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Marxist Art History: Directive Model or Radical Inspiration?¹

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Abstract:

Any attempt to define Marxism as an art historical methodology is complicated by the post-communist predicament. This study aims to clear the way for a fresh analysis and provides the first ever survey of possible Marxist approaches that peaked between the 1940s and 1970s. It is based on the premise that because of the inherently materialist character of visual art, “art history” cannot be confounded with aesthetics or the

philosophy and theory of art, and should also be distinguished from the history of architecture. Marxist theory and methodology thus cannot be simply extended to art history from the texts by Marx, Engels, Lenin and other theoreticians who dealt mainly with literature and general aesthetics. In this respect, Marxism proves to be largely incompatible with the history of art that is based on the Eurocentric tradition of “high art” intrinsically linked with the elites.

Keywords: Marxism – methodology of art history – 20th century art history – Max Raphael – Meyer Schapiro – Otto K. Werckmeister

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Every discussion of Marxist approaches to art history and theory in the Czech Republic is necessarily circumscribed by several limits that render it highly specific in time and place. One such factor is the mandatory status of Marxist-Leninist science, which was enshrined in the constitution of 1960 and was therefore valid until at least the end of 1989: Marxism had of course been obligatory for members of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSČ) even prior to that. The second factor is the conviction of Western Marxists that there was no Marxist thinking of any significance in Eastern Europe for the duration of the Iron Curtain. This is illustrated perfectly by the first book to offer an overview of Marxism in art history, which refers only to György Lukács and Mikhail Lifshitz from this part of the world, both of whom are relevant to other spheres, namely aesthetics and a general theory or philosophy of art.² The third factor limiting such studies is the well-nigh universal rejection or suppression of Marxism as a method in the humanities in post-socialist countries since 1990, the result of which is a blind spot, which after thirty years has become a sizeable empty space on the map of domestic intellectual history. Marxism was denied any significance outside that of being the political ideology of communist parties with totalitarian ambitions, which liberal democratic societies must be protected from at all costs. In an extreme, albeit relatively widespread, form Marxism is seen to exist on the same ideological level as German Nazism and stereotypically identified as a direct path to the gulag. The rejection of any differentiation between Marxism, Marxism-Leninism and Stalinism made historically accurate analyses of individual phases of the dictatorship of the communist party impossible. The idea that there could be a Marxism outside the communist movement has become inconceivable. The entire web of barriers is completed by the tendency toward self-colonisation, in which research into every intellectual trend is based on the idea that its normatively correct and sole true versions were simply those deployed west and south of the Iron Curtain.

It was self-colonisation that prevented me from acquiring a deeper understanding of Czech Marxist art history when I first enquired into its form on the occasion of the conference “Between East and West” in 2012. Three incrementally expanded drafts of the outcome of that research were published not only in *Notebook for Art, Theory and Related Zones*, but also, thanks to considerable foreign interest in this topic, in two online journals in Great Britain and Germany.³ It was only through a systematic investigation of Czech art history between 1945 and 1969 that I managed to differentiate in greater detail and understand the complexity of terminology and content of the Marxist discourse in art history and appreciate more fully the originality of the specifically Czechoslovak Marxist approach of the late 1950s and especially the 1960s. I was motivated to pursue these studies by the fact that the knowledge generated in Czechoslovak scholarship from the 1950s to the 1980s until recently formed the bedrock of this discipline, and in many respects still does. Yet how can this be reconciled with the blanket rejection of Marxism’s intellectual capabilities and the demand that, under the terms of Act 183/1994, we

2 Andrew HEMINGWAY (ed.), *Marxism and the History of Art: From William Morris to the New Left*. London – Ann Arbor: Pluto Press 2006.

3 Milena BARTLOVÁ, “Punkva. Kde je marxismus v českých dějinách umění?”, *Sešit pro umění, teorii a příbuzné zóny*, 2013, No. 14, pp. 6–16; english translation published in: *The Sešit Reader 2007–2017*, Praha: VVP AVU 2019, pp. 164–175; Milena BARTLOVÁ, “Marxism in Czech Art History 1945–1970”, *kunsttexte.de*, 2015, no. 4 / Ostblock, available at: <https://edoc.hu-berlin.de/handle/18452/8220> (accessed 1 September 2020); Milena BARTLOVÁ, “Czech art history and Marxism”, *Journal of Art Historiography*, 2012, No. 7, available at: <https://arthistoriography.wordpress.com/7-dec2012/> (accessed 1 September 2020).

view this period as “criminal”? I published the results of my findings in a book.⁴ In this article I would like to clarify a particular idea of the nature of Marxist art histories (in the plural) by drawing on the highly incisive observations of Otto K. Werckmeister (b. 1934), a German art historian who moved to the USA in 1965, i.e. prior to the appearance of the most powerful art history generation of Western Marxism.⁵ I shall then sketch out the international range of Marxist art history in the twentieth century, to which Czechoslovak art history, focused on a humanist Marxism, contributed original ideas in the 1960s. In conclusion I shall attempt to spotlight the changes that Marxist and Marxist-inspired art history underwent after the fall of the Soviet bloc. This is crucial, since Marxism was primarily an intellectual movement associated with industrial modernity, and it can therefore be argued that only by transforming itself completely could it continue to be a source of inspiration in the post-industrial era. Although Marxism cannot be denied the quality of an independent philosophical and intellectual tendency, it remains consciously and intentionally associated with left-wing political practice, and so failures in the political sphere were bound to impact retrospectively on its theoretical content. In short: such failures once again demonstrated that the idea that there exists a strict separation of the theoretical domain from that of material and real-world practice has always been and continues to be an illusion that could justifiably be called an ideology.⁶

In light of what I have written so far, it might be useful for some readers if I emphasise that this text defines its subject as art-historical thinking, often called the “methodology of art history”. I believe we have to distinguish the history of art (including “theory” in the narrowest sense of thinking and writing about contemporary art) from two essentially broader and equally distinctive spheres, namely aesthetics and the philosophy of art. For the most part the Marxist theoretical discourse has steered clear of the history and theory of art as such. The unexamined transplantation of aesthetic analyses and judgements from literature and drama – regarding which topics Marx, Engels and, later on, Lenin, wrote far more – was and remains common, though fails to acknowledge the materiality of visual art. As Werckmeister showed in a study provocatively titled *Ende der Ästhetik*,⁷ such an approach does not do justice to the material character of visual art, a fact that distinguishes it from other art forms. Such an approach is obliged to work with abstraction and, in an attempt at “philosophical control over the noetic nature of art”, avert its gaze from the material conditions of the production of visual art – material not only in the socio-economic sense, but also in the sense of “vulgar materialism”. Such a framing makes it impossible to pay attention to the genuine uniqueness of visual art, which it mistakenly replaces with representative realism. In countries with a regime of state socialism this led to a situation in which “official Marxist-Leninist aesthetics determines and evaluates art unilaterally as a product, whose utility value is more important for society than the work process of its creation”.⁸ A crucial parameter was overlooked, namely the market commodification of artworks, which is embedded in the economic

4 Milena BARTLOVÁ, *Dějiny českých dějin umění 1945–1969*, Praha: UMPRUM 2020.

5 Wolfgang KERSTEN (ed.), *Radical Art History. Internationale Anthologie, Subject: O.K. Werckmeister*. Zürich: Zurich InterPublishers 1997.

6 This is the case if ideology is understood, along with Marx and Engels, as referring to “false consciousness”, which conceals the true state of things for the purpose of maintaining power. Cf. note 44.

7 Otto K. WERCKMEISTER, *Ende der Ästhetik*, Frankfurt a. M.: S. Fischer 1974

8 Otto K. WERCKMEISTER, “Ideologie und Kunst bei Marx”, in: *Ideologie und Kunst bei Marx u. a. Essays*, Frankfurt m Main: S. Fischer 1974, pp. 5–35.

system of a particular society in a different way and more intensively than the material side of literature, and in a different way than in the case of the performing arts. It is for this reason that the transfer of the theme to the sphere of aesthetics and general art theory failed to take account, for example, of the fundamental difference in the conditions of artistic culture under state socialism, where the art market was virtually abolished and replaced by bureaucratic decision-making. In addition, for the purposes of this study I have had to distinguish the history of architecture from that of visual art. Though they are retrospectively lumped together in historical discourse, when studying the modern, capitalist era the material and social contingency of architecture extrudes as a significantly differentiating factor.

The complications associated with the subject of this study derive from the fact that it is by no means a self-evident domain. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels did not address the topic of visual art or the history thereof. In the early 1840s, Marx wrote two short texts on art, polemics against the place ascribed it by Hegel in the development of spirit. However, both these texts have been lost.⁹ In the Soviet Union and other countries of the eastern bloc, collections of quotes from essays by Marx and Engels were published that could be applied to art.¹⁰ Since Lenin and Stalin believed that culture and art played an important role in the process of the attainment of a classless society, one had to have a “theoretical base” to hand. However, this could not be easily acquired by the usual means, i.e. by referring to the “classics”. The lack of attention paid by Marx and Engels to art is completely logical. Art belongs to the superstructure, whereas historical movement takes place in the base. Furthermore, art history as an academic discipline only came into being in the latter half of the nineteenth century. However, even then, as to a considerable extent today, it was intrinsically linked with the character of its subject, i.e. the classical tradition of the “beaux-arts” and monumental architecture. Art history has been and still is produced by political, economic and power elites, and its place is the realm of ideological hegemony. The sources for art history as a discipline are such artworks that first and foremost qualify as “high quality art” and necessarily belong to the very centre of elite culture. Attempts at refashioning art history so as to take account of folklore were doomed to failure even under Stalin’s rule. A full-blown expansion of the discipline to include the thematic sphere of the non-artistic image (visual culture) or popular culture, initiated by iconology in the 1950s and slowly promoted since the 1970s, remains in part controversial, as does an approach to visual art not as to a sphere of ideas and ideal or religious values, but also as a market commodity and powerful instrument of communication. These last perspectives were introduced by Marxism, though we will not find them in the works of its founders. One might say that the history of art by its very nature tends towards idealism, and that there are deep bonds between it and bourgeois society. It is for this reason that an interest in Marxist art history arrives in Czechoslovakia only after the Second World War within the political context of the hegemony of the KSČ. The only person active in the sphere of art history and theory in the interwar period who was a Marxist was Karel Teige (1900–1951), though he only began to apply himself to questions of art history in the narrow sense of the term, i.e. art older than contemporary and

9 *Ibid.*, 30. Cf. WERCKMEISTER, *Ende*; Otto K. WERCKMEISTER, “Marx on Ideology and Art”, *New Literary History*, vol. 4, 1973, no. 3, pp. 501–519

10 A reader was translated from German and published in Czech: Karel MARX – Bedřich ENGELS, *O umění a literatuře. Sborník ze spisů*, organised by Michail Lifšic, Praha: Svoboda 1951.

recent, in the 1940s. At this point we see clearly how the sphere of art history differs both from that of active art, and from literary theory and aesthetics.

Studies in art history from the Stalin era are a valuable object of interest only in the system within the framework of which they operated. A great deal of scholarly energy was expended at the end of the 1950s and into the 1960s on overcoming limits previously created. However, in the 1960s, in the countries of the Soviet bloc, including the Soviet Union itself, original variations on Marxist initiatives came into being that linked up in different ways to the local tradition of academic research. Unfortunately, there has not been a great deal of research into this topic.¹¹ Modern art history was only just coming into being in Bulgaria and Romania. In Russia and the Baltic states local literary structuralism and formalism were being reappraised, though the most influential figures, such as Oleg Grabar, Viktor Lazarev, Mikhail Libman and Mikhail Alpatov, wrote histories of older art in the sense of interwar traditions adapted to Marxist-Leninist argumentation more rhetorically than conceptually. However, more analysis needs to be conducted of these texts before we will be in a position to offer a more exhaustive evaluation, and the same is true of Hungarian and Polish art history. In the German Democratic Republic (GDR) the politicisation of the discipline was intensified by the local form of denazification, and political success was achieved by a pressure to transform art history into a general science of art in which it was not possible to distance oneself effectively from the cultural and political claims of socialist realism. East German Marxist theory, represented by Peter H. Feist, Harald Olbrich, and Friedrich Möbius and Helga Sciurie, remained in critical contact with West Germany scholarship and culminated in the 1980s with a collaboration with young West German leftists. Inasmuch as Feist deems the prioritisation of a work's content (though not its theme) over its form as materialist in a Marxist sense, this can be seen either as a hangover of the Stalinist definition of socialist realism, or as an instrument for a secularist reinterpretation of older art – both with the same authority.¹² In Czechoslovakia the discipline of art history resisted similar pressures far more effectively, and in the 1960s created two distinctive Marxist discourses: the Prague School of Marxist Iconology and Axiology.¹³

Marxist variations

A lack of relevant and canonical texts of the “classics” made possible creative variations on how to introduce a Marxist perspective into the discipline. Basically, these can be divided into four areas: Marxist aesthetics, the discourse of realism as the noetic ability of visual art, a historical materialist conception of stylistic development, and a social history of art. In addition, one should not overlook an approach in which the political side of Marxism is superior to research methodology, and party allegiance becomes the main criterion (which in Czechoslovakia is the case of the influential figure Zdeněk Nejedlý, who as a historian never managed to transcend positivism). This is the criterion used

11 Cf. collections published by the working group Art History and Socialism(s), of which I have been a part since 2013, especially Krista KODRES – Kristina JŮEKALDA – Michaela MAREK (eds.), *A Socialist Art History? Writing Art History in the Post-War Decades*, Wien – Köln – Weimar: Böhlau 2019

12 Peter H. FEIST, *Prinzipien und Methoden marxistischer Kunstwissenschaft*, Leipzig: E. A. Seeman 1966, p. 24.

13 For more details see BARTLOVÁ, *Dějiny českých dějin umění*.

by Andrew Hemingway, editor of a collective monograph from 2006, which presents a basic outline of the themes of Marxist art history. The question of what will result from the fall of the political regimes characterised by “real socialism” then leads to an unclear prospect inasmuch as Hemingway deems art history to be Marxist if it shares in the larger project of world knowledge and does not restrict itself to being an academic discipline.¹⁴ Membership of the communist party became essential in countries where the dictatorship of these parties ruled, and not only in terms of power practices. In Marxism-Leninism an author’s affiliation to a communist party became the guarantee of scientific objectivity, the guarantor of which was the collective knowledge of the party and its position in the vanguard of historical development. While in Czechoslovakia Jan Mukařovský successfully convinced researchers in the humanities of the benefits of party allegiance, in German speaking countries this task fell to György Lukács.¹⁵ At the same time Lukács’s conception had an anti-Stalinist sting in its tail in the sense that he was interested in retaining the specificity of artistic creation and therefore in effect he theorised the autonomy of art.¹⁶ In Mukařovský’s case, too, it is possible to identify in Czech and Slovak scholarship a strong trace of structuralist formalism focused on autonomy.¹⁷

The dominant sphere of the development of Marxist-Leninist and Stalinist art theory and history was the noetic role of art (not of the image, as we tend to understand it today). Reference was made to Marx and Engel’s analyses of novels by Balzac and Dickens and an extensive discourse on realism was created. The definition of this discourse in fine art fluctuated from an ideal, originally salon academicism, via the Realist style of the latter half of the nineteenth century, through to modernist expressive forms that were associated with Cubism, Expressionism and Surrealism, and worked with a representation of the “internal model”. An important factor was the category of intelligibility, the criterion of which was the taste and needs of the proletarian “masses” and was the end goal of the emphasis placed on their education, an element that in Stalinism acquired the voluntaristic role of substantial support for social transformation in the direction of a classless society.¹⁸ The rejection of abstract or non-representational art as an expression of the autonomous subject of the artist’s genius was based on the requirement that art as an instrument of education be as accommodating and intelligible as possible. In the 1950s, the most common idea was of artistic realism as a timeless form. This originated with Lukács, who, however, was barely read in Czech art historical circles, unlike the situation pertaining in Germany and Hungary and especially unlike Czech philosophy.¹⁹ An ahistorical form of realism was understood to be an attribute of the progressivism of art, and the aim in art history was to identify realism in late gothic or baroque art and link it with stages of the

14 HEMINGWAY, *Marxism and the History of Art*; HEMINGWAY, “Marxism and Art History after the Fall of Communism”, *Art Journal*, vol. 55, Nr 2, 1996, pp. 20–27.

15 Jan MUKAŘOVSKÝ, “Socialistická stranickost ve vědě a umění”, in: *Stranickost ve vědě a umění*, Praha: Svoboda 1950, pp. 14–54

16 Ursula APITZSCH, “Das Verhältnis von Künstlerischen Autonomie und Parteilichkeit in der DDR”, in: Michael MÜLLER et al., *Autonomie der Kunst. Zur Genese und Kritik einer bürgerlichen Kategorie*, Frankfurt am Main: Rohwoit 1972, pp. 254–294

17 Regarding art history, see BARTLOVÁ, *Dějiny českých dějin umění*

18 Boris GROYS, *The Total Art of Stalinism. Avant-garde, Aesthetics, Dictatorship and Beyond*. Princeton: Princeton University Press 1992; Vít SCHMARC, *Země lyr a ocele. Subjekty, ideologie, modely, mýty a rituály v kultuře českého stalinismu*, Praha: Academia 2017, pp. 71–110

19 Cf. Ivan LANDA, “György Lukács, otázka marxistické ortodoxie a český marxismus”, *Kontradikce*, vol. 1, 2017, no. 1, pp. 39–48.

class struggle. The historicisation of realism after 1960 was one of the most important steps in the liberation from dogmatism of Czechoslovak art history thinking. On the other hand, a beneficial moment in the debate surrounding intelligibility was the possibility of including the recipient into the primary and legitimate meaning of an image, which in the 1960s and 1970s opened up the space for semiotic evaluation.²⁰

No less frequent, albeit functionally distinct, was the creation of developmental narratives of fine art on the basis of historical materialism. Werckmeister is critical of this, calling it a speculative projection of the alleged ability of Marxism to anticipate future development into traditional models of the autonomous development of art history.²¹ The Hegelian paradigmatic construct of art history as a developmental line remained unchanged: simply another driving force of development was identified as Marxist. This was no longer the self-movement of autonomous form (as in the case of Heinrich Wölfflin and Henri Focillon), nor the historical transformation of spirituality (as in the case of Max Dvořák and Hans Sedlmayr), but the class struggle and the predetermined formula of the sequence of social and economic formations of primitive, slave, feudal, bourgeois and communist societies. On the one hand, the general nature of this formula ensured a simplicity of interpretation (which was deemed a success from a pedagogic and propagandistic perspective), while on the other it had to face concrete historical specificities. In Czechoslovak art history this entailed the following: the question of the Hussites as an early bourgeois revolution; the problem of the national character of the baroque; and questions surrounding the relationship between the national revival movement and bourgeois industrialisation. However, the main methodological problem remained an inability to capture convincingly the mechanism by which individual socio-economic formations and their changes are reflected in the form and content (not simply the subject matter) of artworks.

The answer to this problem was a social history of art. In the 1940s and 1950s, the founders of this new branch of art history were the Marxist art historians Arnold Hauser and Frederick Antal, both of whom worked in Great Britain while also sharing an allegiance with the tradition of the Vienna School. In synergy with the approach taken by Michael Baxandall, who managed in the 1970s and 1980s to integrate a Marxist interest in the materiality of the artwork and its social embeddedness with a postmodern linguistic and communicative turn, post-Marxist inspired social art history began, even before the end of the twentieth century, to become an influential, perhaps even the predominant, approach to art history. This of course was only possible after the failure of radical left-wing politics and the advent of neoliberalism from the mid-1970s onwards. It was for this reason that a party-affiliated art history refuses to concede that social art history is Marxist at all: in this, paradoxically, it is joined by post- and anti-communist perspectives.²² Since the 1980s, the social history of art has managed to overcome the weaknesses of writers of the previous generation and create a methodology that identifies manifestations of class, social and power situationality of the production and reception of art in

20 For more details, see BARTLOVÁ, *Dějiny českých dějin umění*.

21 WERCKMEISTER, "Ideologie und Kunst", 23. Regarding the failure of the projective ability of the classical concept of science in the specific case of Marxism cf. Karl POPPER, *The Poverty of Historicism*, London: Routledge 1957.

22 HEMINGWAY, *Marxism and the History of Art*, 175–195; HEMINGWAY, "Marxism and Art History". Cf. Martin NODL, "Dějiny umění a sociální historie", in: *Dějepisectví mezi vědou a politikou. Úvahy o historiografii 19. a 20. století*, Brno: CDK 2007, pp. 219–230

works as communication systems, without allowing itself to be dragged into the blind alleys of the discourse surrounding the noetic function of realism and developmental theories. On the one hand, attention is paid to the artist *qua* producer, and on the other to the customer or public as user and addressee of the communicative situation; the artwork in its material uniqueness is a trace of the process of its communicative relationship. That the starting point of social history in Marxism is undeniable, though it has transcended this bond by abandoning a political commitment to communist activism. In the 1980s, it became one of many academic methodologies within the framework of postmodernism.²³ In his influential textbook from 2001, Jonathan Harris observes that Marxism as a scientific methodology based on Althusser became the art-history mainstream from the 1970s onwards. However, the title of the first chapter of his book does not include the words Marxist or social, but is instead titled a radical history of art.²⁴

Main figures in the history of art of Western Marxism

Marxist art history developed most rapidly between the 1930s and the 1970s. However, one cannot speak of a coherent system or school, since as a rule, with the exception of Great Britain, Marxist historians did not become faculty members until the 1980s and thus lacked the ordinary conditions for the production of their successors.²⁵ It is this that necessitates a biographical approach.

The oldest historians are Max Raphael (1889–1952)²⁶ and Carl Einstein (1885–1940).²⁷ Both were Jewish educators whose professional careers ended prematurely with their politically motivated suicide. Like Walter Benjamin, Einstein died while trying to escape the Nazis: Raphael, in exile in the USA and therefore safe, nevertheless experienced complete social isolation and material destitution. Both had studied art history in Berlin with Heinrich Wölfflin and Georg Simmel and both had come up against the formal obstacles of the academic system.²⁸ The anarchist leaning Einstein (who participated at the Spartacist uprising in Berlin, spoke over the coffin of Rosa Luxemburg, and fought in the Spanish Civil War as a member of the Durruti Column) had not passed the baccalaureate and was therefore unable to complete his studies. He became an independent writer and critic, and his only important academic output was his editorship of the volume devoted to contemporary art of the twentieth century in the encyclopaedia series *Propyläen Kunstgeschichte* (1926). In contrast, Raphael was an academic scholar who, as a poor Jewish boy from

23 HEMINGWAY, “Marxism and Art History”; Otto K. WERCKMEISTER, “Radical Art History”, *Art Journal*, Vol. 42, 1982, No. 4, pp. 284–291; Paul STIRTON, “Frederick Antal”, in: HEMINGWAY, *Marxism and the History of Art*, pp. 45–67, esp. pp. 64–67.

24 Jonathan HARRIS, *The New Art History: A Critical Introduction*, London – New York: Routledge 2001

25 Arnold Hauser lectured at Leeds University, Hornsey College of Art, and at two American universities; Frederick Antal worked at the Courtauld Institute, London, where his most important student was Anthony Blunt.

26 See the website entitled The Max Raphael Project, www.maxraphael.org; my interpretation also draws on Tanja FRANK, *Max Raphaels Konzeption einer marxistischen Kunstwissenschaft*, dissertation, Humboldt Universität Berlin 1980, typescript.

27 David QUIGLEY, *Carl Einstein: A Defense of the Real*, Wien: Akademie der Künste 2007.

28 Michael DIERS, “Bande à part. Die Außenseite(r) der Kunstgeschichte: Georg Simmel, Carl Einstein, Siegfried Kracauer, Max Raphael, Walter Benjamin und Rudolf Arnheim”, in: Horst BREDEKAMP – Adam S. LABUDA (eds.), *In der Mitte Berlins. 200 Jahre Kunstgeschichte an der Humboldt-Universität*, Berlin: Gebrüder Mann 2010, pp. 273–294.

eastern Prussia, had done all he could to acquire a formal education. However, when in 1910 he wrote his dissertation on Picasso, Wölfflin refused to accept it because contemporary art was not recognised as a subject of historical research. Raphael lectured in philosophy and art history at workers' evening classes in Berlin, which he quit in 1932 after refusing to adapt his teaching to the requirements of National Socialism. In Paris and later in New York he wrote long texts in both disciplines, though only a few were published in his lifetime. In 1968, Herbert Read published a collection in English of Raphael's legacy, while most of the texts were published, albeit somewhat chaotically, between 1974 and 1982 in west and east Germany.²⁹ In Czechoslovakia both Raphael and Einstein were known for their early works on Cubism. Einstein's *Negerplastik* (1915) was widely read in the pre-war circle of modernist artists. Raphael's book on Picasso did not only win the highest praise from Vincenc Kramář, but was also deemed an impressive achievement by the young Karel Teige. However, the examination of Marxism in texts from the 1930s and in Raphael's case from the 1940s remained unknown in Czechoslovakia, and whatever the reactions were to the probable reading of these texts can only be reconstructed from the private notes Kramář made in the 1950s.³⁰

Einstein's position was to strive for a qualified examination of contemporary art, and could be characterised as more non-conformist left-wing than explicitly Marxist. His work on African woodcarvings was groundbreaking, not least for the fact that it shattered the idea of art as the exclusively spiritual expression of white European culture and its elite classes. The consequences it has wrought for modern visuality, and, with the benefit of greater hindsight, the "decolonisation" of the 1950s and 1960s, as well as for the theory and history of art, was only brought home to us by Georges Didi-Huberman.³¹ In contrast, Max Raphael can arguably be regarded as the most important Marxist historian of visual art. He developed his own philosophical theory of the "dialectic of the concrete". Thanks to this and to his status as academic outsider and non-communist Marxist, he was not dragged into the blind alley of the discourse of timeless realism nor the construction of historical-materialist developmental theories, but was instead able to reflect upon them. He constructed his methodological instruments for interpreting the history of art on a bottom-up Marxist approach, which was based on the primacy of the material human world over the world of ideas and religion, the primacy of work over ideology, the conviction that art is something more than a medium of the power of elites and a subject of commerce, and on an analysis of the specific communicative role of a painting. His tool of interpretation did not involve the application of ideas, but an evocative and yet strictly rational language. Raphael studied art from three perspectives. The first involved a detailed interpretation of the material side of the painting, i.e. the layers of pigment applied to the substrate bearing traces of the physical work of the painter. On the other hand, Raphael sought the concrete relationship between this transitory material side and the creation of lasting artistic or aesthetic values, and was uncompromising in his categorisation of creativity as a special type of work. Thirdly, he attempted to describe, again with

29 The following are available in Czech libraries: Max RAPHAEL, *Von Monet zu Picasso. Grundzüge einer Ästhetik und Entwicklung der Modernen Malerei*, Berlin: Delphin Verlag 1919; Max RAPHAEL, *The Demands of Art*, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1968; and the east German anthology Max RAPHAEL, *Arbeiter, Kunst und Künstler*, Frankfurt a. M.: S. Fischer – Dresden: VEB Verlag der Kunst 1978.

30 For more details see Milena BARTLOVÁ, "Není možno se vzdát svobody myšlení". Vincenc Kramář a marxismus 1945–1960", *Umění*, Vol. LXVI, 2018, No. 4, pp. 246–263.

31 Georges DIDI-HUBERMAN, *Devant le temps*. Paris: Minuit 2000.

the maximum attainable level of specificity, the sequence of elements connecting the individual work with the society for which and within which it was created. It is important to point out what is lacking in this approach, namely, any element of psychologising and the two discourses ensuing therefrom: ethnic nationalism and the mystification of the artistic genius. This is why we find in his work an entry point into a theory of visuality, since he differentiates the “field of vision”, wherein sensory perception takes place, from the “field of the image”, wherein the image acquires meaning. Raphael accepted with reservations the influential Gestalt method, though not on the level of psychology, like Hans Sedlmayr, but from the perspective of materialist corporeality (i.e. in the manner later developed in Czechoslovakia by Růžena Grebeníčková). Raphael expressed his distance from psychologising in texts from the late period of his life, when his lifelong pedagogic considerations and his intention to write a concise history of art led him to study the Palaeolithic Age, or “cave art” as it was known at that time. In contrast to the Vienna School, this theme was perceived as a major challenge by the circle around Wölfflin in Berlin. Though forced in the 1940s to work under conditions of destitution, with only photographs published in books to work with, a circumstance that led to an underestimation of the spatial and luminous conditions of the perception of cave paintings, Raphael’s approach to the interpretation of Palaeolithic images by means of societal values and the material (and physical) conditions of a painting are once again inspiring us today.³²

A happier fate was enjoyed by two Hungarian emigrants of the same generation: Frederick (Frigyés) Antal (1887–1954)³³ and Arnold Hauser (1892–1978),³⁴ who in the 1930s fled to Great Britain, where they were able to secure lectureships at universities. Before the war both had studied art history in Berlin under Wölfflin and then in Vienna under Dvořák. During the war both had been members of Lukács’s “Sunday Circle” in Budapest, and in 1919 they participated actively in the cultural policy of the Hungarian Soviet Republic. With the title of his most influential work, the two-volume *Social History of Art and Literature* (1951), Hauser was already the founder of an entire intellectual current. He drew on Karel Mannheim’s sociology of knowledge (the two had met in Budapest) and viewed art primarily as a document of social communication. However, his approach attracted legitimate criticism for making artistic creativity excessively contingent upon class, political and economic factors, and for underestimating the autonomy and activity of the visual image and artistic creativity. The harsh, not to say poisonous, criticism aimed at Hauser by Ernst H. Gombrich, who in his review of the book accused Hauser of a typically Marxist suppression of the generally humanist sense and nature of art history, is probably the most influential theoretical rejection of a Marxist and social history of art.³⁵ A similarly formulated judgement, with accusations of “sociologism”, was expressed but one year later in the afterword to the Czech translation of Frederick Antal’s main work *Florentine*

32 Max RAPHAEL, *Die Hand an der Wand*, Zürich – Berlin: Diaphanes 2013. For more details see Milena BARTLOVÁ, “Can We Grasp Wordless Images?”, in: Tim JUCKES – Assaf PINKUS et al., *How do Images Work? Collection of Essays for Michael V. Schwarz*, Wien (forthcoming).

33 STIRTON, “Frederick Antal”.

34 Paul BARLOW, “Arnold Hauser”, in: Chris MURRAY (ed.), *Key Writers on Art: the Twentieth Century*, London – New York: Routledge: 2003, 155–160. Released in a Czech translation as Arnold HAUSER, *Filosofie dějin umění*, Praha: Odeon 1975.

35 Ernst H. GOMBRICH, “The Social History of Art by Arnold Hauser” [orig. 1953], in: *Meditations on a Hobby Horse and Other Essays on the Theory of Art*, London: Phaidon 1963, pp. 86–94.

Painting and its Social Background by the Czech art historian Jaromír Neumann, though from the opposite political and methodological position to Gombrich.³⁶ Neumann rejected Antal's thesis because it was based only on Marx and not on Engels and Lenin. In his work, written during the war and published in London in 1947, Antal had demonstrated through detailed analysis the mimetic representational procedures of Florentine painting between Giotto and Masaccio as an immediate manifestation of the rise of the bourgeoisie. At the same time, he remained within the boundaries of the Vienna School with its concept of the transparency of forms that reveal the intellectual backdrop of a painting, but he substituted historical materialism for Dvořák's spirituality. The unsatisfactory outcome was the consequence of work with abstract concepts and therefore of the fact that "Antal understood the semantic content of artworks as independent of the historical consciousness of the people that had produced them".³⁷

The British academic environment maintained a distance from a German-style "scientific" history of art right up to the middle of the 20th century. And so Herbert Read (1893–1968) and John Berger (1926–2017) were critics, writers and theoreticians rather than art historians in the narrow sense of the word, and were certainly not aestheticians or philosophers.³⁸ Furthermore, both had a tendency toward individualistic anarchism rather than party affiliation. Read integrated a materialist standpoint into Jungian psychoanalysis, and in the 1950s created a concept of the history of art, especially modern art, as an educational tool for reinforcing humanist antiwar culture. The Czech and Slovak translations of three of his books in the mid-1960s supported efforts by local theoreticians and academics to legitimise modern art.³⁹ Berger was one of the few direct successors of Max Raphael, and in his essays on modern artists he strove for a materialist understanding of creativity in a critical antithesis to idealist concepts. During the 1960s, interest in Berger in Czechoslovakia was but slight, and not even the recent discovery of his subversive texts, establishing critical visual studies, has resulted in any focus on his Marxist affiliation.⁴⁰

The most prominent Marxist oriented American art historian was Meyer Schapiro (1904–1996), born in the USA to Jewish emigrants from Lithuania.⁴¹ His interpretation of the meaning of abstract art is explicitly Marxist. He published the first version while still a member of the Trotskyite Communist Party USA, and his text of 1936 represented a very early appreciation of abstraction. Even though he left the party in protest against the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, unlike his pre-war party comrade Clement Greenberg he

36 Jaromír NEUMANN, "K Antalově knize a k otázkám výkladu renesančního umění", in: Frederick ANTAL, *Florentské malířství a jeho sociální pozadí*, Praha: SNKLU 1954, pp. 283–299.

37 WERCKMEISTER, "Ideologie und Kunst", p. 23.

38 Allan WALLACH, "John Berger", in: MURRAY, *Key Writers*, pp. 49–55; Martin POKORNÝ, "Doslov", in: John BERGER, *O pohledu*. Praha: Fra 2009, pp. 219–222; Michael PARASKOS, "Herbert Read", in: MURRAY, *Key Writers*, pp. 234–238.

39 Herbert READ, *Osudy moderního umění*, Praha: SNKLU 1964; Herbert READ, *Výchova uměním*, Praha: Odeon 1967; Herbert READ, *Stručné dějiny malířstva*, Bratislava: Tatran 1967.

40 Andrea PRŮCHOVÁ, "Způsoby angažovaného vidění", in: John BERGER, *Způsoby vidění*, Praha: Labyrint 2016, pp. 136–142 [orig. 1972]; however, also see POKORNÝ, "Doslov".

41 Andrew HEMINGWAY, "Meyer Schapiro: Marxism, Science and Art", in: HEMINGWAY, *Marxism and the History of Art*, pp. 123–143; David CRAVEN, "Meyer Schapiro", in: MURRAY, *Key Writers*, pp. 239–244; see also Meyer SCHAPIRO, *Dílo a styl*, Praha: Argo 2006

persisted with a Marxist interpretation even in the rewrite of the article of 1957.⁴² Schapiro's central claim is that the work of an artist, specifically in the case of the gestural painting of Abstract Expressionism, is one of the last sites of un-alienated work that permits the artist self-confirmation of his or her authentic humanity. The study of modern art in Schapiro's work found its antithesis in his systematic research into Romanesque sculpture and illuminated manuscripts, while the common denominator, especially during the 1960s, was his interest in semiotics deriving from his appreciation of the role of receiver. Characteristic of Schapiro is a personal (and explicitly labelled) post-Marxism, namely a systematic endeavour at a rationalist and non-religious interpretation of an artwork that might at first sight appear primarily religious in theme, and a methodological approach based on "critical empiricism" in contrast to the formalist concepts of stylistic autonomy of, for instance, Alfred H. Barr Jr.⁴³

Nicos Hadjinicolaou (b. 1938) stands out from national and generational groups. He comes from a Greek family, studied in West Germany in the mid 1960s and published a book on Marxist art history in 1973 in French.⁴⁴ He presents the most systematic Marxist-based construction of the development of the history of art. He has, however, received little in the way of a response, since, leaving aside the French-speaking world, he was propounding this concept at a historical juncture in which the main stage of the development of Marxism in this area was coming to an end. Hadjinicolaou was the only writer outside the Soviet bloc to develop and apply the theme of the relationship between the development of fine art and the class struggle, i.e. the driving force of history in accordance with Marxist historical materialism. Typical of his position is the fact that he rejects Lenin and Soviet theoreticians, but instead works with Maoism. In this respect, during the Stalin era historians of art in the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, the German Democratic Republic, and other countries remained enclosed within the limits stipulated by dogmatic axioms, and at the end of the 1950s not only quickly abandoned these ideas, but forgot them. Hadjinicolaou calls them "vulgar Marxists" and rejects their ideas, as he does "bourgeois" concepts of formalism, structuralism and a "spiritual history of art". After conducting a critical analysis, he concludes that the specificity of fine art requires a completely original analytical category, something he calls "visual ideology" [*ideologie imagée*], which cannot be derived from an ideology of classes, and is not an ideology that the artist as person adheres to.⁴⁵ He replaces the category of style, in the sense of the subject of art history and the place where individual creative acts encounter the society in which and for which the work is created, with the category visual ideology. "Research into the style of an individual picture cannot be carried out in isolation from

42 Meyer SCHAPIRO, "Nature of Abstract Art", *Marxist Quarterly*, Vol. I, 1937, pp. 1–12; Meyer SCHAPIRO, "The Liberating Quality of Avant-Garde Art", *Art News*, Summer 1957, pp. 1–11.

43 See also the epilogue by Karel Srp in: SCHAPIRO, *Dílo a styl*, p. 367. The same text was preliminarily released as Karel SRP, "Dějiny umění podle Meyera Schapiro", *Umění*, Vol. XLVIII, 2000, No. 1/2, pp. 22–40.

44 I am referring here to the English translation Nicos HADJINICOLAOU, *Art History and Class Struggle*, London: Pluto Press 1978. Cf. the review by John BERGER, "The 'work' of art", in: *Landscapes: John Berger on Art*, London – New York: Verso 2016, pp. 176–182 [orig. 1985].

45 Hadjinicolaou does not use the term "ideology" in the sense that Marx and Engels do, but as a way of describing "the relatively coherent system of ideas, values and beliefs by means of which people express the relationship of their life practice to the conditions under which they live". HADJINICOLAOU, *Art History*, p. 95.

the collective visual ideology to which it belongs, but the collective visual ideology cannot be ascertained without reference to individual pictures.”⁴⁶ It is remarkable to what extent this outcome coincides with the theoretical position of axiology, developed in the 1960s by the Czech art historian Luděk Novák in collaboration with Jaromír Neumann, without there existing any direct link between them other than a starting point in a non-dogmatic Marxism.⁴⁷ However, unlike axiology, visual ideology is directly related to a tendency toward a theory of visuality and the theoretical evaluation of Lacan’s philosophy of the gaze and the image.

A radical history of art

After the collapse of left-wing politics in western Germany and Great Britain in the mid-1970s, a Marxism inspired art history faded into the background in the sense that writers abandoned a deliberate self-identification with and active political engagement on the side of what was then Euro-communism. Ten years later, the fall of the state socialist regimes, the end of the Cold War, and the breakup of the Soviet bloc confirmed the end of Marxism’s ambition to play the role of universally valid theory of social and historical change.

A publication prepared in honour of Andrew Hemingway by his students and friends in 2014 on the occasion of his departure from University College London demonstrates the “possibility of a renewal of Marxist art history” and is larger than Hemingway’s own overview from 2006. It includes a feminist perspective and the post-colonial turn, albeit only in respect of Latin America and the Far East, not the former Soviet bloc.⁴⁸ It signals a change in intellectual tradition that might already be called post- rather than neo-Marxist. However, the book is stuck in the postmodern field of cultural identities and leaves to one side the most important art historians, who in the 1980s developed Marxist theory in legitimate directions, but who, for various reasons, did not belong to Hemingway’s group. The book by Harris already referred to, which also focuses solely on the Anglo-American environment, situates post-Marxism similarly. However, no less important in the two decades around the turn of the millennium was the work of the German art-history generation clustered around the Ulm Association, even though, as I have noted above, it no longer identified with Marxism (let alone with communism). It was the work of this group that had the most important effect on Czech art history, albeit only from the turn of the millennium onwards and without any specific reference to leftism or even Marxism. Its earlier fellow traveller Werckmeister characterised this position as “radical” art history.⁴⁹ As previously, radical art history is

46 *Ibid.*, p. 99. However, the criticism applies that Hadjinicolaou’s specific proof of his concept is not convincingly put together – see HEMINGWAY, *Marxism and the History of Art*, pp. 188–191.

47 Luděk NOVÁK, “Axiologie a metoda dějin umění”, *Umění*, Vol. XV., 1967, No. 2, pp. 202–214; for more details see BARTLOVÁ, *Dějiny českých dějin umění*.

48 Warren CARTER – Barnaby HARAN – Frederic J. SCHWARTZ (eds.), *ReNew Marxist Art History*, London: Art / Books 2014.

49 WERCKMEISTER “Ideologie und Kunst”, from whom the term was adopted by HARRIS, *The New Art History*; Otto K. WERCKMEISTER, “The Turn from Marx to Warburg in West German Art History, 1968–90”, in: HEMINGWAY, *Marxism and the History of Art*, pp. 213–220.

equally divided between the Anglo-Saxon and German environments, even though the two rarely communicate.⁵⁰

I would suggest that the points of connection with radical art history are formed by the post-Marxist development of a social art history and its provocative interrogation and resolution of themes that not only undermine the identification of a sphere firmly associated with power elites, especially with the Christian church, but also deconstruct its deliberate depoliticisation. From a methodological perspective the most important representative of radical art history is Michael Baxandall (1933–2008), even though he himself refused to be classed alongside post-Marxist or even social art history. Despite being a student of Gombrich, his conscious starting points were Marxist materialism, the primacy of labour and production, and a class analysis of hegemonic ideologies in the style of Gramsci, even though he did not cite these sources directly.⁵¹ The point is that Baxandall was able to combine these perspectives in a non-dogmatic way with the semiotic and linguistic turn, and was thus able to propose the most successful model yet of a rationally describable relationship between society and artwork, between the artist as producer and his or her public as consumer, between the communication of ideas and the material form of the work. This was a relationship that had been postulated by Hadjinicolaou and Novák, as we have seen above, though neither managed to find sufficiently grounded approaches.

Ten years later, Timothy J. Clark (b. 1943),⁵² another of Gombrich's British doctoral students, was dubbed "the most important Marxist art historian". In his groundbreaking books on the art of the latter half of the nineteenth century, he consistently interpreted paintings as products created under the specific intellectual and material conditions of bourgeois society, which can only be understood as a reaction to these conditions.⁵³ At the same time, he sought the origin of "artistic greatness" and found it in the critical and subversive relationship to these conditions. He thus found himself involved in a confrontational discussion on the nature of modernity with Michael Fried, a believer in the development of art from the dynamic of the autonomous movement of forms. Clark had been a member of the Situationist International, and later his perspective as art historian was significantly influenced by the collapse of the state socialist project. In 1999, he reacted with a sceptical recapitulation of the loss of the modern era entitled *Farewell to an Idea*,⁵⁴ and a resigned acknowledgement that art cannot change the world. The special status accorded to art of the nineteenth century as the exclusive manifestation of national emancipation, a conviction that persists to this day in Czech art history, may explain the fact that Clark seems not to have been read at all in this country.

50 An exception is the circle around O. K. Werckmeister, see the conceptual bilingualism of the jubilee anthology KERSTEN, *Radical Art History*.

51 For more details of the literature, see my preface to the selection of translated texts by Michael BAXANDALL, *Intelligence obrazu a jazyk dějin umění*, Praha: UMPRUM 2019, pp. 10–25.

52 Jonathan HARRIS, "T. J. Clark", in: MURRAY, *Key Writers*, pp. 68–73.

53 Timothy J. CLARK, *Image of the People: Gustav Courbet and the 1848 Revolution*, Berkeley: University of California Press 1973; Timothy J. CLARK, *The Absolute Bourgeois: Artists and Politics in France 1848–1851*, Berkeley: University of California Press 1973; Timothy J. CLARK, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and His Followers*, Princeton University Press 1985.

54 Timothy J. CLARK, *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism*, New Haven: Yale University Press 1999.

The factual renewal or perhaps the new promotion of social art history was the work of a group that, in 1968, belonged generationally and politically to the circle associated with the Ulm Association and two years later produced a demand for reflections upon Germany's Nazi past and a revision of the elitist status of the discipline of art history. Their dissertations published in the mid-1970s were the most Marxist oriented. The group shared an interest in the topic of iconoclasm and political iconography. Its unofficial leader was Martin Warnke (1937–2019). Warnke became professor at the University of Marburg, where group debates took place, and was editor of the anthology *Kunstwerk zwischen Wissenschaft und Weltanschauung*.⁵⁵ His dissertation on court artists became the model of an approach that, instead of analysing individual artworks, examines the conditions of artistic production.⁵⁶ In 1993, Jutta Held (1933–2007) and Norbert Schneider (1945–2017) published a book on the social history of art: it was limited, however, to early modern and modern painting.⁵⁷ During the 2000s, Held was the main initiator and leading figure in research projects devoted to the history of German art history during the Nazi period and the latter half of the twentieth century.⁵⁸ These drew on the methodology of Heinrich Dilly, who in his dissertation was the first, and for a long time the last, to write on the history of the discipline of art history not as involving disputes centred on pure ideas or the biographies of great men, but as the subject of the social history of institutions.⁵⁹

The most radical art history in this area is the work of the youngest of the writers mentioned, Horst Bredekamp (b. 1947). His dissertation dealt with iconoclasm in the early Christian period, during the ninth century in Byzantium, and in Czech Hussitism, and interpreted it as a form of class struggle.⁶⁰ Immediately afterwards he and Wolfgang BEEH tried to organise an exhibition, the aim of which was to exhibit the art of the International Gothic (called the “Beautiful Style” by Czech art historians) around 1400, as only one part of a reality that included poverty, exploitation and extreme social inequality.⁶¹ However, both projects demonstrated that Marxism thus conceived of came up against the boundaries established by the self-definition of art history as a scientific discipline and the limits of its sources. In addition to the incompatibility with the outcomes of art history and culture of late antiquity and Byzantine studies, Bredekamp's dissertation was also mistaken in its assumption that the formal artistic expression of the “revolutionary masses” in Hussitism was factually primitive and uneducated. (The fallaciousness of a similar search for an allegedly popular primitivism was also revealed by Meyer Schapiro in his study of Courbet's realism.⁶²) The endeavour to reveal the hidden face of the luxury

- 55 Martin WARNKE (ed.), *Kunstwerk zwischen Wissenschaft und Weltanschauung*, Gütersloh: Bertelsmann 1970.
- 56 Martin WARNKE, *Hofkünstler. Zur Vorgeschichte des modernen Künstlers*, Köln am Rhein: DuMont 1978.
- 57 Jutta HELD – Norbert SCHNEIDER, *Sozialgeschichte der Malerei: vom Spätmittelalter bis ins 20. Jahrhundert*, Köln am Rhein: DuMont 2006.
- 58 Jutta HELD, “New Left Art History and Fascism in Germany”, in: HEMINGWAY, *Marxism and the History of Art*, pp. 196–212; BARTLOVÁ, *Dějiny českých dějin umění*.
- 59 Heinrich DILLY, *Kunstgeschichte als Institution*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1979.
- 60 Horst BREDEKAMP, *Kunst als Medium sozialer Konflikte. Bilderkämpfe von der Spätantike bis zur Hussitenrevolution*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1975.
- 61 Horst BREDEKAMP – Wolfgang BEEH, *Kunst am Mittelrhein um 1400: Ein Teil der Wirklichkeit* (exh. cat.), Frankfurt am Main: Liebighaus 1975.
- 62 Meyer SCHAPIRO, “Courbet a lidové umění. Esej o realismu a naivitě” (1941), in: SCHAPIRO, *Dílo a styl*, pp. 153–183.

and beauty of religious and elite art at the start of the fifteenth century could not succeed, since the very subject of the discipline of art history, i.e. art regarded as “quality”, is inevitably associated in pre-modern eras with the idealised representation of reality as the world of dematerialised and depoliticised ideas. After 1990, perhaps in reaction to this, Bredekamp focused on an obviously more successful variant of post-Marxist art history, namely, the transformation of the discipline in the direction of the history of the image (*Bildwissenschaft*, or “image-science”) as a communication medium, with a special emphasis on the imaging methods of the natural sciences.

The most successful influencers in the sphere of social art history were those who, like Baxandall in Britain and the USA, or Robert Suckale in Germany, never explicitly linked their name with Marxism, but integrated Marxist concepts into the internal methodological constructs of their academic discipline. Suckale (1941–2020) belonged to the generation of the Ulm Association, though was not a member. Though he never identified with Marxist themes, Suckale’s work had a similarly subversive effect on conventional art history. He regarded the artwork as part of political and not “spiritual” cultural history, and, in parallel with Baxandall, identified power strategies in the very act of artistic and formal creation. As a medievalist he sought to correct the nationalist direction of most German-language art history, and to demonstrate practically the autonomous quality of art from underestimated regions of “German colonisation” in central and eastern Europe. As a result, since the 1990s, Suckale has received considerable acclaim in Czech academic spheres, though the subversive implications of his methodology have not been properly thought through and as a consequence are often connected in hybrid form to conservative spiritual concepts of the history of art.

What remains of Marxist art history today? At first sight almost nothing. The website of the Ulm Association states that almost all the requirements of the student revolutionaries ca. 1970 are now standard features of the art-historical mainstream. The subversive potential of social and, in a narrower sense, Marxist art history, is in reality to be felt more in post-communist countries, since it was suppressed and banished to oblivion here after 1990. The situation is particularly pronounced in the Czech Republic, where a systematic eradication in the 1970s led to such a radical break with continuity that the texts of humanist Marxism from the 1960s had to be retrieved through archaeological methods.

These days, the construct of a developmental logic of historical materialism driven by progress makes no sense in art history, just like the discourse of realism as a noetic function of the artwork, while it is even less interesting to subordinate the artist’s methods to his or her political activities. In another reaction to the collapse of the system of real socialism, Werckmeister challenges Marxist art history to self-reflect and to appreciate fully not only artistic, but also art-historical, practice as *labour*.⁶³

Personally I believe that the most fruitful strategy at present and in the near future may be a materialist evaluation of the tangible materiality of fine art. In an era characterised by the rapid dissemination and promotion of digital technologies and artificial intelligence, material reality and concrete corporeality once again become attractive, interesting features. Fine art, which has been and to a large extent still is inextricably linked with material reality, will more than ever before need a discourse commensurate to

63 Otto K. WERCKMEISTER, “A Working Perspective for Marxist Art History Today”, *Oxford Art Journal*, Vol. 14, 1991, No. 2, pp. 83–87.

this situation. In the history of art-historical methodologies it is precisely the impulse of Marxist materialism, whether this be the narrower concept of Max Raphael or the broader perspective of Michael Baxandall, that may well have something to say.