I: The Objectivity of Truth in Marxist-Leninist Epistemology

Lukács argues in this section that the basis for any correct cognition of reality, whether of nature or society, is the recognition of the objectivity of the external world, that is, its existence independent of human consciousness. Any apprehension of the external world is nothing more than a reflection in consciousness of the world that exists independently of consciousness. (25)

Arguing that the “theory of reflection provides the common basis for all forms of theoretical and practical mastery of reality through consciousness” (25), Lukacs contends that this “basic fact of the relationship of consciousness to being” (25) also “serves for the artistic reflection of being” (25). His goal here, he explains is to “elaborate the specific aspects of artistic reflection within the scope of the general theory” (25).

Lukács is of the view that a “materialist, dialectical theory” (25) of “objectivity and of the reflection in consciousness of a reality existing independent of consciousness” (25) is an “impossibility” (25) for the “bourgeois mind” (25). Rather, a “valid, comprehensive theory of reflection first arose with dialectical materialism, in the works of Marx, Engels and Lenin” (25). Lukacs criticises bourgeois philosophers for elevating the issue into a “question of epistemology” (25) and thereby becoming “trapped in mechanistic materialism or . . . philosophic idealism” (25). He cites in this regard Lenin’s criticism of the former (empiricism) as ignorant of the dialectical “process and evolution of knowledge” (26) and unable to “apply dialectics to the theory of images” (26), and of the latter (rationalism) as prone to “subjectivism” (26) and guilty of a “pompous inflation of one aspect, of one side, of one frontier of knowledge to a sanctified absolute divorced from matter, from nature” (26).

Lukács then turns to a “few aspects of the epistemology of Marxism-Leninism which are especially significant for the problem of objectivity in the artistic reflection of reality” (26). The first problem is “that of the direct reflections of the external world. All knowledge rests on them; they are the foundation, the point of departure for all knowledge” (26), he points out, but “only the point of departure and not all there is to the process of knowing” (26). Lukacs contends that sense-impressions may be the starting-point of knowledge but they are not the end-point of scientific inquiry. He cites both Marx (“Science would be superfluous if there were any immediate coincidence of the appearance and reality of things” [qtd. in Lukacs, 26]) and Lenin (“Truth is not to be found at the beginning but at the end, more particularly within the process. Truth is not the initial impression” [qtd. in Lukacs, 26]) in this regard. Lenin’s point is that observation must be followed by “generalisation, . . . the formulation of concepts (judgements, conclusions)” (27), the “perceptual image” (27) must be turned into “abstract thought” (27), mere perception succeeded by concrete scientific knowledge. The bourgeois account of the “intellectual reproduction of reality, both in the direct mirroring of phenomena as well as in concepts and laws (when they are considered one-sidedly, undialectically, outside the infinite process of dialectical interaction)” (27) is inadequate. Lenin, Lukacs argues, emphasises the “dialectical interaction in the process of cognition” (27). He asked:

Is the perceptual image closer to reality than thought? Both yes and no. The perceptual image cannot entirely comprehend motion; for example, it cannot comprehend speed of three hundred thousand kilometres per second, but thought can and should do so. Thus thought derived from perception mirrors reality. (qtd. in Lukacs, 27-28)
He adds that the: approach of human reason to the individual thing, obtaining an impression (a concept) of it is no simple, direct, lifeless mirroring but a complicated, dichotomous, zigzag act which by its very nature encompasses the possibility that imagination can soar away from life. . . . For even in the simplest generalisation of the most elementary universal idea (like the idea of a table) there lurks a shred of imagination (vice versa, it is foolish to deny the role of imagination in the most exact science). (qtd. in Lukacs, 28)

Given the “strict materialism of his epistemology and his unwavering insistence on the principle of objectivity” (28), Lukacs maintains, Lenin was able to “grasp the correct dialectical relationship of the modes of human perception of reality in their dynamics” (28).

Lukacs insists that it is only through dialectics is it possible to overcome the incompleteness, the rigidity and the barrenness of any one-sided conception of reality. Only through the correct and conscious application of dialectics can we overcome the incompleteness in the infinite process of cognition and bring our thinking closer to the dynamic infinity in objective reality. (qtd. in Lukacs, 28)

The “essence of dialectics” (28), Lukacs stresses, is to be “expressed through the formula” unity, identity of opposites” (28). Lenin’s “profound conception of the dialectical nature of objective reality and of the dialectic of its reflection in consciousness” (28-29) rests on the “union of materialist dialectics with practice, its derivation from practice, its control through practice, its directive role in practice” (28). The “relationship between the strict objectivity in epistemology and its integral relationship to practice” (29) is a crucial element of Marxism-Leninism: the “objectivity of the external world is no inert, rigid objectivity fatalistically determining human activity; because of its very independence of consciousness it stands in the most intimate indissoluble interaction with practice” (29). All in all, Lukacs claims, Lenin “grasped the objectivism in dialectical materialism correctly and profoundly as an objectivism of practice, of partisanship” (29).

What Lukacs is getting at in all this is that there is a distinction between perception and conception, between the empirical sensations experienced by the eye and the other senses and the scientific knowledge that is the product of rational reflection. Their point is that the inherently dialectical nature of all things is not something immediately apparent to the perceiving senses. This ‘fact’ of existence, the claim that all things and events are inevitably caught up in dialectical relationships, is something not known by what they call the ‘bourgeois’ philosophers, thinkers like Descartes, Locke or Kant, who did not benefit from Hegel’s partially true and, later, Marx’s allegedly scientific, iron-clad insights into the true nature of things. Early modern philosophers, especially the empiricists, were quite content to stay at the level of appearances. However, appearances are deceiving as a result of which one must go beyond them if one is to grasp the absolute truth, certain principles which are universally true of all places and time. The key to understanding these principles lie in Marx’s historical materialism.

II: The Theory of Reflection in Bourgeois Aesthetics

In this section, Lukacs argues that this “contradictory basis in man’s apprehension of the external world, this immanent contradiction in the structure of the reflection of the eternal [sic] world in consciousness appears in all theoretical concepts regarding the artistic reproduction of reality” (30). When the “history of aesthetics” (30) is investigated from the standpoint of Marxism-Leninism, one witnesses either one or other of the two tendencies which Lenin criticised in Bourgeois epistemology: the “incapacity of mechanical materialism ‘to apply dialectics to the theory of images,’ and on the other hand, the basic error inherent in idealism: ‘the universal (the concept, the idea) as a peculiar entity in itself’” (30).
Mechanical materialism, the strength of which "lies in its insistence upon the concept of the reflection of objective reality" (30), is "transformed into idealism as a result of its inability to comprehend motion, history, etc." (30). On the other hand, "objective idealists (Aristotle, Hegel)" (30) managed to achieve "individual astute formulations regarding objectivity, but their systems as a whole fall victim to the one-sidedness of idealism" (30). Lukacs cites the work of Diderot as an example of mechanical materialism and that of Friedrich von Schiller of idealism in the sphere of eighteenth century bourgeois aesthetics.

The same pattern is repeated in contemporary aesthetics: "on the one hand, the insistence on immediate reality; on the other, the isolation from material reality of any aspects reaching beyond immediate reality" (31). The theory of the direct reproduction of reality more or less loses its character as a theory of the reflection of the external world. Direct experience becomes even more strongly subjectivised, more firmly conceived as an independent and autonomous function of the individual (as impression, emotional response, etc., abstractly divorced from the objective reality which generates it). . . . More and more, theories become permeated with an eclecticism of a false objectivism and a false subjectivism. They isolate objectivity from practice, eliminate all motion and vitality and set it in crass, fatalistic, romantic opposition to an equally isolated subjectivity. Zola's famous definition of art, 'un coin de la nature vu a travers un temperament,' is a prime example of such eclecticism. A scrap of reality is to be reproduced mechanically and thus with a false objectivity, and is to become poetic by being viewed in the light of the observer's subjectivity, a subjectivity divorced from practice and from interaction with practice. (32-33)

This "subjectivising of the direct reproduction of reality reaches its ultimate extension in naturalism" (33), the "theory of empathy" (33), "impressionism" (33) and "expressionism" (34). The theory of empathy is exemplified by someone named Lipps for whom the "form of an object is always determined by me, through my inner activity" (33). From this perspective, the "essence of art is the introduction of human thoughts, feelings, etc., into an external world regarded as unknowable" (33). Whatever the particular variant, these tendencies result in the "growing subjectivisation of subject matter and of creative method and in the increasing alienation of art from great social problems" (33). In short, "realism" (33) is in flight and its place taken by an "extreme idealistic rigidity" (33) which is an "ideology of reaction, of flight from the great issues of the era, a denial of reality by 'abstracting it out of existence'" (33). This has culminated in the "subjectivist elimination of all content from aesthetics" (34) and the "subjectivist petrification and decay of artistic forms in the period of capitalist degeneration" (34).

III: The Artistic Reflection of Reality

The "artistic reflection of reality rests on the same contradiction as any other reflection of reality" (34) but it "pursues another resolution of these contradictions than science" (34). Lukács's argument here is that the goal of the "artistic reflection of reality" (34) is to provide a picture of reality in which the contradiction between appearance and reality, the particular and the general, the immediate and the conceptual, is so resolved that the two converge into a spontaneous integrity in the direct impression of the work of art and provide a sense of an inseparable integrity. The universal appears as a quality of the individual and the particular, reality becomes manifest and can be experienced within appearance, the general principle is exposed as the specific impelling cause for the individual case being specially depicted. (34-35)

Lukacs gestures at this point towards Engels' model of characterisation: "Each is
simultaneously a type and a particular individual, a ‘this one,’ as old Hegel expressed it“ (35).

Every work of art “must present a circumscribed, self-contained and complete context with its own immediately self-evident movement and structure” (35). The “true, fundamental interrelationships” (35) in a literary work are “disclosed only at the end” (35). The “motivating factors in the world depicted in a literary work are revealed in an artistic sequence and climaxing” (35), the latter “accomplished within a direct unity of appearance and reality present from the very beginning” (35) and gradually made “ever more integral and self-evident” (35). Every work of art must “evolve within itself all the preconditions for its characters, situations, events, etc.” (35). The reader must experience “every important aspect of the growth or change with all the primary determining factors” (35) in such a way that the “outcome is never simply handed to him but he is conducted to the outcome and directly experiences the process leading to the outcome” (35). The “basic materialism of all great artists . . . appears in their clear depiction of the pertinent preconditions and motivations out of which the consciousness of their characters arises and develops” (35). It in this way that “every significant work of art creates its ‘own world’” (35). The “greater the artist, the more intensely his creative power permeates all aspects of his work of art and the more pregnantly his fictional ‘world’ emerges through all the details of his work” (36). Balzac took great delight, for example, in the richness of the fabricated details of his Comédie Humaine.

Such “particularity” (36) merely “affirms the special character, the peculiar kind of reflection of reality there is in art” (36) and on which its “apparent non-correspondence with reality” (36) is founded. This is merely an “illusion” (36) for the “effect of art, the immersion of the receptor in the action of the work of art, his complete penetration into the special ‘world’ of the work of art, results from the fact that the work by its very nature offers a truer, more complete, more vivid and more dynamic reflection of reality than the receptor otherwise possesses” (36) and leads him towards a “more concrete insight into reality” (36) on the basis of but “beyond the bounds of his own experiences” (36). As Balzac put it, “French society should be the historian, I only its amanuensis” (qtd. in Lukacs, 37).

Historically accurate literary works “depict their times correctly and profoundly” (37) by offering a “reflection of the process of life in motion and in concrete dynamic context” (37). The “goal of the work of art is depicting that subtlety, richness and inexhaustibility of life . . . and bringing it dynamically and vividly to life” (38). The work must reflect correctly and in proper proportion all important factors objectively determining the area of life it represents. It must so reflect these that this area of life becomes comprehensible from within and from without, re-experiencible, that it appears as a totality of life. (38)

The “totality of reality necessarily is beyond the possible scope of any artistic creation” (38) for which reason the “totality of the work of art is rather intensive: 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” (38). This is as true of a brief song as it is of a vast epic.

Whether the intention is to depict the whole of reality or an isolated incident, the aim will be to involve “creatively in its fiction all important factors which in objective reality provide the basis for a particular event or complex of events” (38). All these “factors will appear as personal attributes of the persons in the action, as the specific qualities of the situations depicted, etc.; thus in a directly perceptible unity of the individual and the universal” (38). Most people “achieve knowledge of general determinants in life only through the abandonment of the immediate, only through abstraction, only through generalised comparison of experiences” (39). By contrast, in representing individual men and situations, the artist awakens the illusion of
life. In depicting them as exemplary men and situations (the unity of the individual and the typical), in bringing to life the greatest possible richness of the objective conditions of life as the particular attributes of individual people and situations, he makes his ‘own world’ emerge as the reflection of life in its total motion, as process and totality. . . . (39)

Lukacs proceeds to argue that it is necessary that “within this richness and subtlety the artist introduce a new order of things which displaces or modifies the old abstractions” (39). The “new order is never simply imposed on life but is derived from the new phenomena of life through reflection, comparison, etc.” (39), an initial reaction of shock before the new phenomena being followed by the need to “deal with them intellectually by applying the dialectical method” (39). In the work, the new order “emerges in the course of the artistic climaxing” (40).

Lukacs argues that the “representation of life, structured and ordered more richly and strictly than ordinary life experience” (40) has an “active social function, the propaganda effect of the genuine work of art” (40). This is by contrast to the “lifeless and false objectivity of an ‘impartial’ imitation which takes no stand or provides no call to action” (40). Lukacs refers once more to Lenin’s view that “partisanship of objectivity” (40) is a “motive force inherent in reality . . . made conscious through the correct dialectical reflection of reality and introduced into practice” (40), to which end the “subject matter of a work of art is consciously arranged and ordered by the artist” (40). A “genuine work of art” (40) is “directed specifically toward depicting this partisanship as a quality inherent in it and growing organically out of it” (40).

Lukacs points out that the effect of a work of art is paradoxical: “we surrender ourselves to the work as though it presented reality to us, accept it as reality and immerse ourselves in it although we are always aware that it is not reality but simply a special form of reflecting reality” (40). The “aesthetic illusion” (40) depends on the “fact that the work of art in its totality reflects the full process of life and does not represent in its details reflections of particular phenomena of life which can be related individually to aspects of actual life on which they are modelled” (40-41) (Lukacs is gesturing here towards Emile Zola’s naturalism) as well as the capacity of the work to reflect the “total objective process of life with objective accuracy” (41). Bourgeois theories of imitation cannot do justice to this fact, Lukacs maintains. As outlined earlier, idealistic theories fall into “mysticism” (41) while materialist theories “usually go from a mechanical photographic theory of imitation to Platonism, to a theory of the artistic imitation of ‘ideas’” (41). The “more the aspects of the self-containment of a work and of the dynamic character of the artistic elaboration and reshaping of reality are opposed to the theory of reflection instead of being derived from it dialectically, the more the principle of form, beauty and artistry is divorced from life” (41). The “social isolation of the personally dedicated artist in a declining society is mirrored in this mystical, subjective inflation of the principle of form divorced from any connection with life” (42). Such artists surrender to “parasitic resignation and the self-complacency of ‘art for art’s sake’” (42) which “evolves into a theory of a contemptuous, parasitic divorce of art from life, into a denial of any objectivity in art, a glorification of the ‘sovereignty’ of the creative individual and a theory of indifference to content and arbitrariness in form” (42). By the same token, Lukacs accuses the materialist approach of “pseudo-objectivity” (42): the “direct imitation of the immediate world of phenomena . . . does not acknowledge the objectivity of the underlying laws and relationships that cannot immediately be perceived” (42).

Lukacs’ point is that the “objectivity of the artistic reflection of reality depends on the correct reflection of the totality” (42-43). The artistic correctness of a detail . . . has nothing to do with whether the detail corresponds to any similar detail in reality. The detail in a work of art is an accurate reflection of life when it is a necessary aspect of the accurate
reflection of the total process of objective reality. (43)

Indeed, the artistic truth of a detail which corresponds photographically to life is purely accidental, arbitrary and subjective. When, for example, the detail is not directly and obviously necessary to the context, then it is incidental to a work of art, its inclusion is arbitrary and subjective. It is therefore entirely possible that a collage of photographic material may provide an incorrect, subjective and arbitrary reflection of reality. (43)

In order to discipline accident into a proper context with artistic necessity, the necessity must be latent within the accidental and must appear as an inner motivation within the details themselves. The detail must be so selected and so depicted from the outset that its relationship with the totality must be organic and dynamic. (43)

For Lukacs, “partisanship in the work of art is a component of objective reality” (43) and, thus, of the “correct, objective artistic reflection of life” (43). This “tendency” (43) “speaks forth from the objective context of the world depicted within the work; it is the language of the work of art transmitted through the artistic reflection of reality and therefore the speech of reality itself, not the subjective opinion of the writer exposed baldly or explicitly in a personal commentary or in a subjective, ready-made conclusion” (43-44). Lukacs differentiates between “art as direct propaganda” (44) that stems from a “mere subjective expression of the author’s views” (44) and the “objective propaganda potential of art in the Leninist conception of partisanship” (44) which grows “organically out of the logic of the subject matter” (44).

IV: The Objectivity of Artistic Form

Lukacs argues that the subjectivist tendencies outlined above “disrupt the dialectical unity of form and content in art” (44), either the one or the other being “wrenched out of the dialectical unity and inflated to an autonomy” (44). But in either case, the “concept of the objectivity of form is abandoned” (44) and the “form becomes a ‘device’ to be manipulated subjectively and wilfully” (44), losing its “character as a specific mode of the reflection of reality” (44). Lukacs cites in this regard Lenin’s definition of ‘objectivism’ according to which the “categories of thought are not tools for men but the expression of the order governing nature and men” (qtd. in Lukacs, 44): this view becomes the “basis for the investigation of form in art, with the emphasis, naturally, on the specific, essential characteristics of artistic reflection; always within the framework of the dialectical materialist conception of the nature of form” (44). Stressing the “objectivity of form” (44) and the existence of an “objective principle in artistic form” (45), Lukacs argues that, far from implying some “relapse into bourgeois aestheticism” (45), there is a “dialectical unity of content and form” (45) and a “mirroring quality of both content and form” (45).

As Hegel put it, Lukacs points out, “content is nothing but the conversion of form into content, and form is nothing but the conversion of content into form” (qtd. in Lukacs, 45). Lukacs argues, however, that Hegel must be “turned upside down’ materialistically” (45) on this score. He contends that “artistic form is just as much a mode of reflecting reality as the terminology of logic” (45):

Just as in the process of the reflection of reality through thought, the categories that are most general, the most abstracted from the surface of the world of phenomena, from sense data, therefore, express the most abstract laws governing nature and men; so it is with the forms of art. It is only a question of making clear what this highest level of abstraction signifies in art. (45)
Artistic forms "carry out the process of abstraction, the process of generalisation" (45) in a way recognised long ago by Aristotle for whom history is particularising in that it reports what did happen whereas poetry is universal in that it represents what could happen. He meant that "poetry (fiction) in its characters, situations and plots not merely imitates individual characters, situations and actions but expresses simultaneously the regular, the universal and the typical" (45-46). As Engels put it, the "task of realism" (46) is to "create typical characters under typical conditions" (46). It would be a mistake, Lukacs believes, to disrupt the "unity of the particular and the universal, of the individual and the typical" (46) by opposing one to the other for such a unity is "not a quality of literary content... considered in isolation, a quality for the expression of which the artistic form is merely a 'technical aid'" (46). Rather, such dialectical unity of the universal and the particular is a "product of that interpenetration of form and content" (46) to which Hegel alludes.

Both materialism and idealism "bluntly oppose the direct reflection of the external world, the foundation for any understanding of reality, to the universal and the typical" (46). As a result, the typical appears as the "product of a merely subjective intellectual operation, as a merely intellectual, abstract and thus ultimately purely subjective accessory to the world of immediate experience; not as a component of objective reality" (46). The "aesthetic" (46) that arises from such a view is predicated either on a "false conception of the concrete" (46) or an "equally false conception of the abstract" (46). But Marx defined the concrete as the "synthesis of many determinants, the unity within diversity" (46), as synonymous with the "process of synthesis, as the result, not as the point of departure" (46), which is in turn the "point of departure for perception and conception" (46).

The "task of art is the reconstitution of the concrete... in a direct, perceptual self-evidence" (47). Those "factors must be discovered in the concrete and rendered perceptible whose unity makes the concrete concrete" (46). In "reality every phenomenon stands in a vast, infinite context with all other simultaneous and previous phenomena" (47). A work of art "provides only a greater or lesser extract of reality" (46). Artistic form has the "responsibility of preventing this extract from giving the effect of an extract" (46) for which reason the "extract must seem to be a self-contained whole and to require no external extension" (47). In that sense, the artist is engaged in an "intellectual disciplining" (46) or "ordering" (46) of reality. Because the work of art has to "act as a self-contained whole" (46) and the "concreteness of objective reality must be reconstituted in perceptual immediacy in the work of art" (46), "all those factors which objectively make the concrete concrete must be depicted in their interrelation and unity" (46). The "concreteness of a phenomenon depends directly upon this extensive, infinite total context" (47). In a work of art, "any extract, any event, any individual or any aspect of the individual's life must represent such a context in its concreteness, thus in the unity of all its important determinants" (47). These determinant must be "present from the start of the work" (46); they must "appear in their purity, clarity and typicality" (46) and the "proportions in the relationships of the various determinants must reflect that objective partisanship with which the work is infused" (47). Last but not least, the determinants must "offer any abstract contrast to the world of phenomena that is directly perceptible" (48): they must appear as "concrete, direct, perceptible qualities of individual men and situations" (48). The "artistic intensification of concreteness" (48) must counterbalance any attempt to "overload' the particular with typical aspects" (48).

Lukacs turns his attention at this point to the "role of form in the establishment of this concreteness" (48). If the art work captures both the concreteness and the abstractness of the world, these are "factors emerging and becoming apparent through artistic form. They are the result of the transformation of content into form and result in the transformation of form into content" (48). At this point, Lukacs illustrates his point with reference to Gerhart Hauptmann's Weavers and Balzac's Pere Goriot. Balzac's example in particular illustrates how the
content of the work of art must be transformed into a form through which it can achieve its full artistic effectiveness. Form is nothing but the highest abstraction, the highest mode of condensation of content, of the extreme intensification of motivations, of constituting the proper proportion among the individual motivations and the hierarchy of importance among the individual contradictions of the life mirrored in the work of art. (50-51)

Lukacs considers this "characteristic form" (51) with reference to one particular example of the "individual categories of form" (51): the plot, which is the basis of both epic and drama and a cardinal element of "discussion of literary form since Aristotle" (51). Lukacs avers that "only through plot can the dialectic of human existence and consciousness be expressed, that only through a character's action can the contrast between what he is objectively and what he imagines himself to be, be expressed in a process that the reader can experience" (51). (Otherwise, the author would "either be forced to take his characters as they take themselves to be and to present them from their own limited subjective perspective, or he would have to merely assert the contrast between their view of themselves and the reality and would not be able to make his readers perceive and experience the contrast" (51). The task of a "Marxist aesthetics" (51) is to "reveal the quality of the formal aspects of art concretely as modes of reflecting reality" (51).

Lukacs argues that "breadth and depth of subject matter convert into decisive problems of form" (52), the "introduction and mastery of new thematic material" (52) calling forth a "new form with significantly new principles within the form, governing everything from composition to diction" (52). Where form and content are unified in this way, the result of a seemingly "entirely 'natural'" (52) form of art possessed of sheer "artlessness" (52). The "more 'artless' a work of art, the more it gives the effect of life and nature, the more clearly it exemplifies an actual concentrated reflection of its times and the more clearly it demonstrates that the only function of its form is the expression of this objectivity, this reflection of life in the greatest concreteness and clarity and with its motivating contradictions" (52). By contrast, "every form of which the reader is conscious as form, in its very independence of the content and in its incomplete conversion into content necessarily give the effect of a subjective expression rather than a full reflection of the subject matter itself" (52). Marxist aesthetics must "demonstrate concretely how objectivity of form is an aspect of the creative process" (53). Where bourgeois aestheticians conceive of the objectivity of form in terms of a "sterile mystique about form" (53), a Marxist aestheticians must develop a "concept of form as a mode of reflection" (53) with a view to demonstrating "how this objectivity emerges in the creative process of objectivity, as truth independent of the artist's consciousness" (53). For Lukacs, the "objective independence from the artist's consciousness begins immediately with the selection of the subject matter" (53). The artist is free to select any subject matter and to use the subject in question as "springboard to a different sort of artistic expression" (53). In the latter case, a contradiction can arise "between the thematic content and the artistic elaboration" (53).

Lukacs offers a "Marxist theory of genres" (54), contending that "every genre has its own specific, objective laws which no artist can ignore without peril" (54). In the case of a writer like Balzac, the particular "form grows out of the essential quality of the theme and subject matter" (54). Lukacs contrasts in this regard what he sees as Balzac's "profound artistic insight in selecting the short story to represent the tragedy of an artist" (54) with Zola's unfortunate decision to extend the work "to novel length" (54): the "additional motivations" (54) introduced by the latter "do not arise out of the inner dialectic of the original short-story material but remain unrelated and superficial" (55). The reason for this is that "characters and plots show the same independence of the artist's consciousness. Although originating in the writer's head, they have their own dialectic, which the writer must obey" (55). Lukacs warns that the objective dialectic of form because of its very objectivity is an historical...
dialectic. The idealistic inflation of form becomes most obvious in the transformation of forms not merely in mystical and even 'eternal' entities. Such idealistic de-historicising of form eliminates any concreteness and all dialectic. Form becomes a field model, a schoolbook example, for mechanical imitation. (55)

For example, the "profound truths in Aristotle's Poetics" (55) are the "expression of definite laws of tragedy" (55) that transcend the will of individual writers even as it is important to remember that what was crucial was the "living essence, the ever-new, ever-modified application of these laws" (55) in subsequent social and historical contexts.

Lukacs argues, however, that a "truly historical, dialectical and systematic formulation of the objectivity of form and its specific application to ever-changing historical reality" (56). Marx underscored, in his preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, "two great problems in the historical dialectic of the objectivity" (56) with regard to the epic. For Marx, firstly, "every artistic form is the outgrowth of definite social conditions and of ideological premises of a particular society and that only on these premises can subject matter and formal elements emerge which cause a particular form to flourish" (56). The "concept of the objectivity of artistic forms" (56) are the "basis for the analysis of the historical and social factors in the generation of artistic forms" (56). Given his view of "artistic value as objectively recognisable and definable" (56) as well the existence of "periods of extraordinary creative activity (the Greeks, Shakespeare)" (56), Marx came up with the concept of the "law of uneven development" (56) to explain the "fact that certain flourishing periods (of art) by no means stand in direct relation to the general social development" (56). Lukacs laments that this insight has been degraded by the "mire of bourgeois ideology" (56) into "relativistic, vulgar sociology" (56). Marx argues, secondly, that the "difficulty does not lie in understanding that Greek art and epic were related to certain forms of social development" (qtd. in Lukacs, 56) but in the fact that "they still provide us with aesthetic pleasure and serve in certain measure as norms and unattainable models" (qtd. in Lukacs, 56-57). Where Marx's first point deals with the "genesis of artistic form" (57), here his concern is with the "objective validity of a finished work of art, of the artistic form" (57). Lukacs laments that Marx's "manuscript unfortunately breaks off" (57) at this point. The lesson to be learned, for Lukacs, from Marx's comments here is that "for him Greek art forms spring out of the specific content of Greek life and has the function of raising this content to the level of objectivity in artistic representation" (57).

This "concept of the dialectical objectivity of artistic form as seen in its historical concreteness" (57) should, according to Lukacs, be the starting point of a Marxist aesthetics (which is still, he argued earlier, at a relatively "primitive level" [56]). A Marxist aesthetics "must reject any attempt at making artistic forms either sociologically relative, at transforming dialectics into sophistry or at effacing the difference between periods of flourishing creativity and of decadence, between serious art and mere dabbling" (57). It must also "decisively reject . . . any attempt at assigning artistic forms an abstract formalistic pseudo-objectivity in which artistic form and distinction among formal genres are construed abstractly as independent of the historical process and as mere formal considerations" (57). The goal should, in short, be the "concretising of the principle of objectivity" (57). This should go hand in hand with a "relentless struggle against the subjectivisation of art dominant in contemporary bourgeois aesthetics" (57), to be precise, the tendency to transform form into the "expression of a so-called great personality" (57) or a "mystical objectivity and inflated to an independent reality (neo-classicism) or denied and eliminated with mechanistic objectivity (the stream of consciousness theory)" (58). All these lead to the "separation of form and content, to the blunt opposition of one to the other and thus to the destruction of the dialectical basis for the objectivity of form" (58). At the root of all these tendencies (which amount to the "subjectivist disintegration or petrification of forms" [58] leading to the "collapse of artistic form" [58]) is to be found, in Lukacs' view,
the “same rot of bourgeois decadence” (58). A Marxist aesthetic, the development of which "lags behind the general development of Marxism" (58), would be heading in the wrong direction if it were to distort "Marx's profound theory of the uneven development of art into a relativistic caricature" (58).

Lukacs then turns his attention to the contemporary "confusion of form with technique" (58). He draws an analogy between the "conception of aesthetics as a mere technology of art" (58) and the fact that recently a "technological concept of thought has become dominant in bourgeois logic, a theory of logic as a formalist instrument" (58), something he dismisses as "idealist and agnostic" (58). To be sure, he admits, art "has a technical side" (58) but he claims that the fact that this "technique must be mastered" (58) has nothing to do with the confusion of form with technique. "Logical thinking requires schooling, too, and is a technique that can be learned and mastered, but that the categories have merely a technical and auxiliary character is a subjective and agnostic deduction from this fact" (58). "Every artist must possess a highly developed technique by which he can represent the world that shimmers before him, with artistic conviction" (58-59). However, Lukacs contends that "[t]echnician theories identifying technique with form arise exclusively out of the subjectivist illusion" (59). The latter tendency is summed up by Lenin’s view that in "reality human intentions are created by an objective world and presuppose it. . . . But to man it appears that his intentions come from beyond and are independent of the world" (59). There is, rather, a "dialectical interrelationship of reality, content, form and technique" (59). The "quality and efficacy of technique are necessarily determined by these objective factors" (59) for which reason "technique is a means for expressing the reflection of objective reality through the alternating conversion of content and form" (59). When "technique is rendered autonomous" (59) and granted "artificial independence" (59) and thereby "replaces objective form" (59) (technique "considered in isolation becomes divorced from the objective problems of art and appears as an independent instrument in the service of the artist’s subjectivity" [59]), subjectivisation in aesthetics (specifically, an “ideology of subjectivist virtuosity of form” [59], the “cult of the ‘perfection of form’ for its own sake” [59], “aestheticism” [59]) and “obscurantism” (60) vis a vis the “more profound problems of artistic form” (60) are the consequence.