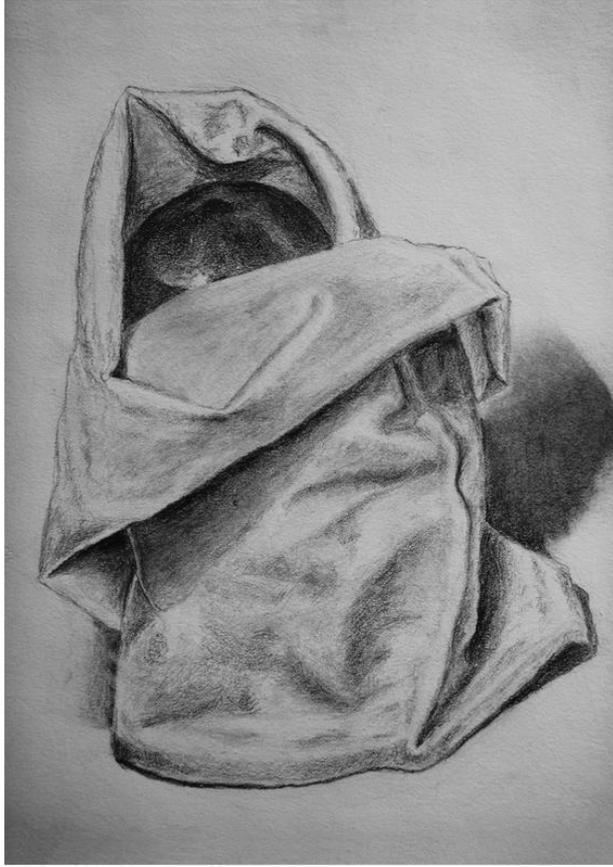


RENEW MARXIST ART HISTORY

EDITED BY
WARREN CARTER
BARNABY HARAN
FREDERIC J. SCHWARTZ

ART/BOOKS



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Cover image: Karl Marx photographed in London in 1875 by John Mayall. Courtesy of the International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam.

Page 2: Carol Duncan, *Under Wraps (Bust of Lenin)*, 2011, pencil on paper, 25.4 × 21.6 cm.

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Copyright

This book is the result of a project that had two goals. It was conceived as a Festschrift in honour of Andrew Hemingway, to mark the occasion of his retirement from the Department of History of Art at University College London. But the project quickly exceeded that initial objective, and for two reasons. First, a Festschrift implies the end of an academic career, something patently not the case with Andrew, who continues to teach, publish and supervise doctoral students. And second, his field of activity has always gone beyond the confines of a single academic institution, even one to which he contributed so much and whose direction he helped to determine over two decades. He was, for example, at the centre of the University of London's Labour History Seminar for many years, and was the principal figure behind the Seminar for Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture (now renamed the Seminar for Marxism in Culture) that came out of it. He was also crucial to the development and continued profile of the *Oxford Art Journal* for many years. And he has been a tireless organizer of conferences - the international MAVAN (Marxism and the Visual Arts Now) set the agenda for many for a decade - symposia and volumes of collected texts. As supervisor, external reader and editor, he has encouraged and challenged scores of scholars, whose work has gained in richness, depth and rigour as a result. In a discipline once handicapped by insularity, he has been a key link between academics in the United Kingdom, United States, Canada, Germany and France.

Doing justice to such a wide range of activity and influence would have resulted in a publication three times this size. The book as it is, however, represents the attempt of the editors to gather a representative group of Hemingway's colleagues, students and interlocutors in the service of the second goal: to provide a snapshot of the state of an art history that can be considered properly Marxist.

The volume is divided into four sections. Three of these correspond to areas of Hemingway's own scholarly commitments, and one does not. The first section, 'Marxist Theory in Practice', addresses theoretical issues of materialist art history and explores case studies in the development of the tradition itself. Establishing an intellectual context for the rest of the book, John Roberts maps out the development of Hemingway's own scholarship by situating it within the moment in the 1970s when a generation of academics, radicalized by the utopian moment of 1968, withdrew from the subject altogether, embracing instead the newly emergent domains of popular or visual cultures. Roberts charts what was at stake in Hemingway's decision to stay within art history, reading his research through his initial attachment to a form of humanist realism and then the shift to a post-Adornian position in which the work of art is read as a form of symptomatic critique, all within a Lukácsian framework emphasizing the continuing importance of the concept of totality. Stephen Eisenman provides a personal account of another trajectory of the period: his formation as a radical art historian in California from the early 1970s through to the mid-1980s, from the moment when a Marxist art history was being forged with both Otto Karl Werckmeister and T. J. Clark at UCLA through to its

recuperation and eventual eclipse in the 1980s. Looking at the development of this tradition through the prism of internal debates within the subject, its relationship to other radical traditions within the Californian academic system (including the presence of key members of the Frankfurt School) and the broader economic shifts impacting upon the university sector, Eisenman charts how the initial political optimism of the earlier work became transmuted into a form of political fatalism in which revolutionary defeat was preordained and avant-garde strategies were understood as compromised.

Warren Carter assesses the political rationale that underpinned Meyer Schapiro's aesthetic theories during a period of emerging crises on the Left, in particular the schisms caused in the 1930s by the repressions of the Soviet Union. He situates Schapiro's ideas in a dialogue with German Marxist debates on aesthetics, and traces the influence of Bertolt Brecht's 'epic theatre' and Georg Lukács's rival notion of 'epic realism' in Schapiro's thinking on public art, most notably the work of Diego Rivera, and later in Abstract Expressionism's gestural appeal against alienation. In the following text, Stewart Martin considers the basis of Marx's concept of the aesthetic in the sensuous materialism of Ludwig Feuerbach, and argues that Marx's break with the latter in his 'Theses on Feuerbach' necessarily involved jettisoning any conception of the aesthetic. Martin shows that thinking through the consequences of this rupture allows a radical clarification of Marx's new conception of practice, as this emerges from his critique of sensuousness materialism (and idealism); and furthermore that this new vantage point

suggests a new basis for an appreciation of Marx's relation to aesthetics, indeed a new orientation to the critique of aesthetics within the capitalist mode of production. Putting aside Walter Pater's reputation as the leading 'art-for-its-own sake' aesthete of the late nineteenth century, Matthew Beaumont addresses the seldom-explored sociality of Pater's writings as a rebellious form of romantic anti-capitalism. Beaumont recasts details such as Pater's homosexuality and his apparent antagonism towards modernity as contributory elements of a 'social dreaming' based on utopian, liberatory impulses that equated with sensory aesthetic experiences, and indicates a modern, even prophetic, sensibility inherent in 'Diaphaneitè', his putative manifesto. In the next contribution, Norbert Schneider, a key figure in the development of a left art history in the Federal Republic of Germany, provides an erudite reconsideration of Adorno's influential critique of culture, exploring its sources, strategies and lacunae. Schneider shows something else too: that, as in the case of Werckmeister, art history emerging from the German New Left was not a passive recipient of critical theory but instead a unique and productive site from which to engage with this body of thought. Finally, Frederic J. Schwartz starts in non-Marxist territory - a brief encounter between art historian Aby Warburg and sociologist Max Weber - to explore how Warburg's work represented an ambivalent and uncomfortable engagement with turn-of-the-century debates about the nature and origins of capitalism. Paradoxically, Warburg's tentative and evasive treatment of the issue, Schwartz argues, proved influential for later critical

theorists, from Ernst Bloch to Walter Benjamin and Siegfried Kracauer.

The second section, 'Landscape, Class and Ideology', focuses on a set of concerns that was crucial to the development of a Marxist art history in the wake of the New Left, while at the same time reconsidering approaches to this material. Alan Wallach explores aestheticizing tendencies within Hudson River School painting from the 1850s and 1860s, developments that had been obscured with the invention of the art-historical category of 'Luminism' from the 1950s as a means both to market a particular type of landscape art and to define a home-grown pictorial model in the nineteenth century. Drawing upon the work of Pierre Bourdieu and examining the paintings of John F. Kensett, Wallach argues that these aestheticizing tendencies coincide with the needs of a particular patrician class seeking to distinguish itself through its aesthetic sensibility in an attempt to secure a cultural hegemony in line with its political and economic power in the post-Civil War period. Brian Foss shows how the landscapes of the Canadian painter Homer Watson from the turn of the twentieth century responded to the encroachment of industry and infrastructure on the wilderness, and were consonant with a nostalgic and selective discourse about nature that saw modernity as an imminent threat. Marketing himself as imbued with the 'pioneer spirit' to an urban audience, Watson was caught between preserving a natural paradise and serving a cultural elite that the very destructive processes of modernization had enabled. Charles Ford uses the consideration of the class dynamics of an earlier period - late-seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century

England - as a way to explore the emergence of the 'bourgeois public sphere' as described by Jürgen Habermas. But Ford comes to decidedly un-Habermasian conclusions, seeing the wide-ranging work of polymath Roger North as negotiating a place for private knowledge in the new publicity of published and circulating texts. Despite the usefulness of Habermas's categories in describing the origins of what we identify as the Enlightenment, the contours of privacy, publicity and authorship are drawn here in a very different way.

The remaining texts in this section similarly stretch categories, chronologies and media. Looking at John Thompson's *Street Life in London* from the 1870s, Steve Edwards considers the political economy of nineteenth-century British photography. He addresses themes of continued urgency about the document's social agency (in a rebuttal to both the influence of Michael Fried's attenuation of the medium's social promise and the ironic archival style of some contemporary work), debates on the métier of photography and its aesthetic status, the nuances in the iconography of labour, and the operation of photography as a form of work. Tom Gretton moves through and beyond an iconographical analysis of the prints produced by the Mexican artist José Guadalupe Posada in Mexico City between 1888 and 1913. Focusing on what he terms the 'specific commodity function' of these sheets, he identifies precisely the urban audience for them, at the same time drawing upon and challenging the anthropological work of Michael Taussig on both devils and commodity fetishism. Concentrating on the artist Rockwell Kent's 1930 illustrations for *Moby Dick*, Angela Miller

elaborates a triadic relationship around the epic nautical narrative between Herman Melville's original text, Kent's dramatic woodcuts and C. L. R. James's 1953 Marxist analysis of the book. She argues that the figure of Ahab becomes a shifting cipher of political personality cults as the era of dictators moves on to the Cold War, a site of tension that echoes the antagonisms of Kent's political thinking, an idiosyncratic version of socialism that combined unionist collectivism with the survivalist individualism of the wilderness adventurer. Caroline Arscott reconsiders a seemingly familiar topic - the designs of William Morris - in terms of the political potential of affect, desire and subjectivity. Framing her discussion by reference to Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's discussion of biopolitics in *Empire*, she investigates the intimations of sensory experience in Morris's designs for printed textiles and their relation to both Morris's own aesthetics and contemporary physiological aesthetics.

Section three, 'Marxism and the Shaping of Modernism', considers the historical intersection of Marxism and the modernist projects of the early twentieth century, teasing out the complexities and specificities of these episodes. In the first chapter, Barnaby Haran discusses how Louis Lozowick's apparently unambiguously celebratory lithographs of Soviet Tajikistan invoked the conflicts that underlay 'red *hashar*', a sovietized version of Central Asian neighbourliness, whereby figures such as veiled and unveiled women and Tajik Red Army horsemen and tractor drivers were used as symbols of ongoing traumas in the imposition of communist modernity against Islamic, feudal traditionalism. Embroiled in international controversies about proletarian iconography, which

he largely challenged, Lozowick's pictures of Tajikistan were imbued with touristic, melancholy romanticism about the indigenous world that the Soviet modernizers were forcibly remaking. Martin Gaughan explores the complex work of Lu Märten, writings that amount to a sophisticated but largely forgotten attempt to develop a Marxist aesthetics in 1920s Germany. Gaughan unearths a debate that developed in the pages of *Die Linkskurve* and *Die Rote Fahne*, involving not only Märten but also Karl August Wittfogel and Gertrud Alexander, important figures who remain obscure. Rachel Sanders demonstrates that far from being a monolithic organ of communist propaganda, the American magazine *New Masses* was a site of competing viewpoints and shifting editorial lines during its two decades of existence from 1926. Concentrating on its most modernist and plural phase, before increasing political and aesthetic entrenchment after 1934, Sanders examines the varying strategies of its artists and the responses of editors and writers to developments in Soviet and Comintern policies such as the Third Period Line and the emergence of the Popular Front. By focusing upon one painting by Stuart Davis - previously mistitled *Artists Against War and Fascism* - Jody Patterson demonstrates how the traditional binary opposition between a supposedly agitational social realism and a purported disinterested abstraction in the 1930s American art world is patently unworkable. She brings new iconographic arguments to bear upon Davis's work to argue that while it may indeed represent a critique of the rise of fascism in the 1930s - in particular in terms of the Spanish Civil War - it also comments upon the struggles between various trade-union factions on the waterfront on

the East Coast, whose more radical members were protesting the use of American ships to carry arms to the forces of Franco, a multivalency made possible by the painting's very abstraction.

In the following text, Fred Orton returns to, and revises, his essay on Harold Rosenberg's celebrated account of American postwar gestural painting, 'The American Action Painters'. Orton's essay, first published in the *Oxford Art Journal* in 1992, and thus seven years before Rosenberg's papers were released by the Getty Research Institute, reads Rosenberg's account as a continuation of his earlier political commitments in the 1930s when he was within the orbit of the American Communist Party and then Trotskyism. After Stalinism and Nazism had destroyed any claims that Moscow and Paris may have had for cultural supremacy, Rosenberg sees in the New York Abstract Expressionist artist a surrogate proletarian agency defined by the changed political circumstances of the early 1950s, when the opportunities for political dissent had withered under McCarthyism. The last two essays in this section offer a different take on the relations between Marxism and modernism. Instead of focusing on projects where these two are more or less unproblematically allied, James A. van Dyke and Paul B. Jaskot employ a sensitive and fine-grained materialist approach to the concrete details of the relations of art and politics, allowing a more complex picture of these relations to emerge. Van Dyke takes as his subject a portrait by Otto Dix, a painter who stayed programmatically clear of political commitments. Van Dyke argues that a non-revolutionary painter, even in potentially revolutionary times, offers valuable material for a

materialist history of art, revealing clearly the networks

of institutions, discourses and social forces that such an artist needed to negotiate, and showing the precise ways specific works of art were produced and functioned socially. Jaskot, in turn, reconsiders the National Socialists' political mobilization of images of the Bauhaus, teasing out the local conditions and subtle chronology of this engagement of enemies. Focusing on institutions and events allows a more complete and complex account of entities that are usually generalized and considered only in terms of ideologies whose contours are sketched with an unhelpfully broad brush.

The final section, 'Marxism in a New World Order', considers Marxist perspectives on recent and contemporary art. As such, it does not so much echo or engage in debate with the writings of this book's dedicatee, but represents work that is nonetheless part and parcel of the Marxist milieu in which he and others operated. In the first chapter, Alex Potts considers the politics of the investment in materiality of European artists in the postwar years, specifically Renato Guttuso's and Asger Jorn's development of innovative, alternate realist practices that simultaneously diverged from older conventions and newer trends of leftist culture, such as social realism or neo-realism. Although differing in degrees of legible subject matter, Guttuso and Jorn shared a commitment to the necessity of the physicality of painting that superseded their relative disparities around the dualism of abstraction and figuration, and their practices proposed a sustained affective experience of materiality in the production and reception of art

with the potential for an interdependent model of agency. In the next contribution, we publish posthumously a text by the late Frances Stracey, a colleague and friend whom the editors of this book, and many of its contributors, miss deeply. She explores the position of women in relation to the Situationist International: first in terms of how they were depicted in the representational strategies in its journal *Internationale situationniste*; and second, how the role they played within the group was articulated at a theoretical level in their writing. Stracey argues that the seemingly random images of women culled from glossy magazines and pornographic sources constituted two different levels of *détournement* as a critique of the commodity fetishism in consumer society and the sexism endemic to it. Furthermore, she argues that in its renewed call for a more inclusive proletariat, the Situationist political programme was proto-feminist, despite the limited number of female participants within the SI itself. Peter Smith's 'Photography, Language and the Pictorial Turn' considers the radical interplay of word and image in the hybrid medium of the photo-essay, in which the photograph and the text are placed in a critical relation to each other that emphasizes, rather than blurs, their discrete ontologies. Smith highlights the radical possibilities for contemporary art practice of the dialectical photo-essay format, exemplified by the work of Allan Sekula, one that mobilizes the photograph's non-linguistic basis rather than relying on the simplifying anchorage of captions. The juxtaposed text, he argues, acts as a provocative foil for enquiry into the represented social reality.

In the first of three essays on contemporary practice, Chin-tao Wu considers the Colombian artist Doris Salcedo, questioning the ways that she has negotiated, even colluded with, a Western art world in which the insatiable demand for so-called 'Third World artists' among curators and collectors can appear cynical and opportunistic. Often typified by evocative arrays of associative found objects, Salcedo's work involves an examination of the traumas in Colombian society of the civil war and political suppression of the 1980s, but Wu considers that the extent of the artist's adherence to the aggressively speculative art market risks sacrificing political import about a local situation for global success. In a project she cheerfully admits is 'perverse', Gail Day considers the work of Allan Sekula, Chto Delat, Freee and Radek Community through the lens of Lukács's concepts of reification, realism and totality. Reading Lukács against the grain, Day has little trouble reconnecting with the complexity of his thought, circumventing the crude statements of his positions (including his *own* statements) and mobilizing it in productive ways. In the last contribution, Kerstin Stakemeier begins with an exploration of Adorno's concept of *Entkunstung* or 'deartification', the ineluctable encroachment in modernity of the outside world on the autonomy of art. She finds there a productive place to reopen the negative dialectic of Adorno's critical theory, focusing on the issue of artistic labour, one not dealt with adequately by Adorno (or other critical theorists). Her reflections draw sustenance from and yield insight on a range of postwar contemporary practices whose projects centre on a consideration of labour, from Italian Workerism to feminist art and theory.

The reader will notice a lack of texts from beyond the Anglo-American and German art-historical communities. There are reasons for this. Isolated examples have appeared elsewhere, but the constellations of intellectual momentum, institutional politics and publishing opportunities have worked against the development of sustained and vigorous production of scholarship in these contexts. In France, for example, the journal *Histoire et critique des arts* served as a focus for a group of that name, holding important conferences and engaging in international discussions that were very much part of the advanced debates of the late 1970s. Scholars such as Nicos Hadjinicolaou, Michel Melot and Patrick Le Nouène had much to say, but the group, and the journal itself, served more as a forum to publish work from North America and Germany than actually establishing an autonomous discourse in its own right. In Italy, the architectural history of the so-called 'Venice School' around Manfredo Tafuri, Massimo Cacciari, Francesco Dal Co and Marco De Michelis at the IUAV (Istituto Universitario di Architettura di Venezia) generated work of impressive philosophical rigour and depth, which was combined with an active involvement in communist politics. Yet a certain narrowness of focus - architecture and the issue of the capitalist city - has prevented this scholarship from serving as a model beyond these respective fields. Isolated within the academic context of their country, the most important resonances of the Venice School have been felt, as is often the case, in North America, and there more in schools of architecture than within the field of art history.

As this book and others show, it is possible to draw a genealogy of a Marxist history of art, but this should not blind us to the contingencies of each moment in this complex trajectory. A Marxist art history was a necessity a century ago, but it was necessarily scattered and heterogeneous due to the institutional bases open to it (political parties of the left with their own institutional problems) and those avenues that were closed (the academy). The energy of the 1960s and 1970s generated by the New Left similarly made a Marxist art history seem necessary. The efforts of an embattled younger generation in Germany, the United States and Britain, against great odds and opposition, showed too that it was possible, and that conservative institutions could be both challenged and transformed in the process. But the momentum and sheer weight of these institutions allowed them to assimilate and incorporate, and ultimately to diffuse and defuse, the energies of that particular moment. Thus the tradition with which we are dealing saw its energies divided and its alliances fractured as its insights were incorporated within a hegemonic academy and its larger perspective was rejected. But now this tradition of thought has new opportunities to negotiate its relationship to institutions, as these latter no longer look so secure, so insulated and so isolated. The paradoxical situation of Marxist art history today - oppositional but intellectually strong, marginal in terms of personnel but integral to the thinking of the discipline - means that there is reason neither for fatalism nor for withdrawal. This collection of essays is, in the best sense, incomplete, full of remnants of the past and promises of the future, the balance of which we can not yet be sure. While

drawing on, and simultaneously challenging, the as yet unexhausted work of Marx and Marxist views of the past, new interventions and frameworks are being developed. For example, recently formed groups such as Historical Materialism (a journal, a set of conferences and a publishing venture) will feed into the further development of Marxist art history. We are aware that figures such as Alain Badiou, Michael Hardt, Antonio Negri and others who have opened up lines of enquiry and critique are only occasionally alluded to in this collection. But we are confident that these perspectives, and others, will be represented - and that Marxism will look quite different - the next time someone attempts a project such as the one we have undertaken in the pages that follow.

★★★★★

The editors would like to add just two final notes. First, our thanks to our publisher Andrew Brown of Art / Books and to Tamar Garb and Stephen Smith at University College London for their belief in and support of this project over several years. And second, the dedication of this book from all those involved: to Andrew Hemingway.

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