

The social function of the arts and its unfoldings in the aesthetic constitution of the social being

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ABSTRACT. The purpose of this article is to situate the social function of the arts in the aesthetic construction of the social being. It is theoretical-bibliographic research in light of the Lukacsian aesthetical legacy. The main source used for the development of this study is the systematized work of Georg Lukács: *Aesthetics: the specificity of the aesthetic*. The complexity of the art provides, albeit for a brief moment, an elevation that leads to an encounter between the individual and humankind. This discussion is based on the formative process of the arts. Catharsis is presented as the main category of analysis, based on the understanding that it is in everyday life that the sensations of capturing social beings in the world are extracted. It is in the development of human senses that social beings become aesthetic and grow as a human race. Indeed, briefly, the potentialities of creating and enjoying art under the logic of capitalist sociability are understood as dispersed, since the state of exploitation refuses to elevate everyone to the spiritual and material wealth of society. Moreover, the need to conjecture another social form that makes human-objective conditions capable of providing genuine cathartic moments possible to the whole of humanity is considered.

Keywords: catharsis; aesthetic education; humankind.

A função social da arte e os desdobramentos na formação estética do ser social

RESUMO. O presente artigo tem como objetivo situar a função social da arte no entorno da formação estética do ser social. Trata-se de uma pesquisa teórico-bibliográfica, na compreensão do legado estético lukacsiano. Destaca-se como fonte principal para o desenvolvimento do estudo a obra sistematizada por Georg Lukács: *Estética: a peculiaridade de lo estético*. O complexo da arte proporciona, nem que seja por um pequeno instante, uma elevação que ocasiona um encontro do indivíduo com o gênero humano. A discussão pauta-se sobre o processo formativo da arte. Apresenta-se como categoria principal de análise a catarse, com base na compreensão de que é na vida cotidiana que se extraem as sensações de captação dos seres sociais no mundo. É no desenvolvimento dos sentidos humanos que os seres sociais se fazem estéticos e se engrandecem enquanto gênero humano. Com efeito, de modo sucinto, as potencialidades de criar e fruir arte sob a lógica da sociabilidade capitalista são entendidas como dispersas, uma vez que o estado de exploração recusa a elevação de todos à riqueza espiritual e material da sociedade. Considera-se, ademais, a necessidade de conjecturar outra forma social que possibilite, ao conjunto da humanidade, condições humano-objetivas capazes de proporcionar momentos catárticos genuínos ao conjunto da humanidade.

Palavras-chave: catarse; educação estética; gênero humano.

La función social del arte y los desarrollos en la formación estética del ser social

RESUMEN. El presente artículo intenta situar la función social del arte en torno a la formación estética del ser social. Se trata de una investigación teórica y bibliográfica, en la comprensión del legado estético lukacsiano. Destaca como fuente principal al desarrollo del estudio la obra sistematizada por Georg Lukács: *Estética: la peculiaridad de lo estético*. El complejo del arte proporciona, aunque sea por un momento, una elevación que lleva al encuentro del individuo con el género humano. La discusión se basa en el proceso formativo del arte. La catarsis se presenta como la principal categoría de análisis y parte del entendimiento de que es en la vida cotidiana donde se extraen las sensaciones de captación de los seres sociales en el mundo. En el desarrollo de los sentidos humanos es donde los seres sociales se vuelven estéticos y se potencian como género humano. En efecto, de manera sucinta, las potencialidades de crear y disfrutar del arte bajo la lógica de la sociabilidad capitalista se entienden como dispersas, puesto que el estado de explotación rechaza la elevación de todos a la riqueza espiritual y material de la sociedad. También se

plantea la necesidad de idear otra forma social que haga posible, para toda la humanidad, unas condiciones humano-objetivas capaces de proporcionar auténticos momentos catárticos para toda la humanidad.

Palabras clave: catarsis; educación estética; género humano.

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Introduction: catharsis as a possibility of an aesthetic formation¹

The term ‘catharsis’ comes from the Greek: *κάθαρση*, which means: “Liberation from what is foreign to the essence or nature of a thing and which therefore disturbs or corrupts it” (Abbagnano, 2007, p. 120). According to this author, Aristotle was the first to coin this concept in the field of art, as “[...] a kind of liberation or serenity that poetry and, in particular, drama and music provoke in man” (Abbagnano, 2007, p. 120). In the words of Aristotle (1979):

Tragedy, then, is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; [imitation realized] in the form of action, not of narrative; through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of these emotions (Aristotle, 1979, p. 245)

It is common in aesthetic literature to use this definition of Aristotle. Despite this, according to Lukács (1972, p. 500, our translation), the concept of catharsis is broader: “As in all important categories of aesthetics, also in catharsis it is verified that its primary origin is in life, and not in art, from which it comes”². It should be noted that catharsis is formed by the most intense relationships of social beings with life, before any other mediation. In this sense, the more extensive the reality, the more intensely the social being encompasses their action and reflection on reality, the more cathartic processes can prosper. We thus present the education complex in its ontological plane and its relationship with the art complex, with the aim of situating the aesthetic formation of the social being. After, we will carry out a more accurate study of catharsis as a possibility for an aesthetic formation, in search of an understanding of the social being as a participant of the human race.

Work, art, science, and education: distinctions and onto-historical approaches

We apprehend that art and education are distinct complexes and each one has its social function, but both have, in common, their founding base in the work complex. In this sense, Lima and Jimenez (2011) assert that education, as well as the other complexes – which include art – constitutes, along with work, a relationship of ontological dependence and relative autonomy. In the words of the authors:

As a founding category of social being, work has ontological priority over other categories and social complexes, which can only be produced within the scope of already constituted sociability, in whose core the social totality expresses the predominant moment. Social complexes only achieve autonomy in a context already increasingly socialized by the development of work. But such autonomy cannot be configured absolutely. It is always relative, precisely because of the ontological dependence that underlies its relationship with work. The autonomy established in these complexes derives from the fact that, in order to carry out specific functions, which are essentially different from the exchange between man and nature, they assume particular characteristics that differentiate them from work (Lima & Jimenez, 2011, p. 79).

With this, we want to make it clear that it is through work that the individual is constituted as a social being. It is in the work process that the social being modifies the natural and themselves. The other social complexes and other established activities are work-oriented. Therefore, there is an ontological dependence on work. Despite this, there is not an absolute, but a relative autonomy that other complexes and activities carry within themselves.

In the study of the genesis of art, we understand that its social need does not have such evident and plausible roots, as is the case of education and science. The social reality becomes more complex in the immediate daily life of social beings. Therefore, the art complex is late in relation to work, considering that its detachment depends on some factors, apprehended by Lukács (1972, 1974), namely: the evolution of technique and idleness, both provided by work; the process of apprehending the pleasant and the self-

¹ This article is the result of studies systematized in a thesis entitled *Gênese e função social da arte e os desdobramentos no processo formativo-educativo: uma análise fundamentada na estética lukacsiana* defended in the Graduate Program in Education at the Federal University of Ceará in 2020.

² “Como en todas las categorías importantes de la estética, también en la catarsis se comprueba que su origen primario está en la vida, no en el arte, al que ha llegado desde aquella”.

awareness of humankind. The education complex, in turn, is linked to social reproduction and its social function has the: “[...] sense of guaranteeing the transmission and perpetuation, to the new generations, of the objectifications produced by humanity, which constitute, in each form of society concretely taken, the essential elements that characterize the human race” (Lima, 2009, p. 12).

That said, we consider it important to understand the educational function of art and, therefore, it is necessary to recover the elements that brought together and distanced the complexes of art, science, and religion in Lukács’s systematization. The categories anthropomorphization and deanthropomorphization, immanence and transcendence serve to approximate and distance the aforementioned complexes. In summary: the art and religion complexes retain their anthropomorphism, as they start from a projection from the inside out, which varies according to our needs and experiences and depends on the subject to exist. The science complex is rooted in deanthropomorphization, since it starts from objective reality, bringing its contents and categories to consciousness. The object exists independently of the will of the subject. That said, art and science keep immanence, as both are related to concrete reality. Religion distances itself and keeps transcendence because it is in the sublime of what cannot be reached in human materiality.

After recovering this brief explanation, based on the Lukacsian theoretical-aesthetic contribution — that is, the analysis of the triad art, science, and religion, approaching and distancing the categories anthropomorphization, deanthropomorphization, immanence, and transcendence —, we consider following the Lukacsian model of this triad. In this case, it is necessary to consider art, science, and education in order to approximate and distance them, using, at this moment, the categories anthropomorphization and deanthropomorphization, in addition to specifying why the three complexes are immanent and not transcendent.

Let us now consider the education, art, and science complexes to approach and distance the complexes in the understanding of educational fundamentals. The education complex is located in what is immanent, along with the art and science complexes since all of them integrate the character of what is properly human and necessarily worldly – they can only be realized in concrete objective reality. Therefore, they do not carry in themselves the transcendent basis that would take them to a level beyond the material-human reach, as is the case with religion, as explained earlier.

The separation between the education, art, and science complexes will be around the categories anthropomorphization and deanthropomorphization. Art is anthropomorphic because it exists from human consciousness and also addresses human consciousness. The object only exists because it was created by the artist. Science, as far as it is concerned, takes place in the in-itself, phenomena exist in nature and are emancipated from human will, therefore, it is disanthropomorphic.

The education complex carries the systematized content that unfolds in knowledge, therefore, in-itself, disanthropomorphic. Even understanding that education, by encompassing knowledge, has an organized content in-itself, it is necessary to highlight that the dialectical movement that permeates education (from generation to generation) confers and improves what is accumulated by humanity in the relationship it has as its link teaching and learning, content and form, teacher and student. The education complex is thus anthropomorphic.

It is worth mentioning that knowledge, according to Barbosa (2016), in the ontological sense, is related to the possibility of choosing between alternatives that are instituted in a conscious and oriented action, having work as a fundamental basis. This process occurs in the genesis of work, when the social being has to know and recognize the natural legality of the inorganic and organic world so that they can carry out work. Therefore, knowledge acts in this selection between options, considering the entire development of work, from the most rudimentary to the most complex.

We understand that the scope of knowledge is essential in the educational process. Lukács (1974) returns to the primitive age when reporting that the first interactions and conquests in the field of science were indispensable for men and women not to perish. Even though awareness of what they were doing took a long time, protection and reproduction were the order of the day. The education of generations — under the construction of work —, in this context, was important in the apprehension of knowledge. For example, the conservation of technique, through education, was one of the necessary premises for the development of art.

Art and science, as already presented, and, moreover, education, are complexes of an immanent order, since they are developed in the field of what is properly human, that is, the social being creates before these complexes, each with its particularity. The result depends on the action of social beings and not on a superior

deity, as occurs in the religion complex of a transcendent order. Education is immanent, as it carries the knowledge that social beings will deliver to future generations.

That said, we understand that a basic aspect that permeates the education complex is imitation, which becomes indispensable in the course of aesthetic education, in apprehending the reflection of reality, in observing the technique put into practice by the social individual. According to Lukács (1972, p. 8, our translation): “[...] the preservation and transmission of essential experiences for the life of the species can only be achieved through imitation”³. From ancient times to the present day, imitation is constituted as a mediation system between individuals. In the case of the formative function of art, it is clear that imitation alone is not enough to achieve any artistic development and, thus, continues the Hungarian philosopher: “[...] the natural basis on which imitation arises as an elementary fact of life and art, although, naturally, this occurs in the case of art through much more complicated and dilated mediations” (Lukács, 1972, p. 8, our translation)⁴.

By understanding the social function of art in the world of social beings, the social function of education, in the dialectical relationship, should serve all individuals, so that they educate the human senses and appropriate the technique and elements that constitute the sensible. The behavior of social beings fundamentally stems from the scope of objective and subjective activities, and education plays a key role in this process. For Lukács (1974, p. 74, our translation), “[...] all of man’s faculties require an orientation – partly instinctively, partly consciously through education – for the fulfillment of these objective legalities”. Furthermore, it is worth noting that, through the formative function of art, there is the possibility of meeting not only objective legalities but also subjective ones.

The education of the five human senses serves both objective and subjective activities and, through it, the social being also had the possibility of enjoying and producing art. The social being is the only species to educate for the human senses, and this has been structured historically. In this specificity of our constitution, the question of the formative function of art is inserted, since the animal adapts biologically; the human, in turn, goes beyond, instructs and governs the human senses. It is important here to emphasize Marx’s (2004) maxim:

For not only the five senses but also the so-called mental senses, the practical senses (will, love, etc.), in a word, *human* sense, the human nature of the senses, comes to be by virtue of *its* object, by virtue of *humanized* nature. The *forming* of the five senses is a labor of the entire history of the world down to the present (Marx, 2004, p. 110, emphasis in the original).

It must be clear that the human senses and everything that derives from them are developed by the social being themselves, and not something arising solely through the biological path. Mészáros (2006, p. 182) pays attention to the fact that: “As the natural world becomes humanized [...] the senses, related to increasingly humanly configured objects, become specifically human and increasingly more refined”. This tuning process of the human senses becomes an inheritance from generation to generation.

In these terms, the process of human formation is also conceived in the education of the human senses, through the appropriation, fixation, and crystallization of the production of what was systematized by the ancestors. The art complex, therefore, only exists in the relationship between social beings. Through the humanization of human senses, constituted by activity and reciprocity between social beings, the possibility of enriching the human race in this field of human formation arises. However, this is only likely to the extent that the social being develops the necessary capacity to perceive the object, in the objective and subjective field.

The art complex and the artistic sense are not born with humanity, on the contrary, they are socially constructed. When dealing with psychological⁵ and philosophical categories of the aesthetic, Lukács (1967a) points to a signaling system 1’ [or system of signs of signs], which would be responsible for instructing the understanding of life through art. He reveals that the starting point for the systematization of the signaling system was the method applied by Pavlov. However, he criticizes him for not alluding to historical-genetic issues. As the Hungarian philosopher observes:

Pavlov did not observe the role of work in the constitution of signs of signs that are characteristic of language, it is understandable that he paid no attention to these relationships, which are even more complicated precisely from a

³ “[...] a conservación y la trasmisión de las experiencias imprescindibles para la vida de la especie no pueden consumarse sino por medio de la imitación”.

⁴ “[...] la base natural sobre la cual se yergue la imitación como hecho elemental de la vida y del arte, aunque, como es natural, ello ocurre en el caso del arte a través de mediaciones mucho más complicadas y dilatadas”.

⁵ Lukács (1967a) claims a materialist psychology. According to him, psychology cannot be limited to physiological issues, as a materialist explanation of psychological phenomena would be necessary to guide an accurate study of the environment. Lukács asserts that Pavlov considered the external world over the physiopsychological life, even recognizing that there are gaps in the systematization of the Russian physiologist. It is worth noting that a question still being researched by many who study the legacies of Lukács and Vygotsky is to understand and situate the fact that Lukács did not address, during his studies of the work *Aesthetics*, the systematization of Soviet psychology, which made much progress in the study of a materialist psychology.

psychological point of view. As we have already said, Engels rightly pointed out, on the contrary, that the origin of language can only be understood on the basis of the social needs produced by work, that is, on the basis of the fact that working men have to communicate something for which simple expressive sounds and gestures typical of the level of conditioned reflexes are no longer enough (Lukács, 1967a, p. 37, our translation)⁶.

Signaling system 1' is explained in what is most acute and does not consist only of new revelations or new connections from objective reality that, until then, were not in consciousness; at the same time, it is the broadening of the subject in conscious sensitive action. Lukács (1967a) considers that the valence of the signaling system 1' is a decisive leap in the life of the creator and the artistic receiver, because on the one hand "[...] the creator separates from their own somato-psychic existence the evocative reflex of the world and gives it a definite and totally different form in principle"; and, on the other hand, "[...] the receiver is no longer confronted with a fleeting, transient, and unique event, but with a training that allows repeated contemplation and new and intensified experiences" (Lukács, 1967a, p. 113-114, our translation)⁷.

We understand that the art complex and the artistic sense are the result of a historical-social need of humanity. Therefore, the formation of the signaling system 1' is a consequence of this process that, as Lukács states (1967a, p. 121, our translation), "[...] although the primacy of social need is recognized, the educational role of art in the implementation of the signaling system 1' should not be underestimated"⁸. From these considerations, it is important to understand that every artistic form carries signs, even if each art has its particularity, the historical-social development allowed education to transform them into substantive artistic power.

Training in the field of aesthetics allows us to improve ourselves as creators or receivers of the art complex. Lukács (1967b) points out the impulse that music has in terms of expressing sensations and emotions and, moreover, making us understand how human we are:

The musical expressive power of emotion and the capacity to receive it undoubtedly developed into an indissoluble community over these long phases, extended to all areas of life, were refined to express increasingly differentiated feelings, and educated a very subtle and profound receptiveness (Lukács, 1967b, p. 61, our translation)⁹.

From music, we can extend to other artistic languages – literature, painting, sculpture, dance, cinema, etc. – capable of being transferred from education to the social being. That said, we understand that aesthetic education should be a destiny of humanity. There are those who say there are some who do not have the aptitude to create an artistic object, or even cannot enjoy any artistic language. In response to this demand, when explaining talent in a beautiful essay on the imagination of children and adolescents, Vygotsky (2018, p. 53) is categorical in stating: "If we understand creation, in its true psychological sense, as the creation of the new, it is easy to come to the conclusion that it is everyone's destiny, to a greater or lesser extent". The Russian psychologist asserts that talent can be seen in prodigy or exceptional children who, very early on, reveal some special 'gift'. Let us see:

We can find these child prodigies more frequently in music, but they also exist, although more rarely, in the visual arts. Willy Ferrero, an example of a child prodigy, became famous worldwide 20 years ago, revealing an extraordinary musical gift at a very young age. At the age of six or seven, he conducted an orchestra in the performance of complex musical works, in addition to being a virtuoso on a musical instrument, etc. (Vygotsky, 2018, p. 53).

Talent, therefore, can be acquired socially. Lukács (2018), in a passage from *Toward the Ontology of Social Being*, describes musical talent as "[...] a social capacity, such as, for example, social and no longer biological categories are and remain, a passage or characteristic in human expression, etc." (Lukács, 2018, p. 215). The Hungarian philosopher brings as an example the individual who is born with absolute pitch¹⁰. This ability has nothing to do with a talent for music, as expert musicians are perfectly capable of identifying each musical note, as they have internalized musical knowledge through the aesthetic training they have received in their careers.

When approaching artistic creation as a free activity, Mészáros (2006), based on Marxian theory, asserts that such a complex is not limited to being destined for a lucky few, but subscribes it as an "[...] essential

⁶ "Pavlov no ha observado el papel del trabajo en la constitución de las señales de señales que son propias del lenguaje, se comprende que no haya dedicado tampoco atención alguna a esas relaciones, que son aún más complicadas precisamente desde el punto de vista psicológico. Como ya hemos dicho, Engels ha indicado justamente, por el contrario, que el origen del lenguaje no puede entenderse más que partiendo de las necesidades sociales producidas por el trabajo, o sea, partiendo del hecho de que los hombres que trabajan tienen que comunicarse algo para lo cual no bastan ya los simples sonidos y gestos expresivos propios del nivel de los reflejos condicionados".

⁷ "[...] el creador desprende de su propia existencia somato-psíquica el reflejo evocativo del mundo y le presta una forma definitiva en principio y totalmente diversa; [...] el receptor no se enfrenta ya con un acontecimiento fugaz, pasajero y único, sino con una formación que permite la contemplación repetida y vivencias nuevas e intensificadas".

⁸ "[...] aun reconociendo el primado de la necesidad social, no debe subestimarse el papel educador del arte en el despliegue del sistema de señalización 1'".

⁹ "La fuerza musical expresiva de la emoción y la capacidad de recibirla se han desarrollado sin duda en una comunidad indisoluble a lo largo de esas dilatadas fases, se han extendido a todos los terrenos de la vida, se han afinado para expresar sentimientos cada vez más diferenciados y han educado una receptividad de lo más sutil y profundo".

¹⁰ Veloso and Feitosa (2013, p. 357) point that "The literature describes Absolute Pitch as the ability to identify, name or produce the frequency of a tonal stimulus without the aid of a reference tone".

dimension of human life generally". In the capitalist social form, art is intensely contaminated by the understanding that only an "[...] exclusive concentration of artistic talent in a few" is possible (Mészáros, 2006, p. 191). Thus, talent can be conquered, as long as the objective conditions are considered, not nullifying the existence of innate talent. Idleness is necessary to learn and/or improve a technique. Human aesthetic formation, therefore, should reach the whole of humanity, so that we could improve gifts and talents, or better, simply create and enjoy the art complex. Thus, we would learn, if we wanted to: one, two, three or how many artistic languages, considering the possibility of expanding, in itself, the willingness to receive or form the reflections of the signaling system 1', triggered by aesthetic education, through the art complex.

Formation of aesthetic catharsis

Considering that the art complex arises in the immanent daily life of social beings and returns to this daily life in order to enrich individuals, we understand that art needs to reflect the reality of men and women. Thus, from the cathartic moment in which these individuals apprehend the elements of reality, the understanding of the reality of the being as a human thrives. Lukács (1972) is categorical in stating that:

The transformation of the human being entirely in everyday life into a human being taken as a whole, who is the receiver in each case, before each concrete work of art, moves precisely in the direction of such a catharsis, extremely individualized and, at the same time, of the greatest generality (Lukács, 1972, p. 501, our translation)¹¹.

At the same time that it enhances the individual, in a dialectical relationship, catharsis expands the magnanimity of the human race. In this sense, we can identify a formative role that the art complex realizes in the daily lives of social beings. Catharsis, therefore, has general legality within the art complex, as it needs to encompass the human race in everyday life, surpassing that immediate previous reality, now considering an expressive infinity of the self-conscious understanding of the human.

The Hungarian philosopher considers "[...] catharsis as a general category of aesthetics, and thus [it] founds the deep link between authentic (worldly) ethics¹² and the authentic (worldly) art" (Lukács, 1967b, p. 388, our translation)¹³. For him, Aristotle was a pioneer in studying the peculiarity of the aesthetic, especially in terms of understanding the distinction "[...] between the aesthetic reflection and life itself (on the one hand) and its scientific reproduction (on the other), as well as the relationship between that reflection and the totality of human practice, its relationship with ethics" (Lukács, 1967b, p. 380, our translation)¹⁴. In such a way, the Hungarian aesthete understands that, based on what the Greek philosopher Aristotle systematized, catharsis awakens the strength of the social being itself, which, with its own subsidy, moves its life, even opposing modern aesthetic theories. In the words of the author:

The consummation of the work of art, internal, immanent, and worldly, is thus at the service of this consummation, also worldly, of the human soul. The Aristotelian conception of art placed on this basis is no less social – less born of society, less able to flow into it – than Plato's; nor is the individual abstractly opposed to society, as is so often the case in modern aesthetics; but in Aristotle's thought, the social pedagogical force of art is born from its own aesthetic consummation, and not, as in Platonic thought, from the mummification or simple suppression of properly aesthetic principles. As the discoverer of the peculiarity of aesthetics, Aristotle founded his essence on human worldliness, in the search for the right 'means' of all human activities (Lukács, 1967b, p. 380-381, our translation, emphasis in the original)¹⁵.

Such a start is not a deceptive transcendent salvation. The cathartic process is, therefore, anthropomorphic, immanent, and worldly, and is directed essentially to the social being. Thus, it can only take effect in historical-social materialization. It is heightened consciousness in self-awareness. That is why, for example, authentic literature, charged with what is most human, leads us to the best cathartic effects.

¹¹ "La transformación del hombre entero de la cotidianidad en el hombre enteramente tomado que es el receptor en cada caso, ante cada concreta obra de arte, se mueve precisamente en la dirección de una tal catarsis, extremadamente individualizada y, a la vez, de suma generalidad".

¹² In an interview given to Erzsébet Vezér, Lukács (Lukács, 1999, p. 139) reports that in the same period he wrote the *Aesthetics*, his *Ontology* was already being elaborated, since, for the Hungarian philosopher: "Aesthetics was the preparation for *Ontology*, insofar as it deals with the aesthetic as a moment of being, of social being". Later, the writing of *Ethics* would take place, as the author asserts: "In fact, I planned *Ontology* as the philosophical foundation of *Ethics* and, in this sense, *Ethics* was supplanted by *Ontology*, since it deals with the structure of effectiveness and not a separate form" (Lukács, 1999, p. 139).

¹³ "[...] la catarsis como categoría general de la estética, y funda así la profunda vinculación entre la ética auténtica (cismundana) y el arte auténtico (cismundano)".

¹⁴ "[...] entre el reflejo estético y la vida misma (por una parte) y su reproducción científica (por otra), así como la relación entre aquel reflejo y la totalidad de la práctica humana, su relación con la ética".

¹⁵ "La consumación de la obra de arte, interna, immanente, cismundana, se encuentra así al servicio de esa consumación, también cismundana, del alma del hombre. La concepción aristotélica del arte puesta sobre esa base no es menos social —menos nacida de la sociedad, menos capaz de desembocar en ella— que la de Platón; tampoco ella contraponen abstractamente el individuo a la sociedad, como tan a menudo ocurre en la estética moderna; pero en el pensamiento de Aristóteles la fuerza pedagógica social del arte nace de su propia consumación estética, y no, como en el pensamiento platónico, de la momificación o la simple supresión de los principios propiamente estéticos. Como descubridor de la peculiaridad de lo estético, Aristóteles ha fundado la esencia de ello en una cismundinidad humana, en la búsqueda del justo «medio» de todas las actividades humanas.

Catharsis, in this sense, is a general category, since, for Lukács (1972), there is a very plausible justification for the concept of catharsis to generalize. It is not merely related to the structure of the work of art, but to the fact that it centralizes, in conformity with content and form, two important points that are tangent to each other. The first would be “[...] that of itself with objective reality as a totality to which it owes its own birth [...]” and the second “[...] of a possibility of exerting some influence on the receiver’s soul” (Lukács, 1972, p. 502, our translation)¹⁶. In this way, the more intense and comprehensive the content and artistic form are, the broader the scope of the whole process will be. It is a general category, because:

[...] catharsis is a decisive criterion of the artistic perfection of each work and, at the same time, the determining principle of the important social function of art, of the nature of the After of its effect, of its diffusion in life, of the return of the whole human being to life, after having surrendered entirely to the effect of a work of art and having lived the cathartic emotion (Lukács, 1972, p. 518, our translation)¹⁷.

The effect of catharsis, being the summit of the entire aesthetic process, educates our sensitivity. We understand that catharsis, in this process of individual formation, is the culmination of aesthetic appropriation, which guides human development itself. We also warn that cathartic experiences differ, which can be taken as lighter or deeper moments¹⁸. For Lukács (1972):

[...] the cathartic transformation of the human being entirely from the Before into a human being completely taken over by receptivity – influence in this direction, exerting effects that are sometimes tenuous, almost imperceptible, at other times visibly shaking the most essential, in the center and in the periphery of the whole human being (Lukács, 1972, p. 538, our translation)¹⁹.

We have argued that the arts that carry more than one artistic language, such as theater and cinema, seem to be able to structure more moments of catharsis. The artistic atmosphere that these languages have seems to us more susceptible to the cathartic. Watching a play or a movie, with music in the background, a great performance, photography or scenery, etc., can make us feel more human, in understanding humankind itself, in the face of the drama expressed. This does not disdain any other artistic language, which can equally provide the cathartic effect.

It is worth emphasizing that a commotion in front of the work of art is not always allowed or assisted. We live in a class society that carries many forms of oppression. In that sense, crying and expressing yourself often means being weak. On the other hand, we can be branded as insensitive for not being startled by a certain work, for simply not having had the opportunity to understand the aesthetic delight. We repeat that the way in which the work is constituted is guided by the social experiences that the artist or the connoisseur learned in the course of life. The work of art manifests itself to the receivers as a singular work – even if it retains its generality, as a single substance, since the art complex is anthropomorphic, therefore, it will reach the receivers differently.

Although catharsis demonstrates a greater approximation with tragedy, this justifies the reason the Aristotelian definition is so widespread, the character of catharsis is broader, as previously exposed. For Lukács (1972, p. 501, our translation), catharsis has a character of defetishizing, taking into account that every artistic effect “[...] contains an evocation of the human vital nucleus [...]” and, moreover, “[...] a critique of life (of society, of the relationship it produces with nature)”²⁰. So, we can consider that the character of defetishization of the real, carried by art, has the possibility of making social beings observe the world in a renewed way, through a feeling unaffected by the fetish. This does not mean that all authentic art has this possibility, and we understand that this is not its specific function.

It is presumable to understand, given our explanation, that every authentic work of art is the refiguration of human life and human becoming. Thus, Lukács (1972) points out three aspects through which art refigures the world that is presented in the work created by the social being. The first refers to defetishizing the external world in which the social being is inserted. Thus, he “[...] perceives reality and the way in which it can be objectively offered to him in the given socio-historical circumstances” (Lukács, 1972, p. 429, our

¹⁶ “[...] el de ella misma con la realidad objetiva como totalidad a la que debe su propio nacimiento, [...] de una posibilidad de ejercer alguna influencia en el alma del receptor”.

¹⁷ “[...] la catarsis es un criterio decisivo de la perfección artística de cada obra y, al mismo tiempo, el principio determinante de la importante función social del arte, de la naturaleza del Después de su efecto, de su difusión en la vida, de la vuelta del hombre entero a la vida, luego de haberse entregado enteramente al efecto de una obra de arte y haber vivido la conmoción catártica”.

¹⁸ Loureiro (2005), considering Magherini’s research, presents the Stendhal syndrome that often affects tourists in contact with works of art. According to the author: “These are the main (but not the only) excerpts in which the author reports the diffuse discomfort related to the contemplation of beauty, the origin of the name Stendhal syndrome – a type of trance (ecstasy, celestial sensations) accompanied of tachycardia, weakness, and dizziness” (Loureiro, 2005, p. 102).

¹⁹ “[...] la transformación catártica del hombre entero del Antes en el hombre enteramente tomado por la receptividad — influyen en esa dirección, ejerciendo efectos a veces tenues, casi imperceptibles, otras veces visiblemente sacudidores de lo más esencial, en el centro y en la periferia del hombre entero”.

²⁰ “[...] contiene una evocación del núcleo vital humano [...] una crítica de la vida (de la sociedad, de la relación que ella produce con la naturaleza)”.

translation)²¹. The second aspect exposes art as forming the world of social beings at a certain stage of their internal development. The first two aspects mean that, according to Lukács, there is an effective defetishization. Finally, the third aspect considers “[...] the universality of the content (and the formal, therefore) of art in this dialectical synthesis of the internal and external, in this refiguration of a world suitable for man” (Lukács, 1972, p. 430, our translation)²².

We understand that catharsis, in the process of defetishization, has the possibility of forming and educating our sensitivity to understand the world with a restored understanding, uncontaminated by fetishization. In these terms, the art complex can reveal human wholeness, through the creation of “[...] an autonomous ‘reality’ that absorbs all of man’s intellectual and emotional life, elevates it, intensifies and deepens it [...]”²³ (Lukács, 1972, p. 112, our translation, emphasis in the original), as a legitimate reflection of reality. In order to defetishize, art has the role of understanding reality as it is. Nevertheless, it is necessary to emphasize that if all authentic art is directed to the human being completely – for an instant of apprehension of authentic art – since it is only possible to reach an aspect of the whole human being, bearing in mind that it is not the art complex that can change the structure of society. Social beings can only transpose a model of sociability if they consider that it is from work that a transformation can be effected. When men and women abolish private property and social classes, and we carry out the associated work, a step will be taken towards the constitution of having wholly human beings.

According to Marx (2004, p. 108), private property, rooted in the sociability of antagonistic classes, “[...] made us so cretinous and unilateral [...]”, that we lost (but there is the possibility of finding) the feasibility of becoming omnilateral social beings. How would a wholly human being be constituted? Marx (2004, p. 108) is categorical in stating that there is an omnilateral substance in humans: “Man appropriates his omnilateral essence in an omnilateral way, therefore as a total man”. Human senses and, moreover, human relations with the world, are capable of assimilating objective reality, considering the ontological basis of work. Thus, if individuals actually appropriated the senses, thinking, intuiting, wanting, being active, creating, we could conquer our full individuality as a human race. For Mészáros (2006), the human senses can reach great diversity and opulence. Let us see:

[...] their number corresponds to the infinite richness of the objects with which the human senses relate. Examples such as ‘musical ear’, ‘mineralogical sense’, indicate the manifold character of the objects to which they refer. The same object presents many characteristics – for example, the beauty of the mineral in contrast with its commercially exploitable physical properties or its commercial value – that only become real for the individual if he has the sensibility (that is, the ‘mineralogical sense’, the ‘musical ear’) to perceive them (Mészáros, 2006, p. 183, emphasis in the original).

The Hungarian philosopher warns us, using the examples propagated by Marx (2004), in the *Economic-Philosophical Manuscripts*, how the human senses can be socially educated for a broader understanding. It is true that having eyes does not mean that the individual can contemplate the beauty of a precious stone. It is necessary to go beyond seeing and/or touching the mineral. “Human senses are interconnected not only with each other, but also each of them with all other human powers, including, of course, the power of reasoning” (Mészáros, 2006, p. 183).

In this way, we understand that educating the human senses is appropriating an aesthetic formation and catharsis, as a general category, as the culmination of the aesthetic process, is the alternative for the conquest of human universality, in which aspects of objective reality are refigured. In this sense, we understand that the art complex carries the possibility of providing humanity, if we educate omnilaterally and not unilaterally, an aesthetic development to a large extent, always accumulating human generality. The obstacle that class society affects humanity as a whole with regard to human formation is immense. In this sense, we seek to show how the formative function of art can expand the ability to enrich the social being.

Final considerations

We assert that the central function of the art complex is to reveal the individual as a participant in humankind. In this process, we understand that catharsis presents itself as a possibility of an aesthetic formation, since it enriches the individual as a human being. After a cathartic effect — which, as we have shown, can occur in a mild or more profound way —, the individual is no longer the same, since they conserve and crystallize,

²¹ “[...] percibe la realidad, y al modo como puede ofrecérsele objetivamente en las circunstancias histórico-sociales dadas”.

²² “[...] la universalidad de contenido (y la formal, por tanto) del arte en esa síntesis dialéctica de lo interno y lo externo, en esa refiguración de un mundo adecuado al hombre”.

²³ “[...] una «realidad» autónoma que absorbe toda la vida intelectual y emocional del hombre, la eleva, la intensifica y la profundiza”.

dialectically, the process of human generality. The artistic language (listening to music, reading a book, seeing a sculpture or painting, watching a movie, etc.), when authentic, can provoke such restlessness, in which the individual recognizes themselves in the creation or in the artistic fruition as part of humanity.

It is important to highlight that: “[...] the aesthetic must be considered as a historical-social phenomenon not only in its genesis, but also in its entire development” (Lukács, 1967b, p. 369, our translation)²⁴. This effectively applies throughout human history. Currently, for example, our aesthetic development is at the mercy of a wave of conservatism, attested by governments and extreme right-wing social groups, immersed in a context of destruction, even though there are legitimate ‘islands of human civilization’ (Lukács, 1965). We understand that the art complex can reproduce what society demands, at the same time that it can record a contradiction or put the future into perspective. The authenticity of art is related to the process of creation and fruition, formation consciously related to our own existence, with the historical *hic et nunc*, as the Hungarian philosopher points out several times.

Catharsis, as the culmination of the aesthetic formative process of the social being, enables them to apprehend the latent objective and subjective elements in concrete everyday life. Aesthetic education instructs the development of human senses, enabling social beings to create and enjoy the most genuine artistic works. The entirely human being lifts the wholly human being in a brief cathartic instant. In the contradiction of capitalist society, cathartic moments are increasingly difficult to reverberate in the daily lives of social beings.

Faced with a sociability that aims at profit in the foreground, the possibilities for social beings to fully understand their own life in nature and in society are increasingly difficult; the leap from the entirely human being to the wholly human being, through aesthetic catharsis, is increasingly hampered. As a result, this study indicates that the way in which the current sociability is set, governed by capital, does not support the effective possibilities of human development, so only a radical rupture with the current social form could provide the set of social beings with an appropriation of the wealth of humanity, whether it comes from the needs of the stomach or from fantasy.

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²⁴ “[...] lo estético debe considerarse como un fenómeno histórico-social no sólo en su génesis, sino en todo el curso de su despliegue”.

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