

collectivist values, but this hardly explains the deep enmity the Soviets felt for Freud. It could be, for example, that discrediting Freud became a propedeutic effort for any Soviet intellectual to develop his or her ideological teeth in the same way we ask college students today to write critical essays on any non-controversial topic. Be that as it may, Miller's book leaves a number of rather difficult questions unanswered which will occupy historians of psychoanalysis and historians of Communism for the next few years.

Moreover, one could reflect on why the late 1920s and 1930s were the most prominent years for Freud-bashing in the Soviet Union, while the 1990s proved to be the same in supposedly highly individualistic North America. Were the same factors at work? Were they highly divergent? Or has Freud, for reasons that are not entirely clear, always been an interesting figure-head whom everybody loves to hate and who can easily be criticized in any cultural context when, really, quite different points are being made? Such questions are inevitably part of a broader cultural history of psychoanalysis which transcends an analysis of the dissemination of a specific and, over time, highly codified body of ideas.

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<sup>1</sup>. Edward Shorter, *A History of Psychiatry: From the Era of the Asylum to the Age of Prozac* (New York 1997), chapter 5, "The Psychoanalytic Hiatus."

<sup>2</sup>. See, for example, Nathan G. Hale, *Freud and the Americans: The Beginnings of Psychoanalysis in the United States, 1876-1917* (New York 1971); *Freud and the Americans, 1917-1985: The Rise and Crisis of Psychoanalysis in the United States* (New York 1995).

<sup>3</sup>. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, in their *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis 1983 [or. 1972]) attempt to develop a psychoanalytic theory of the unconscious in which desire is understood to be directly connected to the material conditions of existence. See, in particular, chapter 1.4, "A materialistic psychiatry."

<sup>4</sup>. Louis Althusser, *Writings on Psychoanalysis: Freud and Lacan*. Translated by Jeffrey Mehlmann, edited by Olivier Corpet and François Matheron (New York 1996), 5.

## Dematerializing Marxism

Gen Doy, *Materializing Art History* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 1998).

At the conclusion of this reappraisal of Marxist art history, Gen Doy, with a perhaps unintended nod to Marx's eleventh Thesis on Feuerbach, reminds the reader that we need to be aware of the reasons why, and the manner in which, Marxism has been interpreted in various ways, in different economic and political situations. The material reasons for different interpretations, distortions and reformulations of Marxism are important in understanding the state of Marxist art and cultural history today (257).

As so often happens in this extraordinarily dogmatic and endlessly frustrating book, the author's claims have little bearing upon what she has actually accomplished. Nowhere in a text that runs to over 250 pages does Doy ferret out "material reasons" that might account for the alleged crudeness of social historian Arnold Hauser's "view of the relationship of culture to society"(66), or for T. J. Clark's "enduring sympathy for Situationist theories of modern capitalism"(85). Although claiming to be a practitioner of "dialectical materialism" – a term that is for Doy synonymous with Marxism and the Marxist method – she is unconcerned with the relationship between, for example, the material conditions of academic life and the production of academic-Marxist texts. (In this respect, it should perhaps be noted that Doy has published no fewer than four books in the last five years, a fact probably not unrelated to her promotion in 1999 to the rank of professor at De Montfort University.) A social history of Marxist art history that would attempt to account for "interpretations, distortions and reformulations" would be original, to say the least, and might also turn out to be illuminating. For example, knowing that Nicos Hadjinicolaou wrote *Art History and Class Struggle* in the space of about a month in the fall of 1972 in order to maintain his status as a student resident in France – Hadjinicolaou was at the time a refugee from the Greek Colonels – casts an interesting light on his much debated Althusserian text.<sup>1</sup>

Yet, ironically, in a book entitled *Materializing Art History*, material circumstances count for little; what counts is holding correct ideas. In Doy's view, the failure of all previous Marxist art historians results from their refusal to embrace the tenets of "dialectical materialism" as set forth by Marx, Engels, Lenin, and especially Trotsky. Doy is so insistent upon this point that she repeatedly berates Marxist art historians past and present for their failure to see the "dialectical materialist" or Trotskyist light. Meyer Schapiro was one "of a number of left intellectuals [who in the late 1930s] gravitated to the anti-Stalinist left, without ever really committing themselves to Trotskyism" (92). O. K. Werckmeister, a contemporary German-American art historian, "does not seem to have any interest in the Trotskyist development of Marxism, and therefore has to go back to the drawing board in trying to rescue Marxism from Stalinism" (53).

In her introduction, Doy maintains that Marxism "still provides the best methodological framework from which to understand culture," and that her book will in effect retrieve and refocus "the Marxist strand within 'the social history of art.'" *Materializing Art History* consists of essays that address a range of issues: "dialectical materialism," the social history of art, the relation of the personal to the political, abstract art, postmodernism and postcolonialism. Unfortunately, this is not a systematic effort but a potpourri: Doy goes off on tangents, delivers sermons on peripheral topics, hands down judgments ex cathedra. Still, evaluating *Materializing Art History* requires that we take the author's aims seriously. Thus, we must ask whether the book vindicates a

Marxist framework for understanding culture and whether the author has through a study of the “Marxian strand” managed to reanimate the social history of art.

Doy begins her book with a chapter entitled “Marxism and Dialectical Materialism” in which she rehearses a number of familiar if tortured arguments to demonstrate that Marx was in complete agreement with what critics have described as Engels’ “scientism.” In Doy’s view, Engels’ attempt in *The Dialectics of Nature* (1883) to show that “the laws of dialectics” applied to the natural world helped establish a firm grounding for “dialectical materialism.” Here and throughout the book Doy employs the term “dialectical materialism” as if Marx and Engels had invented it, but in fact “dialectical materialism” was part of the transition from Marx to Marxism and can be traced to the Second International and the writings of such thinkers as Georgi Plekhanov and Karl Kautsky. Doy, however, indulges in what can only be called magical or religious thinking in her insistence upon the centrality of “dialectical materialism” to a Marxist tradition that supposedly passed intact from Marx and Engels to Lenin and Trotsky with each succeeding figure adding to the corpus of holy writ. Predictably, the chapter devolves into a history of official Marxisms from Kautsky, Bernstein and the Second International to the Trotskyist Fourth, with a justification for Lenin’s concept of the democratically-centralized vanguard party, an apologia for the bloody suppression of the 1921 Kronstadt workers’ and sailors’ uprising against the Soviet state, and a reprise of the orthodox Trotskyist analysis of the Soviet Union as a “post-capitalist” albeit “degenerate” workers state.

Having staked out her positions on Marxism and “dialectical materialism,” Doy proceeds in chapters two and three to a discussion of the social history of art and related developments. Organizationally, these two chapters are a hodge-podge. Rather than treat the material historically, Doy dashes backward and forward in time in search of a usable “model” for a Marxist art history. Besides offering disgruntled general comments on the sociology of art (Pierre Bourdieu is castigated for his apparent failure to use dialectics), in chapter two Doy considers and then rejects the work of O. K. Werckmeister and Hollis Clayson (representing the new art history), Janet Wolff (the sociology of art again), Arnold Hauser and Nicos Hadjinicolaou (the social history of art) with remarks in passing on Theodor Adorno and Clement Greenberg.

The third chapter examines, in what can only be described as ahistorical order, the work of T. J. Clark (b. 1944), Max Raphael (1889-1952), and Meyer Schapiro (1904-1996). Doy says nothing about a number of figures who played a role in the history of Marxist art history – Plekhanov, Frederick Antal, Anthony Blunt, Milton Brown, among others – but it is perhaps just as well since she is in effect playing judge and jury in a kangaroo court in which the defendants are invariably condemned for their failure properly to comprehend and apply “dialectical materialism.” Indeed, Doy shows no real interest in constructing a

model, discovering the relative strengths and weaknesses of the figures she considers, or placing their work in historical context. The arraignment is entirely predictable, the outcome never in doubt. Thus, when she asserts at the beginning of chapter three, “I want to explain just what kind of a radical tradition [T. J.] Clark wants to situate himself in, and whether it really is a Marxist one [sic]” (75), the reader pretty well knows where the discussion is headed. In this case, Lukács’ Hegelianized Marxism is in for a sound thrashing and so too the work of the council communists Hermann Gorter and Anton Pannekoek (not much of an influence on Clark, but never mind) and, to be sure, the Situationist Guy Debord – as if scholarship were a question of demonstrating guilt by association and Clark’s work were simply reducible to a few of its political positions and sources (an assumption that seems to parallel the crude suppositions underlying the search for artistic “influences” that once preoccupied art-historical scholars). When, by way of conclusion, Doy proclaims the obvious – that “Clark’s Marxism is certainly a long way from any sort of Trotskyist Marxism” (87) – it is evident she is more concerned with fending off threats to her particular brand of “dialectical materialism” than with what might be learned from or about Clark’s work.

Things become even worse a few pages later when Doy takes on Meyer Schapiro. She spends the better part of six pages arguing with David Craven’s recent commentary on Schapiro, but, astonishingly, in considering the work of a man who very likely will be remembered as the most important American-trained art historian of the twentieth century, she fails to discuss Schapiro’s writings. Indeed, the endnotes for this section contain not a single direct reference to Schapiro’s work. Yet during the 1930s Schapiro produced a series of studies that are now often cited as models of Marxist analysis, of which the three most important are “The Nature of Abstract Art” (1937), “From Mozarabic to Romanesque in Silos,” (1939) and “Courbet and Popular Imagery” (1941).<sup>2</sup> Schapiro’s many-faceted arguments, his reconstructions of historical contexts, his detailed analyses of artistic form defy brief description. Like the best Marxist cultural studies of the period (e.g., the writings of Walter Benjamin), these articles are in their way deeply idiosyncratic. But this does not mean they are of no value to today’s art historians or that they can be dismissed because Schapiro’s Marxism was influenced, and in my view enriched, by the writings of Karl Korsch and Rosa Luxemburg. Yet instead of commenting on Schapiro’s scholarship, Doy offers the reader only a diatribe on Schapiro’s politics.<sup>3</sup>

To the extent that they address the question of Marxism and Marxist art history, the first three chapters of *Materializing Art History* form a unit. The remaining three chapters, although also exercises in “dialectical materialism,” can be read in any order. Chapter four, provocatively titled “How is the Personal Political?” begins with Doy asserting that the chapter will address “some questions of visual culture and political theory and practice in the 1930s”(105). A page later, Doy informs the reader that she will be “considering questions of

the personal” and discussing such issues as “politics and representation” and “the relationship of the individual to wider class and historical issues” as well as considering the question of “the unconscious and the conscious” and “the relationship of psychoanalysis to Marxism”(106). The chapter never really answers the question raised in its title or addresses with any consistency the issues touched on in its opening pages, but instead wanders from an attack on the writings of Jacqueline Rose to a consideration of the dialectics of representation (Doy agrees with Trotsky’s bizarre observation that film is inherently more “dialectical” than photography) and the relation of consciousness to representation (we learn that “the unconscious is historical”) before settling down to a discussion of Claude Cahun, Tina Modotti, and Ken McMullen’s 1985 film *Zina*. What might be called “the Trotsky connection” piques Doy’s interest in all three cases. Cahun was a surrealist whose work reflected Trotskyist sympathies. Modotti, who joined the Mexican Communist Party in 1927, may have been initially a Trotskyist sympathizer since she incorporated a fragment of text from Trotsky’s *Literature and Revolution* (1924) in a photograph entitled *La Técnica* (1928), a work Doy celebrates as “the nearest Modotti came to solving the problem of the modernist political photograph”(145).<sup>4</sup> *Zina* concerns Trotsky’s daughter, Zina Bronstein, who committed suicide in 1933 because she was unable to withstand the strains of exile and multiple betrayals, including her father’s decision to send her letters to her psychoanalyst in the belief the letters would be of use for her therapy.

Doy has a number of worthwhile things to say about *Zina* and about Cahun’s *Poupée 1* (1936), a collage made out of copies of pages from the French communist newspaper *l’Humanité*, and she illuminates her discussion of Cahun’s work with a thumbnail history of the French Popular Front. Here we catch a glimmer of a genuine social-historical approach. All the more reason then to regret the vague and grandiose claims that surround these brief instances of serious analysis.

In a chapter entitled “Concretizing the Abstract,” Doy maintains that until recently Marx and Engels’ supposed preference for realist art discouraged Marxists from discussing abstract and non-figurative art. This leads to a predictable dismissal of most Marxist writing on abstraction. Thus Adorno, Raphael and Althusser failed to properly understand abstract art, deploying, instead, crude formulations. More recent Marxist commentators on abstract expressionism have mistakenly attributed “revolutionary significance” to the writings of critics Harold Rosenberg and Clement Greenberg who in the late 1930s “may have been anti-Stalinist but that certainly doesn’t mean they were Trotskyist, or any other kind of revolutionaries.” Clark has in a recent essay simply muddied the waters with his Hegelianized study of Jackson Pollock’s paintings (“Marx is nowhere to be seen” Doy laments (188)). These considerations form as it were the prologue to Doy’s own, relatively brief account of Kasimir Malevich’s *Black Suprematist Square* (1913-1915) and the

artist's career as an abstract painter. Doy claims that unlike Clark she will employ "a historical, not a philosophical method," but in her hands historical method means an investigation of Malevich's anarchist sympathies and a brief description of Malevich's artistic trajectory leading up to a warning that we should not "assign [Malevich's work] a class ideology or a political meaning." (195) All well and good, but what historical meanings should be assigned to it? Doy never says. Yet it appears obvious that Doy's uncharacteristic reticence results from her failure to develop an understanding of the historical contexts in which Malevich's work was produced and seen.<sup>5</sup>

"Marxism, the Postmodern and the Postcolonial," Doy's final chapter, runs through a lengthy critique of such postmodernist thinkers as Jacques Lacan, Jean Baudrillard, Jean-François Lyotard, Homi Bhabha, Edward Said and Frederic Jameson. Much of Doy's criticism will be familiar to students of postmodernism save perhaps for its "dialectical materialist" twist. As always Doy is keen to distinguish Marxist from non-Marxist and Jameson is here a target of unparalleled opportunity. Jameson's "interest in dialectics is not really a Marxist one" (221) she announces and then proceeds to tear apart Jameson's foray into post-modernist esthetics via a comparison of Van Gogh's *Old Shoes* with Andy Warhol's *Diamond Dust Shoes*. These paintings constitute a ripe topic since Martin Heidegger's essay on Van Gogh's *Old Shoes* long ago drew a rebuke from Meyer Schapiro who in turn was challenged by Jacques Derrida.<sup>6</sup> Doy is unconcerned with, or unaware of, Schapiro's criticism of Heidegger but Jameson's admiration is another matter and he is duly taken to task for failing to note the Fascist dimension in Heidegger's romantic "blood and soil" interpretation of Van Gogh's painting. None of this is particularly original since Doy relies heavily on art historian John Walker's analysis of the Van Gogh painting and its critics and his study of Warhol's *Diamond Dust Shoes*.<sup>7</sup>

The chapter's final section, which is devoted to "The Art of the Postcolonial," is altogether more to the point. Doy's descriptions of Renée Green's mixed media installation *Revue* and Lyle Ashton Harris's photographs entitled *Toussaint l'Ouverture* and *Hottentot Venus 2000* remind the reader that more is at stake here than the vindication of "dialectical materialism." Doy discusses these works with some sensitivity to their possible range of meanings. They also point to questions of artistic production and reception only now and then touched on in Doy's book. Who has looked at or studied these works? What has been their critical reception? What sort of interpretations have they inspired? What has been their influence on other artists? To what extent do they influence understanding of the issues they raise (African-American history, racial stereotyping)? To what extent is avowedly political work of this sort recuperated or used by an art world in which Green's installation and Harris's photographs are commodities?

Unfortunately, Doy considers none of these questions – questions that are, in my opinion, key to a properly Marxist, which is to say, materialized history of

art. It was Doy's adversary Jameson who famously wrote: "Always historicize! This slogan [is] the one absolute and we may even say 'transhistorical' imperative of all dialectical thought."<sup>8</sup> And, indeed, it should be emphasized that materializing art history requires above all a historical account of the discipline: why it came into being, the historical and material circumstances under which art historians worked, how and why they developed their ideas, whether or not they built upon one another's achievements and why.

For example, although it is now easy to criticize Arnold Hauser (1892-1978) for theoretical failings and insensitivity to issues of gender, race and ethnicity, a close look at his life and work would result in a better understanding of his important contribution to a Marxist social history of art. Hauser, who was part of Lukács' circle during World War I, fled Hungary after the failure of the 1919 Revolution, studied with the art historian Max Dvorák in Vienna and with the pioneering sociologist Georg Simmel in Berlin. As an impoverished refugee in London in the 1940s, he produced his multi-volume *Social History of Art*. Despite the awkwardness of the English translation which appeared in 1951, Hauser's book enjoyed enormous popularity in the English-speaking world in the 1950s and 1960s, and remains in print today.<sup>9</sup> A vast compendium of scholarship and critical insight, its faults may now be obvious enough, in particular its frequent resort to reflection theory (the cultural superstructure reflects the social-economic base), which was commonplace for Marxists at the time Hauser wrote. Still, the book's defects in no way diminish its historical significance since it helped keep alive in the depths of the Cold War an interest in a Marxist approach to the history of art as well as an awareness that art is above all a social and historical phenomenon. If today's Marxist art historians reject Hauser's theoretical formulations, those formulations nonetheless once provided them with a useful problematic and a point of departure for further study.<sup>10</sup>

*The Social History of Art* cannot be reduced to a series of theories or positions, yet this is precisely Doy's method when confronted with the work of thinkers like Hauser who fail to toe her particular Trotskyist line. Indeed, she repeatedly dematerializes her subject, reducing it to a series of bloodless abstractions. In her hands, "dialectical materialism" represents a type of idealism since what counts in her book are ideas and political positions abstractly conceived, not historical conditions and material circumstances in all their complexity and multifariousness.

Finally, to return to the question raised at the outset: does *Materializing Art History* support or extend the project of a Marxist social history of art? Marxist art history enjoyed a brief vogue in the late 1970s but quickly fell out of academic fashion. Nonetheless, it continues to have its advocates. Circumstances both within and outside the academy will no doubt determine whether the Marxist approach will capture the interest of a new generation of art-historical scholars. In this respect, the recent appearance of a Radical Art

History Caucus in the College Art Association is a hopeful sign. But Marxism will have no impact on the discipline if it is represented by work in the vein of *Materializing Art History*. As Meyer Schapiro observed almost fifty years ago, “Marxist writing on art has suffered from schematic and premature formulations and from crude judgments imposed by loyalty to a political line.” No doubt advances have been made since Schapiro wrote. Still, he provided an important clue to the future of Marxist art history when in effect he enjoined scholars to apply Marx’s theories “in a true spirit of investigation, such as we see in Marx’s economic writings.”<sup>11</sup> Alas, that “true spirit of investigation,” so indispensable for serious scholarship, is almost nowhere present in this careless, forgettable book.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>. See Nicos Hadjinicolaou, *Art History and Class Struggle*, Louise Asmal trans. (London 1978; orig. publ. 1973). Information about Hadjinicolaou’s situation in the early 1970s from conversations with the author in the summer of 1980.

<sup>2</sup>. See “The Nature of Abstract Art” in *Modern Art, Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries: Selected Papers* (New York 1978), 185-211; “From Mozarabic to Romanesque in Silos” in *Romanesque Art: Selected Papers* (New York 1977), 28-100, and “Courbet and Popular Imagery” (1941) in *Modern Art*, 47-85.

<sup>3</sup>. Doy, 93, mistakenly claims that Schapiro “had joined the American Communist Party by 1932.” Schapiro was in fact a party sympathizer until 1936 when he began to criticize the Moscow Trials at which point party members were ordered to shun him. Doy, however, quickly forgets Schapiro’s involvement with American communism when she writes: “The possibility of a democratic, centralist revolutionary party, based on an agreed programme and tactics and rooted firmly in the working class does not even enter into Schapiro’s alternatives”(96). In reality, Schapiro remained an admirer of Lenin into the 1940s and no doubt devoted some thought to the question of “the democratic, centralist party.”

<sup>4</sup>. Doy also maintains that Modotti’s subsequent “decision to commit herself to Stalinist politics” proved to be “the main stumbling block for Modotti’s development as a photographer”(139), another questionable assertion.

<sup>5</sup>. Doy, 174, observes that T.J. Clark “has never shown much interest in Soviet material in his published writings,” proof for her that Clark is simply pursuing his particular brand of “radical or left politics.” Ironically, in a book published less than a year after the appearance of *Materializing Art History*, Clark devotes a long chapter to the work of El Lissitzky and Malevich and the question of art and the Russian Revolution. See Clark, “God is Not Cast Down,” in *Farewell to an Idea* (New York 1999), 225-297.

<sup>6</sup>. See Martin Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” in *Poetry, Language, Thought* Albert Hofstadter trans. (New York 1971), 647-708; Schapiro, “The Still Life as Personal Object: A Note on Heidegger and Van Gogh,” in *Theory and Philosophy of Art: Selected Papers* (New York 1994), 135-142, and “Further Notes on Heidegger and Van Gogh,” *Theory and Philosophy of Art*, 143-151; Jacques Derrida, “Restitutions of the Truth in Pointing [pointure],” in *The Truth in Painting*, Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod trans.



(Chicago 1987), 255-382.

<sup>7</sup>. See John A. Walker, "Art History Versus Philosophy: The Enigma of the 'Old Shoes,'" in *Van Gogh Studies: Five Critical Essays* (London 1981) and Walker, *Art in the Age of Mass Media* (London 1983).

<sup>8</sup>. *The Political Unconscious: Narrative As A Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca 1981), 9.

<sup>9</sup>. The four-volume paperback edition of *The Social History of Art* published by Vintage remained in print from the mid-1950s until the mid-1990s. In 1999, Routledge brought out a new four-volume paperback edition with an introduction by Jonathan Harris.

<sup>10</sup>. Characteristically, given her scatter-shot approach, Doy ignores Hauser's *Philosophy of Art History* anon. trans. (Cleveland 1958), an important early contribution to among other things the study of art-historical theory and methods. *The Philosophy of Art History* contains a lengthy critique of Heinrich Wölfflin's famous cyclical theory and also the first serious consideration of the concept of ideology as it applies to the history of art.

<sup>11</sup>. Schapiro, "Style," in *Theory and Philosophy of Art: Style, Artist and Society* (New York: 1994), 100. The essay was originally published in 1953. See Alan Wallach, "Meyer Schapiro's Essay on Style: Falling into the Void," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 55, no. 1 (Winter 1997), 11-14.

<sup>12</sup>. Paralleling the murkiness and lack of rigour in the text is a deeply-flawed scholarly apparatus. Doy's bibliography is a hit-or-miss affair when it comes to materials cited in her endnotes and the index is at best spotty and full of errors (e.g., a reference for Walker, John A. to pages 321-2 in a book that runs 271 pages).

David D. Gilmore, *Carnival and Culture: Sex, Symbol and Status in Spain* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999).

Carnival is a near-ubiquitous practice of rural and urban cultures in Europe and has been a long-standing subject of scholarly inquiry. Indeed, from the work of the *Annales school* in the 1950s to the more recent work of Natalie Zemon Davis in the late 1970s, carnival has provoked frequent scholarly investigation and debate in an effort to determine its social, cultural, and political meaning through study of its many and widely varied forms throughout Europe. Historians and anthropologists have been the most interested observers of the ritual practices of carnival, which originated in medieval Europe as a combination of religious, local cultural, and pagan customs practiced in public form. A seminal part of what was referred to in the 1970s as "the new cultural history," carnival has often been the centerpiece in the study of history "from the bottom up." A few noteworthy books in the expansive literature on carnival include Natalie Zemon Davis' *Society and Culture in Early Modern France: Eight Essays* (1975), Emmanuel LeRoy Ladurie's *Carnaval de Romans* (1979), Umberto Eco et al. *Carnival!* (1984), Robert Darnton's *The Great Cat Massacre and other episodes in French cultural history* (1984), and Peter Mason's *Bacchanal!: The Carnival Culture of Trinidad* (1998). David D. Gilmore's latest book, *Carnival and Culture: Sex, Symbol and Status in Spain*, is another contribution to the now voluminous carnival literature. Gilmore is an