

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

I. Music as a subject of philosophy.....	1
II. Pre-Marxist and Marxist materialism.....	6
III. Main representatives of Marxist musicology: Boris Asafyev and Zofia Lissa	10
IV. Orthodox and heterodox Marxism: Lukács and Adorno.....	15
V. The current lack of research on Marxist musicology.....	18
VI. Lukács as a typical representative of Marxist aesthetics	21

1. PROLEGOMENA TO LUKÁCS' MUSICO-AESTHETIC ESSAY

1.1. Place in his œuvre	25
1.2. Methodological background: Marxist musicology	31
1.3. Text structure	36

2. THE GREEK THEORY OF MIMESIS

2.1. Plato – Aristotle – Pindar	41
2.2. Fundamental determinations of aesthetic mimesis: immanence, homogeneity, 'world'	46
2.3. Music and nature.....	52
2.4. The theory of the Pythagoreans	56

3. SPACE AND TIME IN MUSIC

3.1. Music and dance	63
3.2. The concept of 'quasi-space'	73

4. MUSICAL MIMESIS

4.1. Inwardness	81
4.2. Double mimesis	88

5. MUSICAL AUTONOMY

5.1. On the historical relation between subjectivity and music.....	99
5.2. The universal mission of music	104

6. CONTENT AND FORM

6.1. Music and words113

6.2. The validity of the general aesthetic categories in the field of
music: realism, catharsis, worldliness121

CONCLUSIONS133

BIBLIOGRAPHY139

1. PROLEGOMENA TO LUKÁCS' MUSICO-AESTHETIC ESSAY

1.1. Place in his œuvre

An introduction to Georg Lukács' musico-aesthetic work must take as a starting point the primary fact that Lukács was not a musicologist. The bulk of his philosophico-aesthetic research falls within the scope of literary criticism, and only a small part of his œuvre is devoted to the philosophical treatment of music. According to Miklós Szabolcsi (1993, 92), nephew of the Hungarian musicologist Bence Szabolsci (Lukács' close friend and collaborator), Lukács turned to the study of musico-aesthetic issues mainly after 1959, that is, during the last decade of his life. But what led Lukács, even in this late period of his writing activity, to devote more attention to music? What was the motive behind this decision?

An important role in Lukács' shift of interest towards the study of music seems to have been played by the work of his compatriot Béla Bartók, a leading composer of the 20th century. According to the author himself, music only started to concern him 'when I found myself in the face of the problem of Bartók' (Eörsi 1983, 88). Indeed, in his late period Lukács speaks enthusiastically of Bartók's 'plebeian democratism' that was 'directed against the upper classes and against the people's distortion by the upper classes' and becomes manifest clearly and unambiguously in one of Lukács' most favourite musical works, *Cantata Profana*:

Bartók's music was a protest against the kind of gypsy music the gentry favoured... If we truly want to evaluate Bartók's music we should keep in mind that it is a showdown with the gypsy folk song form that was assimilated to the gentry. If we do not recognize this achievement, we shall never understand the significance of Bartók's music and that of such an excellent work as the *Cantata Profana*. (quoted in Szabolcsi 1993, 90)

In this respect, the significance of Bartók can be compared with that of Leo Tolstoy in the field of literature:

For Bartók, if I may put it in this way, the revival of the world of the peasantry is important in the sense in which Lenin said of Tolstoy that, before the arrival of this count, there had never been a real peasant in Russian literature. Similarly, it could be said that no peasant had ever made his appearance in music, and that is what is so important about Bartók. Not that it was a Hungarian peasant or a Romanian peasant, or whatever, but that it was simply a peasant.

And he adds, in closing: 'He [Bartók] is the stag who does not wish to return to the world of men' (Eörsi 1983, 140).

The phrase above is a reference to Bartók's *Cantata Profana*, Sz. 94, which, as noted, was one of Lukács' favourite contemporary musical works. The work is based on the story of the nine sons who, having not been taught anything other than hunting, spend all their time in the woods. One day, while hunting a stag, they cross a haunted bridge and are themselves transformed into stags. Their desperate father begs them to come home, but they reply that the human way of living is no longer appropriate for them and that they will never return. This scene, to which Lukács frequently refers, is a symbol of Bartók's criticism of modern alienation, an instance of his music's spontaneous resistance to the brutal and inhuman forces of his time; in precisely that aspect of his work lies Bartók's great importance for the modern era, in Lukács' view.

Judging by the admiration and appreciation emanating from passages like that quoted above, one cannot doubt that Bartók's work must have been a driving force

behind Lukács' turn towards a more intensive and systematic study of music during the last fifteen years of his life. Of course, such an explanation, which does not go beyond merely subjective motives, can only be insufficient. The deeper motives of this turn and their objective foundations should be sought primarily in Lukács' late work *The Specificity of the Aesthetic* (*Die Eigenart des Ästhetischen*, 1963), on which we should henceforth focus our attention.

The Specificity of the Aesthetic is an unfinished work – of the three planned parts, only one was completed. At the same time, though, it also marks a completion, the realisation of a 'youthful dream' (Lukács 1981, 1:25), or even the 'summary of a life's work' (Bollenbeck 1990, 42). Lukács had indeed been planning to write a systematic aesthetics as early as the Heidelberg period (1912–1917) when he was still under the influence of Lebensphilosophie and Neo-Kantianism. However, only half a century later, with *The Specificity of the Aesthetic*, would those early thoughts acquire a ripe, settled form founded on the solid ground of the philosophy of Marxism.

'The first Marxist system of aesthetics' according to Stefan Morawski (1968, 27), *The Specificity of the Aesthetic* was written in a climate of revival of Marxism, characteristic of the Marxist thought of the post-Stalinist period. Unlike other trends within Marxist musicology which, in the same period, sought to develop Marxist musicological thought through the assimilation of currents such as Semantics or Cybernetics (as in the work of Georg Knepler and Günter Mayer), Lukács – who openly maintained a negative attitude towards such currents – chose a different path by setting himself the task of restoring Marxism's relationship to the classical tradition of philosophy (Aristotle, Goethe, Hegel), of emphasising the continuity between Marxism and the great philosophical traditions of the past, which had broken down during the Stalinist period. Already in the foreword of the work, we read:

Fidelity to Marxism, however, means at the same time attachment to the great traditions of the mental mastering of reality to date. In the Stalin era, especially on the part of Zhdanov, those features were exclusively emphasized that separate Marxism from the great traditions of human thought... But reality – and therefore its mental reflection and reproduction as well – is a dialectical unity of continuity and discontinuity, of tradition and revolution, of gradual transitions and leaps. Scientific socialism itself is something completely new in history, yet at the same time it fulfils a human longing that has existed for thousands of years, something the best minds of humanity deeply strove of. (Lukács 1973, 408–409)

The view of the Leninist theory of reflection, on which the work is epistemologically based, as perfectly consistent with the ancient Greek theory of mimesis – Lukács' use of the terms 'reflection' and 'mimesis' as *identical* – can be understood in this context of the quest to restore Marxism's link to the great philosophical traditions of the past, and therefore in the context of a wider project towards the radical renewal of Marxist thought in the post-Stalinist era. Despite the acute criticism that Lukács has received due to this semantic identification of terms such as 'reflection', 'depiction' and 'mimesis' (see Karbusicky 1974, 72ff.; Zimmermann 1987, 247ff.), it should be stressed once again that the general orientation behind this identification – namely the re-association of Marxism with the philosophical past, the discovery in the latter of the roots, foundations and conditions of Marxist thought – is fully in accordance with the principles of the founders of Marxism. In the so-called 'Theses on Feuerbach', for example, Marx leaves no room for doubt that he perceives his method as a logical development of earlier philosophical tendencies and, in particular, as an overcoming of some of their defects: firstly, of the purely contemplative attitude of the previous 'mechanical' materialism, which conceives reality 'only in the form of the

object or of *contemplation*, but not as *sensuous human activity, practice*, not subjectively', and secondly, of the confusion caused by the conception of reality as 'spiritual' on the part of idealist philosophy, the contribution of which, however, lies in the fact that it has brought to the fore and theoretically developed precisely that 'active' side of the subjective factor lacking in mechanical materialism (see Marx and Engels 1998, 569).

In the field of aesthetics, this difference between mechanical materialism and idealism can be expressed as follows. Mechanical materialism recognises that art reflects (or 'imitates') the real world but underestimates the active role of the subjective factor in this reflection; it misconceives the fact that the subject does not just passively copy the real world in the work of art but *selects* which aspects of reality will be depicted and which will be omitted. Through this complex process, the work of art succeeds in bringing out the latent *essence* of the phenomena it depicts. Idealism, by contrast, exaggerates this active-creative role of the subject but denies the mimetic nature of art, thus conceiving of art as an exclusive product of the subject's pure self-activity. Now, the historical importance of dialectical-materialist aesthetics lies in the fact that it succeeds in showing the compatibility between these two seemingly irreconcilable extremes: the active role of the subjective factor for artistic shaping on the one hand, and the mimetic character of art on the other, its ability to function (precisely thanks to the subject's active role) as a 'mirror', reflecting on its surface the essential moments of human life.

The above leads us to the most central category of Marxist aesthetics, the category of 'reflection'. According to the dialectical-materialist epistemology, all forms of consciousness, from simple sensory perception to art, religion, philosophy and science, are different forms of approximation of a single objective reality, approximate reflections (depictions) of its objective substance. 'Reflection', therefore, does not refer to a single, uniform process but takes different 'forms' depending on the field in which it is applied. Reality is reflected differently in a work of art, in a scientific study or in the average person's daily consciousness. This differentiation of the process of reflection into distinct 'forms' of reflection (art, science, daily consciousness), each of which reflects reality in its own way by focusing on different aspects of it, is not merely formal but stems from the (socio-historically determined) differentiation of social needs that each individual 'form' of reflection is required to serve; it is, therefore, founded on the objective necessities posed by the evolutionary movement of the social being. Science, for instance, which serves knowledge, the development of humanity's *consciousness*, reflects reality as it is in itself (regardless of how it appears in human perception), while art, which serves the development of humanity's *self-consciousness* (man's knowledge of himself) reflects objective reality not as it is in itself, but as experienced by human beings (by humanity).

This differentiation of the forms of reflection also applies to the interior of the aesthetic sphere. The 'pluralistic structure' of the Aesthetic (as Lukács calls it) refers to the internal differentiation of the aesthetic sphere into individual arts (music, literature, visual arts, etc.), each of which emerges historically in relative independence from the others, on the basis of different social needs, and therefore reflects reality differently. We already know, for example, that painting is rather suitable for depicting real objects of the *outer* world, while music is more suitable for depicting emotions, aspects of people's *inner* lives. Of course, both the fact that all these forms are reflections of the *same* reality and the remarkable stability and resilience that these arts show in time (including their potential for immanent evolution) point to the ultimate

unity of the Aesthetic, which is based on the ‘clear and essential convergence of the directly so obviously different needs that lie behind the genesis and function of art’ (Lukács 1981, 1:594).

It follows from the above that the sphere of the Aesthetic constitutes a rich and multifaceted complex of heterogeneous and contradictory determinations, the ultimate unity of which is imposed only ‘in the last instance’. The aim of *The Specificity of the Aesthetic*, then, is ‘the derivation of the specific category of aesthetics, its delimitation from other areas’ (Lukács 1981, 1:7), namely the determination of the inherent aspects and relations governing the aesthetic realm as a whole. One of these aspects that will concern us later in this study is the so-called ‘double mimesis’ (*gedoppelte Mimesis*), a particular way in which aesthetic mimesis manifests itself in certain arts, such as music, architecture and film. The term refers to the case in which the object of mimesis (the ‘original’) is not a real thing but is itself a mimesis (a copy), which leads to the duplication of mimesis: these arts, then, are not merely ‘mimeses’ but ‘mimeses of other mimeses’. If we now consider – to return to the question of the necessity that prompted Lukács to deal with music in his late period – that the aim of his work is ‘the derivation of the specific category of aesthetics’, that ‘double mimesis’ constitutes a basic moment of this category to be ‘derived’ and that it is also characteristic of music, a first answer begins to emerge: Lukács approaches music in the context of clarifying a specific aspect of the aesthetic phenomenon (the ‘double mimesis’) with a view to the conceptual demarcation of the sphere of aesthetics in general. This perspective (the indirect way the author approaches music) largely determines the overall direction, scope and limits of his contribution to musical aesthetics and brings us back to the remark with which we started: that Lukács was not a musicologist, that he dealt with music only to a limited extent and only within very specific contexts; in the present case, in the context of the demarcation of the ‘specific category of aesthetics’.