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EDITORIAL

Editorial

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Georg Lukács published *Die Seele und die Formen* in 1911 as a collection of essays that examine how literary works respond to questions of human existence, social values, and the relationship between individual experience and external reality. Each essay focuses on a specific writer, such as Novalis, Theodor Storm, and Stefan George, who are associated with movements like Romanticism, Realism, and Symbolism. Lukács evaluates their treatment of form and subjectivity to determine the degree to which their writing connects to universal human experiences or retreats into aesthetic isolation, self-absorption, and narcissism.

The fin-de-siècle atmosphere had seen the rise of Symbolism and Aestheticism, movements that celebrated subjective experience and the pursuit of beauty for its own sake. Lukács viewed these developments critically, connecting them to what he considered a withdrawal from life's tangible realities and a focus on introspection. The early 1900s saw the influence of Romanticism persist, but it had been reshaped into more aestheticized and self-referential forms. In his essay on Stefan George, for example, Lukács reflects on how an excess of self-absorption sacrifices the ability to speak about shared human realities: "The path they took could only lead to an organic fusion of all given facts, only to a beautiful harmony of images of life, but not to controlling life."

Lukács interprets this as a broader cultural failure, where literature sacrifices universal engagement in favor of individual, aesthetic seclusion. His critique focuses on the implications of this inward turn: he argues that the use of the first person as a literary device must be a transparent medium through which the world and life are reflected. When the "I" becomes the singular focus, it distorts and obscures the connection between literature and universal truths, reducing the work to a solipsistic exercise.

While browsing through the catalogue of film on FestivalScope, an online platform connecting film professionals to films from international festivals, it is striking to observe how many contemporary documentary films share this tendency. We counted one out of three films, in a sample of 50 films from our

region of interest, that center on the filmmaker's own struggles – family discord, personal struggles, or emotional reactions to social crises.

Subjectivity is not the problem itself. Lukács himself acknowledged its importance as the means to convey real human experience. The issue arises when the filmmaker's self becomes the primary object of interest and obscures the broader realities that the work ostensibly seeks to explore. In one extreme example, a filmmaker transforms the global upheaval of the COVID-19 pandemic into a story about their struggles with a tedious call center job, vitamin deficiencies, and the decision to move abroad for better living conditions. The world outside exists only as an atmospheric prop, hinting faintly at its enormity while the film luxuriates in the director's solitary frustrations.

Film schools bear some responsibility. Teachers in film programs often encourage aspiring filmmakers to mine their own lives for content. It is easy to consider autobiographical storytelling as an "authentic" form of art. The downside is a generation of filmmakers trained to see their lives as the central material for their art.

Self-indulgence mirrors a society unwilling to confront what lies beyond the individual. Critics have long observed that our age defines itself through the performance of selfhood, where the personal becomes the primary way of interpreting the world. The camera, much like the selfie, documents a life in isolation even when it is set against the backdrop of global crises. What Lukács critiqued in literature – the exaltation of the "I" at the expense of the shared world – now defines a cultural moment where storytelling collapses into performance for the self.

If the camera remains pointed inward, the shared reality of human existence slips further out of frame. The challenge for today's filmmakers – and for those who train them – is not to abandon the personal but to use it as a bridge rather than a mirror. Without that connection, art becomes another form of narcissism, a celebration of the "I" in a world desperately in need of a "we."

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In this month's issue, Moritz Pfeifer discusses Cannes and Oscars darling *Anora*, a film that presents a special case of self-centeredness in allowing Sean Baker to reveal his own moral sensibility while dealing with sex work. Konstantin Bojanov's *The Shameless* – another film by a male director dealing with women sex workers hailed at Cannes – falls into a similar trap. Interestingly, like Baker, whose protagonists have an immigrant background, Bojanov adds another layer of exotization by setting his story in India around two women living on the fringes of society. Isabel Jacobs, who reviewed *The Shameless*, spoke to Bojanov about the rationale behind the film, and the challenges he faced during production. Finally, we are publishing two reviews by Jack Page from the Thessaloniki Doc Festival: *Resilience*, an eco-thriller about two unlike

characters both committed to protecting nature, and *Queens of Joy*, a portrait of three drag queens in Kyiv.

We hope you enjoy our reads.
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Editors