. Adorno, who strongly comes up against Lukács' formulation of realism, for instance, does not jettison the epistemological dimension of realism and has firm recourse to the subject-object dialectic on which Lukácsian realism is grounded. What Adorno really criticises through his anti-realistic aesthetics is the very identifying principle whereby the subject is inverted into the object. In other words, Adorno points out that Lukácsian realism cannot solve the problem of the reification of subject, but instead is assimilated into the horrific realism of administrative society.

From this perspective, I have attempted to present the nature, scope and development of the concept of realism in Western Marxism. Throughout this discussion, I would like to examine the aesthetic debates revolving around this concept and its ideological foundations. Excluding any political and ideological oversimplification, there is a surprising similarity between the idea of realism and the idea of anti-realism in Western Marxism. Interestingly, Western Marxists' debates on the problem of realism can be grasped as a symbolic substitute for the real problem; that is to say, the idea of anti-realism is little more than a by-product of a disguised political opposition to Stalinism and actually existing socialism.³ In this sense, it is

² Ibid.

³ Eugene Lunn's argument alludes to this hidden impetus behind the idea of anti-realism. To quote Lunn: 'both Lukács and Brecht were more or less within the Leninist orbit and equivocated in their critiques of Stalinism as a political and social system, a stance which obviously affected their views of art ... Benjamin and Adorno, on the other hand, were institutionally related (the latter more so) to the independent, but politically quietist, Institute of Social Research. Their aesthetic debates – more distant from the Communist movement – were focused on the significance of avant-garde and commercial art under Western capitalism'. Eugene Lunn, *Marxism and Modernism: An Historical Study of Lukács, Brecht, Benjamin and Adorno* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), p. 77

not difficult to say that the basic doctrine of anti-realism also presupposes the similar idea of realism, the idea that the process of aesthetic production can drive our experience beyond the mechanism of reification imposed by the capitalist commodity-structure. Not surprisingly, this is a common programme supposed by both realistic and anti-realistic Western Marxists.

I reconsidered the issue of realism that Lukács raises with his adaptation of Leninist reflection theory in relation to the Hegelian category of mediation as well as to the neo-Kantian conception of the relationship between an individual work of art and *Weltanschauung*. Above all, Lukács regards mediation as an action whereby the reification of form or method can be realised in the process of practice. For Adorno, this is the weakest point in Lukács' formulation of realism; Adorno emphasises the way in which the form of the artwork plays a key role in the epistemological dimension. This can be called the paradox of realism that Lukács overlooks in his ontological framework of realism.

Lukács' formulation of realism clearly presupposes a teleological aspect, mainly derived from Lukács' loyalty to socialism. Consequently, we know that such an optimistic view of historical development is nothing less than Lukács' own demand for utopia. There is no doubt that my thesis does not aim at invoking any nostalgic mood through its account of such a political and aesthetic project. In my study of realism, I wanted to re-examine the theoretical issues of representation in general raised by Western Marxist theorists, which are still hovering around the problem of aesthetic and cultural production. From the outset, my thesis assumed that Lukács' question as to how works of art exist is a fundamental issue. As has been

discussed, many Marxist theorists such as Adorno, Benjamin, Brecht, Sartre and Jameson, strive to solve this problem.

I gave an account of Lukács' conception of the orientation towards the real, or the drive towards totality, as the kernel of realism, whereby we continuously renew the category of reality in response to historical change, as Benjamin and Brecht also point out. I argued that Benjamin is one of the most important theorists to raise the issue on the social and institutional constitution of experience and subjectivity in the process of modernisation. Alongside this, I considered both Brecht's criticism of Lukács and Sartre's criticism of Brecht, which deal with the new issues surrounding realism – realism is not only an aesthetic category but also a major issue of political, philosophical and practical dimension.

Sartre's formulation of analogous realism can be grasped as an attempt to remove any suspicion of copy theory in realism. For Sartre, what is important is not whether an artistic form correctly corresponds to the real object, but how such an artistic form creates a new object. This idea crucially influences Jameson's formulation of realism; realism is better understood by the notion of narrative. Entertaining Lukács' conception of an orientation towards the real, Jameson follows the way in which Sartre sees representation as analogous representatives. In this way, Jameson reformulates Western Marxists' ideas of realism and applies his reformulation to the analysis of postmodern cultural production. Jameson's conception of cognitive mapping is intended to retain the subject-object dialectic and its association with the epistemological dimension of realism. No doubt, such a pursuit can be achieved not only by an epistemological programme, but also an aesthetic programme, in the sense that realism is a continuing venture for the perception of reality through aesthetic practice; realism encourages our experience of

reality beyond cultural reification to the utopian dimension. In this way, realism must now be relocated between utopia and reality like the spectre of communism hovering around in the real world. The idea of realism in Western Marxism arises from an aesthetic project to realise the utopian impulse towards the real.

The main reason why I gave an account of realism as an aesthetic project that can be linked to Marxism is that there is an urgent demand for the constitution of a new subjectivity. In addition, the ongoing practical aspect of realism, which retains the category of the subject-object dialectic, seems to be valuable for understanding of globalised capitalism. In this sense, the theoretical interrogation of the possibility of realism is not only a discussion concomitant to Marxism, but also raises important questions about aesthetic and cultural production in general. Therefore, a more important point is not so much what the correct name is for the spectre of realism as how that spectre should be realised. But this seems another project that I will pursue after this study.

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