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INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

This thesis is an exploration of the relationship art has with reality, laying particular emphasis upon the relationship between Realism and Marxism. I wish to discuss the various interpretations of what a Marxist realism is, in order to discover whether it is an authentic aesthetic. To do this certain presumptions must be made. It seems that art has always assumed one of two positions with regard to the "real". It is either a reflected reality or puts itself forward as constituting the "real". Obviously these are two extremes. Great art may well exist somewhere inbetween, but the question needs to be asked, is it possible for an art object to contain within it both positions? I wish to argue that authenticity in art is dependent upon social issues and aesthetic practice. Keeping this in mind it seems fair to suggest that art is generally accepted as being a social phenomenon. As such, sociological concepts must have some purchase upon it. Marxism is one such concept. There are two particular reasons as to why marxism is of interest to us here. Marxist theorists have carried out a large body of work investigating the relationship of art to reality. Particular forms of aesthetic have been developed by theorists who stem from a marxist heritage.

Very basically, the two extremes which art may adopt are Realism and Formalism. Within

the Marxist heritage the concept of realism has been debated vigorously. Our interest lies with this debate. Thus this thesis is an exploration into exactly what a Marxist Realism is, and how it may embody other political movements in late 20th century society.

Between the thirties and the fifties a variety of discussions took place between various marxist-orientated theorists. These included Lukacs, Brecht and Adorno. The interesting thing about these discussions is that the topics which they raised are still valid to us today. Issues such as authenticity, popularity and political effect were raised as each member attempted to define what realist art might be. Benjamin also partook in these discussions, and while he contributed some formidable insights, he did not produce as clear a body of work as the rest. Historically, Lukacs and Brecht remained loyal to a Marxist tradition. In fact Lukacs formulated an extensive theory of what realist aesthetics ought to be. In section three Lukacs' Realism will be discussed focusing particular attention upon the issues of content and form. Against this, critiques suggested by Brecht and Adorno will be elaborated upon.

Marxism at its best, writes Eugene Lunn "contains penetrating, indispensable historically defined criticism" (Lunn 1982, pp.1-6). Certainly the interpretation of Realism evolved by

Lukacs and Brecht contains all of this. At the same time these suggested concepts are coupled with a dogmatic belief in the inevitability of history and an aesthetic "copy theory" of consciousness and objective reality. Adorno and Benjamin shared an intense concern with the mediation of content through form. As such Adorno may represent, at least, support from within Marxism for the second main position which art may adopt with regard to reality. The notion that the work of art constitutes reality rather than reflecting it, is one which is accepted as belonging to Modernist aesthetics. Greenberg and Wollheim, for example, stress the importance which the formal properties of an art work play.

Naturally, neither aesthetic believes in either passive reflection or form devoid of content. There is far more to Realism as an aesthetic than one might think. Lukacs attempted to form a Marxist aesthetic founded upon some specific principles. These were that the function of art was to depict the essence of social reality. This was to be done through the use of 19th century aesthetic conventions as seen in the work of Balzac and Tolstoy. This description of Realism was taken up by Brecht. He agreed that the first principle of a Marxist aesthetic in the form of Realism should be to show things as they are. However he disagreed with Lukacs' insistence upon the use of neo-classical conventions. These he stated were out-moded in a twentieth century context and thus experimental

techniques, belonging to modernist movements ought to be employed. Adorno, who began his career with a marxist slant, formed the opinion that Realism as an aesthetic was inadequate as a form of knowledge. Art, he stated, could no longer hope to unify the opposites of matter and spirit. Only experimental art forms could in some way act as a reaction against modern totalitarian society. Before discussing in depth individual propositions concerning Realism, it is necessary to explore the general propositions of Realism.

In this first section I will explore the properties which constitute Realism as a form of philosophy. If this were not done, the problem of defining what Realism as an aesthetic and art practice is, would be far more confused. In the second section the discussion will move into the corridors of artistic practice. Here the difference between Realist thought and Realist aesthetic will be exemplified. Particular emphasis will also be placed upon those features which distinguish Marxist realism from other interpretations. In the sections which follow this, the discussion will vere towards the specific concepts put forward by the above theorists. Here I will discuss the opinions posited by Lukacs, Brecht and Adorno in turn. These sections focus upon the internal aspects of form and content with regard to Lukacs' suggested Realism. The final section will explore the external aspects of

the relationship of Realism and Modernism to modern twentieth century social issues, such as Feminism.

Realism as an aesthetic is an ancient tradition. Realist thought and aesthetic is based upon the "mimetic" theory. This theory was developed by Socrates. It is simply the belief in a correspondence between two objects. Plato, in the 10th book of The Republic, complicated matters. He stated that reality was a reflection of the ideal and that art was a nonsense that could only mirror reality. Aristotle, in The Poetics, stated that art reflected the most perfect aspects of reality. On the face of it both theories seem to suggest the same thing, that is, the function of art is to mirror reality. Yet, while each philosopher uses the metaphor of the mirror to describe the function of art, the reality each perceived were quite different. For example, Aristotle believed that art reflected "perfect" aspects of reality, whereas Plato held that art was a second or even a third attempt to reflect the ideal Form of reality. As the function of art is married to the artist's perception of reality, therefore it is essential to look at various interpretations of reality .

SECTION ONE

A Philosophical Perspective

Chapter One:	Empiricism
	Conventionalism
	Epistemological Realism

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

This section wishes to explore Realism as a philosophical perspective. Epistemological Realism is the term usually to describe this form of thought. It is composed of both Empiricism and Conventionalism, both of which will be described below. Epistemological Realism is in some ways quite close to Marxism. Both seem to share a particular perspective of what reality is. Epistemological Realism may not influence a large body of Realist aesthetics, but it does place some pressure upon Marxist aesthetics. In order to understand more clearly the differences between Realism as a form of thought and as an aesthetic an analysis of Epistemological Realism is necessary.

Empiricism

Epistemological Realism, T.Lovell informs us, is composed of Conventionalism and Empiricism both of which are philosophical positions. Empiricism, Joad explains, is a theory which Locke and Berkley developed between the 17th and 18th centuries. It is the belief that all knowledge ultimately derives from the experience which reaches us through our senses. It holds that an objective reality exists, knowledge is determined by this reality and mediated to the individual by the use of his or her senses. Such a

theory, however seems quite passive. It does not allow for the active role of the mind to create knowledge.

Empiricism attempts to answer such criticism by claiming that language is in fact "a shorthand summary of empirical facts" (Lovell, 1980, p.15) and that theories are useful functions in generating knowledge. However, unless theories can be shown to correspond to the "real", they do not have any validity. Goodman in Art and Language complicates matters when suggesting that theories create the objects that they purport to find (Goodman, 1982, p.p.21-31). In an attempt to overcome this problem, Popper developed the "empirical test". This suggested that two theories can co-exist in explaining one phenomenon. If an objective language is found it can adjudicate between rival theories, illustrating how one corresponds to the "real". For example, when watching water flow from a tap it can either be hot or cold. Without touching the water one may say it is hot. Such an assumption is made from some past empirical experience. By touching the water one performs an empirical test which validates or otherwise the assumption.

Conventionalism

Conventionalism as a body of thought appears to be the opposite to Empiricism. Where the latter places priority upon the objective, the former places its priority upon the subjective element.

of thought. Unlike Empiricism, Conventionalism at its most extreme claims that theories create reality. In other words, we construct our reality which is dependent upon theories to exist. Conventionalism, and its aesthetic partner Formalism, adhere closely to Saussure's work on linguistics. Languages, is a system of terms, according to Saussure. A term, which is a word or painted mark, cannot be understood by referring it to something outside of the art object. It can only be understood by looking at its relationship with other terms within the art object. Conventionalism in much the same way states that theories receive their meaning from their place and relationship within a closed theoretical system. With regard to Conventionalism, the question may be asked, how can a term refer to a "real" object which exists outside of that signifying practice if that term inherits its meaning from the internal structure of that practice? The answer given is that reality is a function of knowledge. Such an answer is easily deflated as it seems to suffer from relativism, that is, in the absence of absolutes everything becomes relative.

Epistemological Realism

Epistemological Realism as a body of thought follows much of the Conventionalist critique of Empiricism. It agrees with Conventionalism that the active production of theory exists and that language is

theory impregnated. Yet, Epistemological Realism insists that an objective world exists independently of theory and can yet be known through the use of theory. Epistemological Realism acknowledges a multi-layered reality (Joad, c.1929). Rom Harre describes this perception of reality as "ontological depths" (Harre,1972 p.187). Basically this term means that objective reality exists on a variety of layers. Each layer is connected , if you will, to the one above it. The most obvious layer in this reality is the one of appearance.

Epistemological Realism agrees with Empiricism, that an objective reality exists. This world is far larger than the one which we perceive to our immediate senses. Knowledge, according to the realist, is not simply impregnated upon the observer's mind but is created by the observer. Because of this, knowledge is deemed to be either true or false if it corresponds to some element in objective reality. In other words, objective reality is not thought dependent.

Up to this point I have described what Realism as a body of thought is composed of. It is now necessary to describe its relationship with Marxism. Marxism, in all its various forms, believes in the existence of an objective and social world which may be known through thought. In fact Marx makes the Realist assertion that reality exists beyond appearances.

Science would be superfluous if there were an immediate coincidence of the appearance and reality of things (Marx, in Lukacs, 1970, p.26)

The claim that appearances accepted on face value are misleading is accepted by both Epistemological Realism and Marxism. For example, Marx claims that the function of an ideology is to suggest that the appearance of reality should be accepted at face value, that is, as a single layered reality. He repeatedly attacked religion as being one such ideology. In Marxist theory of commodity fetishism he suggested that the worker must construct knowledge so that he or she may understand the various ontological levels of capitalist society. Epistemological Realism, as we have seen, places importance upon objective reality and the relationship thought has with it.

To sum up, Epistemological realism is a combination of Conventionalism and Empiricism. From conventionalism it adopts the importance of actively producing knowledge. With this it combines the belief in an empirical notion of reality. As with Marxism this empirical reality is constituted by a variety of layers which extend far beyond real appearance. Given the above it seems fair to suggest that Epistemological realism approaches reality in much the same way as Marxism does. Therefore, as a body of thought, it is not inconceivable to think of Epistemological Realism being adopted by Marxism.

SECTION TWO

Realism as an Aesthetic

Chapter One: Realist Aesthetic

Chapter Two: The Aesthetic's of
Lukacs



Chapter One

Realist Aesthetic

Following on from the earlier discussions of Epistemological Realism we must now focus our attention upon Realism as a form of aesthetic. Aesthetics differs from other theoretical practices in that it is concerned with art. Because of this, aesthetics forms a particular type of language which refers to specific art practices. In the following chapter I wish to outline the differences between Epistemological Realism and Realist aesthetics in general. By so doing it will be possible to clarify how the Marxist aesthetics of Lukacs and Brecht stand apart from other interpretations of Realism.

Abrams informs us that the aesthetics of Realism is as old as art itself. From the 18th century onwards there have been a number of artistic movements which have claimed to be Realist, for example, Courbet. Naturalism and Neo-Classicism are examples of artistic movements which are generally incorrectly labelled as being Realist. Therefore to fully understand any interpretation of Realism one must look at its historical context.

While it must be remembered that a distinction exists between different Realisms, they do share the common attitude that the function of art is to

show things as they are. Naturally such an attitude is influenced by the nature of the reality which they reflect. Williams tells us that there is a great deal of confusion as to what is or is not Realism (Williams, 1976, p.218). Differing interpretations have often been labelled under the same headings. Some interpretations have been premised upon Empiricism, for example, 19th century Realist painting such as that of Greaves (Murray,1959,p.343), while others rest upon a critique of Empiricism. The "Critical Realism" put forward by Lukacs is one such example. From this it seems fair to suggest that all Realist aesthetics attempt to show things as they are and to put forward suggested conventions on how to do this. These methods, especially with respect to Lukacs and Brecht often refer to scientific procedure (Jameson,1977,p.200). The task which such aesthetic movements then face is to describe the "real" world through the conventions and signifying practices of the art object. Williams makes an interesting point on this which seems to clarify matters. He states that it would be a mistake to understand Realist aesthetics simply with regard to its conventions. What distinguishes one interpretation from another is its perception of reality (Williams, 1977,). For example, Naturalism (defined below) and Realism are often confused. This may be because critics have concentrated too closely on the methods employed by both

rather than on their perception of reality. Naturalism is interested "in the inner reality" and the psychological aspects of the individual, whereas Realism focuses upon the external social world. This led to the emphasis on Realism's political edge. This is especially true when Realism becomes influenced by Marxism.

Realism, McCabe reminds us, is an issue not only for literature - it is a major "political, philosophical and practical issue" (McCabe, 1974, p.7). Jameson adds that the importance of a Marxist orientated interpretation of Realism is its claim to be both a cognitive as well as an aesthetic theory. Realist aesthetics differ from Realism as a body of thought by the fact that it is an aesthetic practice which concerns itself with specific social and historical contexts and aesthetic conventions. Realist aesthetics is historically orientated, whereas Epistemological Realism describes absolute states of reality.

Both Lukacs and Brecht share a belief in an objective reality which exists independently of knowledge. Marxism as a general proposition claims a unique insight into the fundamental nature of reality. This naturally gives Marxist aesthetics an edge and felt right to accuse other theories of being misleading and illusionary. However, it would be wrong of me to give the impression that the suggested Realisms of Lukacs and Brecht are precise

copies of Marxist materialism. Certain problems are created when aesthetics attempt to incorporate wider political or philosophical debates. For example, Marxist materialism very basically discusses the relationship of labour and capital in society. These are the underlying forces which constitute social reality according to Marx. However, Williams identifies the base line rule of Realist aesthetics as follows:

The cause and effect relationship (in Realist art) should be presented in human and natural terms without reference to superstructural forces (Williams, 1977,p.20).

Therefore, Realist art is based upon human relationships. Marxism, on the other hand, is based upon the interrelationship of things. Thus, a Marxist Realism has certain problems. These are

(a) How can a multi-layered reality of base and superstructure be described by an art form which deals with human relationships ?

(b) How can the narrative of a Marxist aesthetic remain realistic to the story and yet suggest a form of knowledge about an external reality ?

(c) In the case of an art form which describes small personal issues, how may these mirror universal situations ?

The history of such concepts, as "critical" or "social" Realism is exactly an attempt to forge a Marxist aesthetic from Marxist theories and politics in general. The chief architect of this attempt was George Lukacs.

Up to now the discussion has concentrated upon the general problems a Marxist aesthetic in the form of Realism, might face. It is now fitting to move from the general to the specific. Lukacs was primarily concerned with "critical" Realism. Briefly, this is a form of Marxist aesthetic which was formulated by him in an attempt to overcome the three problems mentioned above.

Chapter Two

The Aesthetics of Lukacs

Lukacs himself believed in an objective reality which could be known through thought. Lovell informs us that Lukacs understood art to be a form of thought, differing from science but sharing the same goals of showing things as they are. Lukacs based many of his arguments upon the premise that we held a simplistic understanding of the relationship which art shares with reality. He attacked modernist forms of art as simply reflecting reality in its immediate apprehensible form, an argument he used against Naturalism. Surrealism and Expressionism are accused of being overly subjective and in the long run narcissistic. He puts this point across in his essays with Ernst Bloch entitled "Realism in the Balance".

By so doing, these movements were simply becoming part of the reification process which took place under capitalism. The concept of "reification" is central to Lukacs' thought. He argued that Realist literature could only reflect objective reality if it understood, or at least explored, the constructs of the social world (Jameson, 1977, pp.28-59). Thus it could unify essence and form. Expressionism and Surrealism only concerned themselves with the subjective world. Therefore, like

Conventionalism in a broad philosophical sense, as art practices they could not understand the true nature of the empirical world. Lukacs developed the idea of reification from the Marxist theory of "commodity fetishism". To "reify" is to regard an unreal or subjective phenomenon as a real thing (dictionary). Under capitalism, social relations are reified when their form is perceived as a relationship between things. Social reality is in fact constructed through human relationships. However, in capitalist society the individual finds himself alienated and is thus unable to be completely conscious of the constructs of social reality. Because of this, the individual is subjected to social laws and pressures which seem to be natural forces. Since the reified form masks the social reality which it is a form of, essence and appearance diverge.

In an attempt to overcome this problem Lukacs declared that truly Realist art ought to reflect, as Williams puts it "the underlying movements which constitute the reality of a particular time" (Williams, 1981,p.56) . Movements such as Surrealism, according to Lukacs could not overcome the pressures of reification since they were unable to recognise the "true" structures of social reality. They were cursed to reflect a world of fragmentation, where essence and form had no relationship. In Marxism and Form Jameson puts forward the concept that Marxism is

determined to highlight the relationship between knowledge and objective reality. Lukacs may only be understood as attempting to formulate an aesthetic which did the same. As with Adorno, this problem of unifying opposites took place beneath the canopy of Hegelianism. Hegels' philosophy, in the account given by A.J.P. Taylor is that it is a theory about the synthesis of opposites: the bringing together of "thesis" and "antithesis" to form "synthesis" (TAYLOR, 1967.). As with Marx, Lukacs made a practical application of Hegel's theory. Taking the Marxist idea of the "alienated subject" and coupling it with the Hegelian idea of opposites, he declared that the opposite to human experience in a fractured society was concreteness or "totality". It was the aim of "Critical realism" to create the essence of "totality" in the observer.

An art work may be divided into two elements. These are (a) the form and (b) the content. The form refers to the material and logic used in the construction of the art work. The content is the motivation, political or otherwise that the form of an art work embodies. In a larger context critics and artists alike often associate the terms form and content as representing the subjective and the objective. The form, very simplistically is the subjective expression of some external objective content. Lukacs' "critical realism" believed that it was in the narrative of the

novel that form and content could come together. In an attempt to find an art form which could unify these opposites he began to study Greek epic theatre.

Greek epic theatre, as understood by Lukacs was divided into a hierarchical system. At the head is the "epic" where essence and means collide. Lukacs however stipulated that unlike "epic form" Realist work should not be based upon any presuppositions, be they political or otherwise. An example is in order. Marx and Engels praised Balzac above Zola. They did this as they felt his work to be unpropagandist. The worth of Balzac's novels for a marxist, according to Lukacs, is that they are pure translations of observed social systems (Lukacs, 1962). Lukacs believed that the political point of the novel was to suggest the means by which an individual might become "whole". For this "totality" to occur, the very artistic form of the novel had to be based upon the conflict between the individual and the institutionalised state. However according to various commentators such as Lovell, Williams and Jameson, the art object represents a process of becoming "whole" but is not "whole" itself. Jameson tells us that for Lukacs, the most basic image of human freedom was not the novels' characters. It was the artist and the public who by following the plot could achieve a consciousness of "totality" or "wholeness".

In the Realist work, it is the human character which carries the content. More correctly it is the type of human character which signifies a most striking difference with Modernist aesthetic movements. Lukacs believed that if the artist adopted neo-Classical conventions or methods employed by Tolstoy and others he/she would be able to produce authentic art which corresponds to the "real". The Realist character as suggested by Lukacs would be an ideal form with which to discover the essences of appearance. It would also overcome the problems of describing a Marxist theory on an artistic level. Realist characters often point to a reality which is much larger than their own individual experience. This is done, so that the individual work of art, which operates under particular aesthetic conventions, can refer to a reality which is far larger than its own individual narratives. In the 17th and 18th centuries a "generic human type" of character was developed by artists who saw themselves as being part of a realist tradition (Abrams, 1953 p38). Abrams tells us that this form of character referred to human types rather than individuals. This is why Lukacs was attracted to it as an aesthetic form. Since the "generic human type" or "typicality" as Lukacs termed it, referred to types rather than individuals, artistic works would not be limited from speaking to society. Thomas Mann is a novelist put forward by Lukacs as being a true Realist.

Sartre while agreeing that the form of "totality" is vital for a work of art, questions the whole notion of "typicality". He accused it of being a form of ideology which assumed that a "typical" class could exist in some a-historical fashion (JAMESON, 1974 pp37-40). It seems that this argument is based upon a mis-understanding of what "typicality" for Lukacs was. As I interpret it, it is the belief that the characters used in a novel should represent a specific social class at a specific historical time.

As stated above it was within the narrative that the opposites of reality could be unified. Lukacs used the issues of narrative to explain the weakness of Modernist art movements and the strength of his "Critical realism". He stated that Naturalism limited itself to description rather than narration. Narration is superior to description since it relies upon human interrelationships. In description, a form of narrative associated with Modernist aesthetics, the audience finds themselves detached from the work. Therefore the plot becomes an object of observation rather than identification. Because the spectator is unable to identify with Modernist art works, his vision of society in its reified form is confirmed. The audience remain in a state of partial consciousness and thus Naturalism as a form of knowledge has not worked.

Before moving on to Brecht's

critique of Lukacs' "Critical realism" let us summarise the more important ideas of this Realism. According to Lukacs science and art shared the same goals of showing things as they are. Art differs from science in that it concentrates on the specific while science investigates the general. The task of resolving this problem and unifying the opposites of appearance and essence fell upon representation in Realist art. "Critical realism" attempts to achieve this through the use of "typicality". Through the Realist narrative characters of a "typical" nature reveal that social forces are the product of humans. By doing so the reification process is broken and appearance and essence unite. Lukacs' interpretation of Realism uses the concept of "typicality" to reveal a multi-layered reality.

In the following chapters I wish to examine three different critiques mounted against Lukacs' "Critical realism". The first is the closest to Lukacs' interpretation, as it is based upon the belief that art is a form of knowledge whose purpose is to show things as they are. This critique was put forward by Brecht and focuses upon the conventions of Realism as an aesthetic. Brecht differs principally from Lukacs in that he supported the experimental techniques generally used by modern artistic movements such as Naturalism. The second critique is more radical than that put forward by Brecht, as it questions the whole idea of trying to show things as they are. This critique was

mounted by "Formalist marxism". Very basically "Formalism" like its philosophic partner "Conventionalism" question the very idea that an objective reality can exist independently of thought. Of course I would like to remind the reader that this is a very brief and simplistic explanation. Adorno put forward the final critique of Realism which will be discussed. He, according to D.Lang (1978 p65) came to reject all forms of Realism whether they be that of Lukacs or Brecht.

SECTION THREE

CRITIQUES OF REALISM

CHAPTER ONE: BRECHT AND Mc CABE

CHAPTER TWO: ADORNO

Chapter One

The Aesthetics of Brecht

Brecht critique of Lukacs' Realism and his own formulation of "epic theatre" are often associated with Modernist aesthetics and the avant-Garde. Lovell argues persuasively that to assume that Brecht was a Modernist would be to misunderstand his work (Lovell, 1980 p76). He believed in an objective reality which existed independently of thought. He understood art to be a form of knowledge with close ties to scientific procedure. Both beliefs seem to put him into a Epistemological and an aesthetic Realist camp. The reader might rightly enquire as to why Modernism might claim his aesthetics as being in sympathy with it. This is because Brecht, in attempting to formulate a Realist aesthetic, embraced many of the experimental ideas and techniques generally associated with Modernist aesthetics.

As we have seen, Lukacs' Realism reverted to the tactics of old masters: "bring the individual back to centre stage" (Lang, 1978, p.55). Brecht refuted this advice. Art which adopted such a formula would be regressive. Ironically Brecht accuses Lukacs of being a Formalist, as he was fascinated by aesthetic conventions which belonged to the 19th century. For Brecht, Lukacs' advice was simply "be like

Tolstoy- but without his weakness, be like Balzac, but up to date"(Lang, 1978, p.56). Such conventions, claimed Brecht, would be politically and socially meaningless in a 20th century art form.

Brecht's alternative definition of Realism states that as an aesthetic it must be politically motivated in discovering the causal complexes of society. It must unmask the ruling ideologies and put the working class in a position which will further their ability to revolt against their oppressors. Roland Barthes tells us that to this end Brecht formulated his concept of epic theatre. Epic theatre is interesting not only as a concept but in this case it demonstrates the gulf between his and Lukacs' interpretations of Realism. Brecht seeing Realism in a political light, frowned upon conventions which allowed the viewer to become emotionally involved with the characters of a play. Brecht as with Greenberg the modernist critic, wished to cultivate a detached awareness on behalf of the audience. By so doing the epic play would act, not as a means of systematizing the revolutionary emotions of the working class, but as a means of producing a political ^{awareness} in that same class. Brecht's epic theatre was designed to prevent the audience from involvement through identification. By so doing the theatre would develop the critical thought which goes to make up political consciousness. Note the

striking difference between Brecht's and Lukacs' proposed interpretations. Lukacs believed that authentic art could be ideological, Brecht did not. While Lukacs placed some importance upon identification with the characters of a work, Brecht on the other hand went to great lengths to prevent the audience from becoming anything other than mere spectators.

On the issues of "totality" with regard to Brecht Gallis writes that:

for Brecht totality (which is the union of objective and subjective) is only reached in the process of reception, the work of art is still open and incomplete.

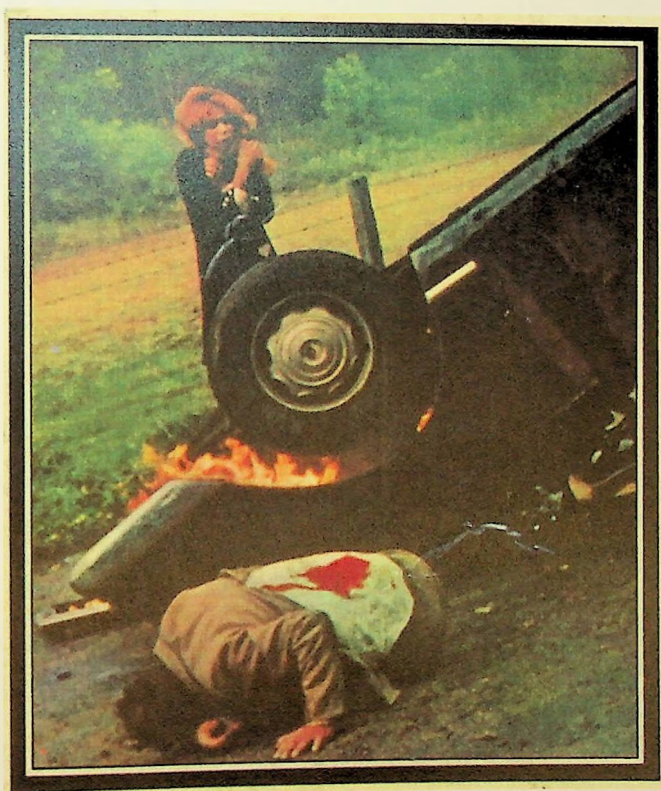
(Gallis, 1972)

The spectator must engage with Brecht's method if he/she is to draw any conclusions about society. briefly then for Brecht, Realist art if it is to have a Marxist political slant must link firstly, a theory of social reality, secondly a theory of aesthetic pleasure and finally a theory which explains the relationship between knowledge, pleasure and political action (Lovell, 1980, p78).

The next critique of Lukacs' Realism centers upon the whole notion that Realist art can reflect reality. Since this critique questions the goals of Realist Marxist aesthetics it calls both Lukacs' and Brecht's interpretations into question. It is the work of Colin McCabe that an influential version of "Formalism" may be observed. Colin McCabe's argument is based upon the premise that Realist art is unable

passively to reflect reality. Aesthetic conventions which govern art practice prevent the art object from doing this. While Mc Cabe's argument is a discussion about aesthetics, it does seem to be very closely linked to the ideas suggested by Saussure. Like Saussure Mc Cabe states that terms, words or painted marks, derive their meaning from the internal conventions of language rather than from some reality external to those conventions. In artistic terms this would mean that the art work could only be understood by studying its relationship with reference to the language it employs and to art history.

Mc Cabe states that all Realist art works contain a number of common characteristics. The first is that a "hierarchy of discourses" exists in all realist art. (Mc Cabe, 1974, p8.) For example a 19th century novel, according to Mc Cabe, was composed of a variety of layers or discourses. At the apex of these discourses was the "meta - language". It was privileged above the rest as it claimed to reflect the "real". Since it was the aim of the Realist novel to reflect reality, the "meta- language" determined the importance and function of all the other levels of the novel. In support of this argument Mc Cabe claimed that the author in a 19th century novel, through making authorial comments on the story line represented this "meta - language". George Eliot is an example of such an



author. However in 20th century Realist work, especially in film, the "meta - language" is carried by the structure of the narrative. Realism, again according to Mc Cabe, is structured on the belief that a pure moment of unification between objective and subjective exists. "Totality" or to show things as they are, Mc Cabe sees as being ideological and illusionary. The "meta - language" performs this ideological function since it seems to unify the opposites of objective and subjective realities.

Mc Cabe further attacks Realist aesthetics, accusing it of being a closed form of knowledge, only accessible if certain ideological presuppositions are accepted by the audience. The most obvious of these is that it shows things as they are. Interestingly, if the reader remembers that one of the stipulations of "Critical realism" was that it was not to be based upon any preconceived or presupposed notions. Realist art as mentioned previously wishes to show things as they are. According to Mc Cabe such a goal is ideological. This ideology is carried by the Realist work in its very structure. Because of this, according to him, the Realist work is unable to subvert its ideological base. Modernist aesthetics tackles these problems, in his view, not by denying that art is ideological but by following Althusser's claim that can be the product of ideology while remaining critical of this ideology. This is achieved when the art object

displays its own signifying practices. In the world of film it is the work of Godard which best displays this attitude. It seems fair to suggest in Realism's defence that Realist art works do not deny that they are objects built out of certain materials. To suggest that Lukacs for example, was unaware of the ideological base which art was built upon seems to be untrue. In *History and Class Consciousness* (Lukacs, 1968) he, according to Federici, claims that art may be ideological and Realist if it simply adopts his suggested form. (Federici, 1972)

As we have seen a "Formalist" critique of Realism focuses upon the conventions which Realism uses, proclaiming them to be ideologically based. Since this argument seems to be either based upon or in some way connected to Conventionalist philosophy, it is likely to suffer from the same problems as that philosophy. Conventionalism places its priority upon thought constituting reality. In other words each thought constitutes a new and individual reality. Therefore the notion that thought may correspond to reality is for the Conventionalist an impossibility. In much the same way McCabe's "formalism" has difficulty in accepting the ideas of correspondence between a language and an empirical Reality. Conventionalism as we have seen suffers from relativism. If each thought constitutes reality anew then there are no absolutes against which things may be measured

everything becomes relative. Mc Cabe's "formalism" it may be argued suffers these difficulties.

Chapter Two

Adorno's critique

The third and final critique of Realism which will be discussed was put forward by Adorno. Brecht, as the reader will remember, questioned the conventions which Realism if it were to be Marxist should adopt. However he agreed with Lukacs' proposition that Realism was a form of knowledge. The "Formalist" critique of Realism as put forward by McCabe questioned Realism's ability to show things as they are. Adorno with the Frankfurt school launched the third critique of Realism. Adorno is of particular interest to our discussion as he formulated his ideas from a Marxist perspective and yet supported conventions employed by Modernist movements.

Adorno's principle charge against Lukacs was that he did not give enough attention to the formal aspects of the art work. Because of this lack of foresight on Lukacs' part Adorno concluded that he was unable to recognise the "essences" portrayed by Modernist movements such as Expressionism. Speaking about Lukacs' later work, Adorno remarks that he employs very flamboyant and unclear words such as "decadence" to describe modern art. (Adorno, 1961.) To believe in decadence is to acknowledge that purity exists in either good or bad form. Any philosophy of

aesthetics, continued Adorno, must recognise that such purity cannot exist. Using such language allowed Lukacs to place Beckett, Kafka, Joyce and Picasso into the same category of "empty formalism". Adorno's basic argument against Lukacs' hypothesis concerning Realist art is that it is unable to reflect reality. This is a recurrent argument levied against Realism, put forward by Gombrich in Art and Illusion. He argues that the art object is constructed out of artistic conventions. Paint and canvas, for example, constitute a painting in the broad sense. Therefore art can never reflect reality since its conventions separate it from reality. According to Adorno and Marcuse, art can at best "reflect art practices" and nothing outside of this art practice. (Adorno, 1970, p.294) However I would suggest that Lukacs was well aware of the abstract nature of art. In support of this claim I wish to draw the readers' attention to a discussion between Lukacs and Ernst Bloch. In this Lukacs states that there is a degree of abstraction implicit in all art works and that he saw no reason as to why this should inhibit art's ability to reflect reality. (Lukacs, 1938, pp.28-59)

The reader may now rightly ask how an art object can remain partly abstract and yet give a true reflection of reality? The answer to this lies in Lukacs' particular understanding of what reflection is. Generally it is accepted that there are two forms of

reflection or "mimesis". There is a passive and an active form of reflection. As described earlier, Empiricist philosophy as put forward by Locke endorsed a passive form of reflection. However Williams reminds us that there is a quite different sense of "mimesis" which is not reflection at all, but a process of grasping, interpreting and changing. (Williams, 1981, p.7) This is the method which Lukacs seemed to prefer. As such it is a method which allowed for the abstract element in artistic practice.

A common characteristic of the cultural criticism of the Frankfurt school, with which Adorno was associated, was its view of the social system as a "totality" whose essential features were to be found at all levels of the society both the economic and the cultural. Adorno observed that modern capitalism had created a totalitarian society. In Adorno's Philosophy of Music he suggested that a relationship existed between musical structure and a larger social structure. In Aesthetic Theory Adorno states that the dialectic of art resembles the social dialectic without "consciously imitating it (Adorno, 1970, pp.6-19). According to Adorno art practices which are based upon accepted aesthetic conventions are in fact a part of a totalitarian capitalist society. The function of art according to Adorno is to negate social structures. By so doing, art may become the last refuge where individuality rather than mass action may exist. However, this negation of



the social totality is only effective as long as the experimental forms do not become systematised. Take for example Schoenberg's music. Adorno saw it as a valid negating force until it developed the "twelve tone system". By developing a system, the music could like Stravinski's work be incorporated into society. (Jameson,1971,p.11) For art to remain authentic it must retain some level of autonomy from an exterior reality. Realism and Modernism achieve this through their formal properties of the aesthetic narrative. Art according to Adorno and his colleague Marcuse, could only be revolutionary within an aesthetic format. A work of art , says Marcuse , is authentic not by virtue of "it's content nor by it's pure form , but by the content having become form". (Marcuse,1979) If we accept that art can only be revolutionary by reacting against the tradition of it's aesthetic form, then it may be said that progressive form is linked to revolutionary content. For example Picasso's cubist work was deemed progressive since it revolutionised aesthetic form. It did this by revolting against historic aesthetic narrative. This revolt took place, mediated through Picasso, because he existed in a particular historical climate which required a new form of aesthetic to embody the new forms of content which existed at that time.

In the following section the issues

of how a Marxist realism can embody a modern political phenomenon such as Feminism will be discussed. As has been pointed out, a Marxist realism as posited by Lukacs must reflect the essences of modern society. Brecht found himself in agreement with this goal, although he disagreed with the conventions which ought to be employed in achieving this. Adorno was a Marxist who disbelieved in Realism as an authentic aesthetic. Because of this he found himself in broad agreement with the Modernist assertion that art can never truthfully reflect an objective reality, but can simply negate existing social structures. In the discussion which follows the adequacy of the Realist belief in reflection and the Modernist concept of experimental art are explored. Each of these discourses represents, in the extreme, the positions which art is able to adopt with regard to reality. It seems logical to assume that the most progressive concept will be the one which is able to embody a social issue, in this case Feminism. However Rita Felski's argument complicates the seemingly obvious issues of progressive aesthetic.

SECTION FOUR

Chapter One: Realism the avant-Garde and Feminism

Conclusion

Chapter One

Realism, Feminism and the Avant-Garde

Up to this point we have discussed the internal roles played by the form and content of an aesthetic art object, laying particular emphasis upon Realism and Modernism. To reiterate, Modernism as an art practice is in many respects the opposite to Realism. Like Realism, Modernism as an art practice is very broad. It embodies many artistic movements, such as Expressionism, Surrealism, Neo-Expressionism to name but a few. The reason for opting to discuss the Modernist/Realist debate is that many of the issues it raised, like avant-Gardism, progressiveness, and authenticity, are not specific to this discussion but question the whole function of art.

A brief examination of the historical nature of the dominant paradigm of art in the 20th century is necessary here. There are two reasons for doing this. The first is to show that Modernism as a form of aesthetic is still relevant today. As stated above, Modernism as an art practice is wide and varied. For the sake of clarity we shall take Greenberg's definition of Modernism as involving the notion that the subjective expression dominates objective representation. That the artist, when producing a work of art partakes in a detached form of criticism of that

work of art, while remaining aware of the internal rules and governing systems of the art language (Greenberg,1967,p.38) Orton and Harrison, when introducing Modernism/Criticism/Realism put forward the persuasive argument that Modernism as presented by the art critic Greenberg, "who remains it's typical and most influential exponent" is still the dominant culture of art. They go on to suggest that Modernism is not "marginal but structural to our culture".(Harrison and Orton,1984.pp.1-5) It is in fact the dominant artistic paradigm. A paradigm, following William's definition is a body of thought based upon certain assumptions which affect the way knowledge is produced and perceived in relation to that body of thought. In the case of art the dominant paradigm may be seen as a form of self - critical and selective analysis. William's suggests that most Marxist and Structuralists tendencies are concurrent with this perception of the paradigm.

Structuralism with which Adorno may be associated, according to William's, grew from contradictions which Formalism could not answer. Formalism, William's assures us is an art practice which places it's emphasis on understanding the artwork through the use of it's internal structures. Unlike Formalism, Structuralism refused to interpret an event in it's own isolated form. It sought rather to locate an event or artwork within a whole signifying system.

What for our purposes may be deemed Structuralist in cultural studies is the work which analyses internal organisation "not as an event in it's self but as a means of understanding internal systems" or infrastructures in objective reality. (William's,1981,) Goodman and indeed Adorno carried out a formidable amount of work into this type of research of narrative forms. (Goodman,1982,p.20-31)

It is now necessary to look at how Realism and Modernism as forms of aesthetics can relate to political issues in the social world. Rita Felski's article Feminism,Realism and the Avant-Garde tackles such issues. Realism as an aesthetic insists on a work being authentic. This has specific implications when it attempts to deal with a political issue such as Feminism. A Realist Feminist work must be a representation "of feminine reality". In other words the Feminist artist must simply reflect the Feminist subject. Critics attack such a concept of reflection as naive. Accordingly it has been suggested that any notion of reflection is unable to question it's ideological base. Mc Cabe is an example of one such critic. Let us note here that Lukacs believed not in a passive reflection process but in an active sense of "mimesis". Rita Felski informs us that Feminism has focused upon Barthe's opposites of the "readable" and the "writable" texts. Barthe's suggests that the dominant paradigm contains two opposite views of what

reality is. These are the opposites of Realism and Modernism. It is only through understanding the ideology which dominates each that one may be termed progressive.

Mannheim suggested that thought or knowledge was essentially determined by class. Ruling classes driven to defend their position developed an ideological mode of thought which served to rationalise and justify the established social order. The working class on the other hand developed a utopian mentality which sought the transformation of existing institutions. (Mannheim,1962,p360) One may suggest that it is the conflict between both values which creates a balance in social thought. Mannheim concludes that in a post-industrial society the conflict between conservatism and revolution has ceased to exist causing an imbalance in modern art and social thought.

Irrespective of content, the Realist novel is seen by critics who support Modernism to be irredeemably compromised. It generates the illusion of transparency, Catherine Belsey states, without drawing attention to it's ideological base. Macheney disagrees with the criticism that Realism is a closed ideological system. The Realist novel for example, is an art object, governed by aesthetic conventions. Therefore it remains in some sense autonomous from reality and cannot be seen as a literal

transcription of the "real". According to the Realist, the aesthetic conventions employed by the art object are and must be ideologically based. Aesthetic conventions must stem from a utopian or reactionary (conservative) vision.

Rita Felski argues that to understand the relationship an art object has with reality it is necessary to study the aesthetic tradition in which the art object is positioned. This has very little to do with the content of the work and more to do with style and dominant social beliefs. Consequently an analyses of the category of art as the product of a particular historical context must play some crucial role in attempting to understand the relationship between politics and artistic form. The Modernist's put themselves forward as producing work which is progressive by it's said subversion of dominant ideological beliefs. However if the type of linguistic subversion described by McCabe's "revolutionary text" is part of the accepted dominant paradigm, it may no longer be said to be from ideology. Both Realism and Modernism are artistic conventions suffering at least some form of ideology. Thus they need to be studied within the broader context of the institutionalised status of art in society. (Felski, 1989)

Felski makes the persuasive argument against the position (which is often used against Realism) that an art form may negate or

transcend the ideological systems of society through the uses of its formal narratives. Peter Berger in Theory of the Avant-Garde suggests that art has moved into a post avant-garde era. Thus art may either "repeat its attacks of provocation or reappropriate more traditional forms". (Felski 1989) Capitalist society's fetishization of novelty has incorporated the ideology of the avant-Garde into its own economic structures. By doing so the political potency and autonomy of the avant-Garde is institutionalised and made dormant.

Since Modernist art practices such as Surrealism are founded upon a practice of negating the accepted perception of reality, this gives them a very negative function. As such they could not embody the positive political content of Feminism. Jochen Schulte suggests that Modernism suffers "from a metaphysical closure" since it negates rather than builds. According to Lovell, Althusser stated that if a body of thought could be said to be closed, then it must have some ideological basis. A symptom of this "metaphysical" closure may be observed, says Schulte, when works of art and critics alike allude to unknowable orders such as quality. In fact in Greenberg's essays on art criticism he often refers to such orders as quality. (Greenberg, 1967, pp. 38-39)

In Theory of the Avant-Garde Berger describes art as being a historical development of

artistic form and as a social institution. He furthers his argument by insisting that art cannot be understood as an isolated issue. It is not the internal structures that define the function a work of art may have but, according to Berger, but the ideological discourses placed on that art object by the cultural institutions of that particular time. Art, in other words, in a post avant-Garde era may adopt whatever conventions it wishes.

From this position Felski states that to understand whether Realism can embody Feminism one must ask how can Feminism influence the way we understand art. Today Feminism belongs to a post-modern tradition. Therefore to understand modern Feminism it is helpful to have some grasp of this post-modern tradition. Post-modernism is a difficult term to pin down. Andreas Huyssen tells us that at it's best, post-modernism is the "embodiment of the criticism of modernism aware of it's own institutionalization". (Felski, 1989) Modern Feminism according to Felski insists upon the importance of gender as a political category in the production and reception of art. Such a view challenges Formalist literary theories which detached the text from all outside influences. Feminism consistently seeks to relocate art within a broader social framework. As a political or social movement Feminism contains within its ranks a variety of smaller groups. These individuals find themselves brought

together as they share the common awareness of an oppressed gender. Rita Felski stresses that Feminism as a group is comprised of individuals. Therefore, she continues, it would be invalid to develop any one normative political aesthetic as such an aesthetic would have to be based upon the notion of women as a unified collective subject. Such a notion would be untrue. As we have seen artistic form and technique are molded by the needs of particular groups. Following Rita Feliski's argument, since Feminism and argueably any social movement is made up of a variety of smaller groups, and since we live in an era where it is difficult to claim one artistic convention as being progressive, it may be said that various groups will put pressure on a variety of artistic forms to express themselves.

Conclusion

To sum up, Feleski states that in a post- avant Garde era, since Feminism is a movement made up of a variety of groups it must address "a cultural pluralism" which will confront the needs and interests of a range of audiences. In this light the abstract notion of a set Feminist aesthetics is shown to be invalid. It can well be argued that in a post-avant-Garde era any political movement must adopt a cultural pluralism. In the light of this argument it seems fair to suggest that a judgement of progressive art form cannot be made solely upon it complying with dominant

artistic conventions. In the late 20th century, due to the demise of the avant-Garde and the commercialization of art in general, there is no longer a dominant artistic practice against which lesser art forms may be judged. In other words, Modern society, rather like Conventionalist philosophy lacks the absolutes upon which to make judgements. Therefore it is extremely difficult to validate either Modernism or Realism. Hence, it may be concluded that a Marxist aesthetic in the form of Realism is dependent upon historical situations, individual needs and an opposite art practice (in this case Modernism) to validate it's authenticity.

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