

# A DIALECTICAL PHILOSOPHY OF ART

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## PREFACE

### MAKING CHOICES

From March to September 2000 while I was writing this essay, the Museum of Modern Art, New York celebrated the millennium with a cycle of twenty five exhibitions that set in place a philosophy of Modernism that cut through all the isms of the last twelve decades. Making Choices (March 16th to September 26th 2000) is a diverse conglomeration that brings together works of art of the last century, which could not be conveniently labelled with any of the isms that I had found confusing - not to say irrelevant - while I researched the subject of modern art. One point became clear to me as it did to the curators of Making Choices. Modernism can be any work of art (photographs included) done since 1880, from Arp to Wyeth.

The title of this essay changed several times as I made my own choices and discoveries. I felt the need to adapt my initial thoughts to a dialectical process that continues. For example, one visit to the National Gallery London changed dramatically my limited perception of what I had called Christian art. For the first time I saw beyond the presence of Christ and his sleeping apostles and saw Bellini's splendid rocky landscape at sunrise - a ravishing work of art. Prolonged conversations with other students, painters and friends made my research interdisciplinary and contributed to the metamorphoses of my text. At first I thought I had locked my self into a protracted dilemma but almost at once it became an adventure.

It had been pointed out to me that the task undertaken was ambitious, although linking art and Marxism via Hegel was a solution that had been contemplated by writers like Adorno, Lukacs and the Frankfurt School of Thought.

Because I had to write this dissertation from a painters viewpoint I changed the first title Marxism and Art to include the name of the German author of the Aesthetics, the philosopher Frederic Hegel. The discovery of Hegel's majestic reflections on fine art initiated a dialectical process that forced one to look much further back than the last twelve decades, to the cave paintings in the Ardeche valley 30.000 years before Christ.

Vladimir Ilich Lenin conceded that a profound understanding of Marx's Capital cannot be achieved without reading Hegel's Science of Logic. Therefore Marxism could be applied to an investigation of the material conditions in which works of art are created, situating them within the appropriate context. I became convinced that to achieve an understanding of the social philosophy of art a balance between the spiritual and the material is a pre-requisite.

Arnold Hauser in The concept of Ideology in the History of Art is raises issues for which no clear and definite answers have been found. Philosophers, sociologists or art historians, have avoided salient questions such as, Does art effect and change our lives and if so, is it possible today for art to improve society? A Social Philosophy of Art was my next choice of title.

I became more ambitious. To merely interpret art history was not enough. I decided to activate and respond to the dialectical processes that could change it. The fact that I am a painter born in Skopje, Macedonia, a Marxist country meant I had to follow Marx for a while. There was a conflict between the traditional academic art education I had experienced in Skopje, which insisted on such disciplines as life drawing (the nude is the bases of all my pictures) and the post-modern lack of discipline that I encountered in Britain. But to resolve this conflict I found the need for a philosophical equilibrium in order to see that post-modernism can be useful to a Marxist approach to art history because at least it reflects superficially the decadent values of capitalist society. As such post-modernism forces one to seek higher aesthetic values as it bombards us with anti-aesthetic ones.

When it dawned on me that any change I could make in the history of art would be part of the dialectical process I was

discovering, A Dialectical Philosophy of Art had to be my final choice of title.

30th September 2000

## INTRODUCTION

"Whenever I meet students they ask me the same question. Can art change society? In one sense the answer is obvious. Art has changed society just as technology has, and plague has and accident has and politics has...Most art may not change very much. But the idea of its potential to do so gives it powerful allure." 1 It is not as a playwright but as a painter, living and trying to practice my craft in England, that I face an unexpected problem that reflects the ongoing debate in academic circles concerned with art history. The problem? Formalist modernity as opposed to Post-modernity, in non-artspeak language, narrative and object versus concept and subject matter. For the British to say that modernism is dead does not mean a lot because modernism in the visual arts never actually lived to the full in Britain. However it thrived in Europe in the last century. British patrons were slow to patronise the new art from the continent. Paradigms of modern art (not the same as Modernism) like Picasso, Mondrian, Kandinsky and Dali - a quartet of European artists who spent a lot of time in the Louvre- never found a single counterpart in Britain.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand British culture was receptive to Post-modernist ideas welcoming and developing American Pop art in the sixties. British conceptualist art of the 1970's was the beginning of an evolution of artistic thought and ideas that has made Britain a commercial centre of artistic activity in the late 20th century.

And it is as a painter that I want to study artist's mores and their position in Britain in view of the fact that we are living in a society impervious to if not derisive of high art. Although Leonardo's Mona Lisa still smiles when she muses on all the many transformations - not to say defacements - she has permitted modernism, for the purpose of our study we are drawn to the Dali Gioconda, a Marxist vampire, sporting Dali's waxed mustache and clasping a handful of surplus profit. (her admirers'- including the paradigms of modern art mentioned above - entrance fees to the Louvre) [Dali's portrait as the Mona Lisa after Leonardo Da Vinci, photograph by Phillipe Halsman, 1973] For Post - modernists Leonardo's Lady Lisa became a symbol of their modern idea when she posed for the cover of New Yorker [February 8th 1999] (plate I) wearing a Monica Lewinsky mask. Could we surmise that recent art history from Dali and Duchamp to Andy Warhol and post-structuralism is ear - marked by the disguises the queen of the Louvre has worn in the last forty years to the ongoing masquerade of art history.

As art is at one and the same time the reflection and cognition of life it seems to me that there are at least two stances for the artist to assume; succumb to Post-modernist values or like Edgar Allan Poe's sailor, after careful observation as he sank into the maelstrom to understand the nature of the vortex and thus be carried out by the same spiral that sucked him down.<sup>3</sup>

An intriguing question surfaced in my painter's mind - could it be possible to paint the narrative and use it as a way out the Post-modern abyss. William Frederick Hegel and Karl Marx gave me clues ( the former could be the hidden spirit of modernism, the latter the body in which the spirit of modernism dwells).

Initially I thought that if the role of art and the artist in a society could rest on Marxist philosophy linked with Hegel's Philosophy of Fine Art, the paradox implied by the two German philosophers names could be resolved and an understanding of what a Marxist vision could have meant for art emerge.

From my painter's perspective the Marxist vision broadened the horizon of my investigation. I decided to adopt a philosophical approach to our subject in the appropriate ontological conditions. Many avenues of inquiry appear such as the relationship of the work of art to the public; whether there is such a thing as progress in art and of course, whether there can be such a thing as progress in society. Does human thought evolve progressively; can art really change society?

By linking Hegel, art and Marx the subtle but crucial role of art in social relations and society can be revealed. We will become aware that art is not neutral, even when it is a modernist art for art's sake work, which has been produced in

particular social environmental conditions and for particular reasons. Art reflects, transforms and changes life regardless of whether we acknowledge in post-structuralist terms that representation of life is real.

What happens to the artist and his art when separated from life and inaccessible to so-called ordinary people? This is indeed a social issue. The application of Marxist theory to answer this question provides more fruitful clues. With the unique exceptions of impressionist and post-modernist art, since 500BC art has aspired towards beauty and an ideal, affirmed and absolute. This aspiration compatible with Hegelian theory would be questioned by Marxism which would want to know about the material conditions that provided the spring board. Art affirms and philosophy envisages a general view of progress and development as a part of a process, style in art, dialectics in Hegelian and Marxist philosophy that requires time for the organic evolutionary process. Even for Karl Marx communism could never have been an end, but a starting point toward man's greater humanity.

Although we know the names of many architects and sculptors in ancient Greece, these craftsmen as they preferred to see themselves, worked together to build a temple or to carve a statue to acknowledge the Idea.<sup>4</sup> Such humble creativity did not involve ego. The artist was not important but the work of art everything, fashioned anonymously for the gods, imbued with cultural traditions.

In the 20th century, media hype is responsible for the shift in focus of attention from the work of art to the artist, creating the super artist like a Picasso or a Dali whose works are less known than their personal lives. As Suzi Gablik observes:

"Just how successful the strategy of estrangement has been in liberating the artist from becoming yet another commodity - producer - of aesthetic "goods" - or in establishing any real alternative to the corporate value system, is open to question, since...most of that art is ambivalent all the way through."<sup>5</sup>

It is generally assumed that Modernist art in the western world is not only different from art from other parts of the world but also superior. Unfortunately, correct as this assumption may be, it has problematical implications because the iconography and symbolism of modern art is diametrically opposed to the politically correct aesthetic of today's society.

Can the artist be socially concerned even if his art is indifferent? As an individual, is the artist part of society? The modernist artist as delineated by Clement Greenberg could not integrate himself and his art into society because he was isolated. The isolated condition of today's artist could be a part of the dialectical processes necessary to change our material conditions.

Gen Doy in *Materialising Art History* gives an example of the unfolding of dialectical processes in art history.

"...Dada itself negated its own nihilism by drawing attention to itself as a cultural movement with a body of theory and practise thereby negating its own attempts to destroy culture. Similarly we could see such a

process in certain aspects of Pop art where high art is challenged and negated by images of popular mass culture, only for this new Pop art to enter the domain of high culture, the museum, gallery and art market.<sup>6</sup>

If the hypothesis of a history of styles is accepted it must be embedded in a dialectical materialist postulate identifiable in sociological terms although one believes, like Hauser, that dialectical processes are not necessarily inherent in all natural and historical phenomena but are an eternal struggle between truth and ideology.

As we re-postulate the philosophical thought of Marxism, Frederick Jameson aside<sup>7</sup> we will investigate its apparently inconceivable relationship to the post-modernist movement. Although Jameson detects as well as investigates the farcical post-modern conditions in which a supposedly socially concerned work of art is born, we will dare to imagine that the rage today against the grand narrative is but one more dialectical stage in the material processes of man and society. Whatever the implications of Marxism within the social and cultural framework, one important factor remains.

Karl Marx has provided us with an invaluable theory to further the understanding of the meaning of art and its role in an evolving society.

## SPIRIT AS ALIENATED MATTER

Many of Karl Marx's conclusions were the outcome of his reflections on Frederick William Hegel, particularly Early Writings which is impregnated with Hegel's seminal ideas. It is interesting to observe the full extent of what Marx had absorbed from Hegel and in turn the ancient Greek philosophers, Plato, Aristotle and Epicurus.

In 1837 at the age of nineteen, six years after Hegel's death, Karl Marx joined the Young Hegelians. Marx had just read Hegel's lectures on fine art ( Aesthetik ) edited by H. G. Hotho and published in 1835. Bearing in mind the fact that Marx wrote almost nothing about art, much less about aesthetics, it is plausible that Hegel's Philosophy of fine art was definitive for him, that he completely demurred to Hegel on the subject of art. Five years later the young Marx, who wrote poetry, still did not differentiate between the medieval romanticism of privileged self - interest and bourgeois fetishism. His base continued to be Hegel's Aesthetics which described as romantic all the art of modern nations, be it a medieval miniature or Dutch still life.<sup>8</sup> Karl Marx's renunciation of romanticism and his acceptance of the basic tenants of Hegel's philosophy of fine art marks a transition to a more sophisticated level of cultural consciousness. Marx's views on art and philosophy at this time have much in common with Hegel's doctrine of the subject. For Hegel the absolute Ideal is reason in process. Gradually and dialectically idealism becomes reality. The fact that part of what the world ought to be could be realised in what it is, presented a solution to the problem of the relationship between theory and practice. The youthful philosopher was attracted to the Young Hegelians for this reason. Marx believed that it was from stillness alone that fine deeds arise, that harmony is the only soil for such deeds.<sup>9</sup> However, two decades later Marx's views changed. If in 1837 he considered matter as lower than spirit he now used the lower as the cornerstone for the whole structure of existence.

Finally Marx rejected the Hegelian idea of the material world as alienated spirit. He maintained that man will only become one with his surroundings by an ongoing dialectical struggle of the absolute idea and the material world, not merely by his thought processes. Hegel had just thought Marx decided. For Marx and his predecessor Feuerbach consciousness is rooted in reality. The Ideal is nothing other than the material world reflected by our mind and transformed into thought patterns.<sup>10</sup> Marx believed that these thought patterns went on ad infinitum. Nothing could be final in terms of absolute truth. Both Marx and Engels, still following a Hegelian line, believed that dialectical thinking reveals a transitory process of everything in everything.

Schlomo Avineri in *The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx* comments:

In the preface to his *Philosophy of the Right* Hegel postulates the this-worldness of philosophical speculation while referring to the transitional *hic-rodus hic- saltus*. In this respect Marx takes Hegel at his word, and tries to confront the Hegelian political philosophy with political historical reality, pointing out that though Hegel always emphasised that his idea of the state could never be identified with any particular historical state, it still should be

the underlying principle of modern Political life. Hence Marx says, if the universality postulated by Hegelian political philosophy could be negated and emasculated by the modern political state, Hegel's philosophy would disqualify itself as an adequate ideal expression of the actual world. <sup>11</sup>

The Israeli scholar says that an understanding of Marx could be achieved only through Hegel and shows how Marx's concept of material dialectics was born. Indeed Hegel's philosophy is universal.

"On the hundredth anniversary of Hegel's death metaphysicians called him the hope for new metaphysics ; Protestant theologians, the joiner of religion and science; ...and the communists protested and tried to prove publicly that they are the only ones that use Hegel's philosophy in the correct way".<sup>12</sup>

For the German Idealist school Hegel's philosophical theories were the culmination of philosophy because they believed that Hegel had resolved the dualism in Western philosophy - the opposition between spirit and matter. Hegel's proof that matter is one of spirit's manifestations must also have been accepted wholeheartedly by the impressionable teenager. The fact that for Hegel matter is spirit in self-alienation was not challenged by Marx until later. For Hegel, matter could not be regarded as a negation or absence of the spirit.

"Hegel's positive achievement here, in his speculative logic, is that the definitive concepts, the universal fixed thought - forms in their independence vis-a-vis nature and mind are a necessary result of the general estrangement of the human being and therefore also of a human thought, and that Hegel has therefore brought these together and presented them as moments of the abstraction process. For example, superseded being is essence, superseded essence is concept, the concept superseded is ...absolute idea. But what then is absolute idea? It supersedes its own self again, if it does not want to perform once more from the beginning the whole act of abstraction, and to satisfy itself with being a totality of abstractions knows itself to be nothing: it must abandon itself - abandon abstraction - and so it arrives at an entity which is its exact opposite - at nature. Thus, the entire logic is the demonstration that abstract thought is nothing in itself; that the absolute idea is nothing for itself, that only nature is something".<sup>13</sup>

The presence of spirit confirmed by Hegel, it remained for Karl Marx to develop a philosophy concerned with the movement and the historical manifestation of matter. Every aspect of mundane existence is not a negation but an affirmation of the Idea.

The revolutionary side of Hegel's Philosophy was taken over and developed by Karl Marx...Dialectics are according to Marx a science of the principle laws of movement of the outside world as well as of human thought.<sup>14</sup>

It follows that Marx's materialist theories are the inherent dialectical process of Hegel's philosophy. This statement underlines the importance of Marx the philosopher as opposed to Marx the social theoretician, and political revolutionary. Marxism must never be considered merely as an instrument for ousting a bourgeois government. Careful analyses of the theories of material dialectics reveal that social changes would come about only by a dialectical process, a result of the interrelated development of the individual and class-consciousness.

Marx's philosophical thought was reshaped by Lenin only to be later deformed beyond recognition by Stalin. This is why a misconception persists. In the last two decades of the 20th century social political events in Eastern Europe aggravated this misconception and should be seen not as a failure of Marxist theory to provide a firm basis for building a society. Too often these historical realities have been overlooked by Marxist and anti - Marxist theoreticians.

A delicate balance must be found between a historical material and philosophical Marxism. The latter, - while it is a crucial starting point for individual awareness, also needs to be implemented into everyday activity, as we shall discuss later. The philosophy of Marxism must not be dismissed by reducing it to a mere utopian socialist idea. Only within time can the connection between the proletariat and philosophy exist because both are universal and because the working class carries the universal premises of philosophy:

"Just as philosophy finds its material weapons in the proletariat, so the proletariat finds its intellectual weapons in philosophy. Philosophy is the head of this emancipation and the proletariat its heart. Philosophy can only be realised by the abolition of the proletariat, and the proletariat can only be abolished by the realisation of philosophy".<sup>15</sup>

When discussing the historical causes of the emergence of the proletariat in the German Ideology Marx concludes that the apparent universal nature of the working class is a corollary to the conditions of production in a capitalist society, more precisely a product of the capitalist mode of production which strives at the same time for universality on a geographical level. As Coca-Cola strives to be a world wide soft drink it also increases its share value.

However, this illusion of universality equates with a bureaucracy that the capitalist countries use as a pretext for particular interests - interests which differ very little from other class interests. Marx's concept of the universality of the working class becomes historical only because he sees the proletariat as the final phase of realisation of that universality.

"...a class which is the dissolution of all classes, a society that is of universal character because its sufferings are universal... (a society) that claims no traditional status but a human status...when the working class demands the negation of private property it only lays down as a principle of society what society has already made a principle for the proletariat, and what the latter already involuntarily embodies as the negative result of society."<sup>16</sup>

The spiritual essence of the material world remains the unacknowledged source of Marxist ideals, however it is the material conditions themselves as part of the dialectical process that manifest the Idea. Is it possible that in The civil war in France, Marx advocates the Hegelian principle of dialectics when he says that the existence of communist ideas preceded the conditions necessary for their realisation in the same way that capitalist ideas preceded the flowering of the bourgeoisie. Marx foresees the importance of the complete development of a capitalist society that could lay the ground for the creation of a communist one.

"The communists are distinguished from other working - class parties by the fact that: 1. In the national struggles of the proletarians of the different countries, they put and bring out to the front the common interests of the entire proletariat, independently of all nationality. 2. In the various stages of development which the struggle of the working class against the bourgeoisie has to pass through, they always and everywhere represent the interests of the movement as a whole... National differences and antagonisms between people are daily more and more vanishing, owing to the development of the bourgeoisie, to freedom of commerce, to the world market, to uniformity in the mode of production and in the conditions of life corresponding there to."17

To realise itself historically Karl Marx's philosophical achievement must be fully understood. Marxism, let us remind ourselves, calls for a proletarian movement but does not actually set the stage for a political movement fitted with organisational continuity to deal with the complex problems of political life. For Marx the political activity of the working class creates the conditions that would allow the realisation of revolutionary objectives in such a way that the proletariat would be ready when circumstances made this realisation unavoidable.

Above we have seen how Marx's concepts were de-based. However his non - violent approach has a tendency to be consciously interventionist and in the same gesture seek to avoid the danger of subjective thinking. Such interventionism can be very easily misinterpreted or twisted by the unscrupulous to serve their own interventionist agendas.

## MARXISM & PRACTICE

Let us consider the dilemma that exists between social material conditions and political action. Schlomo Avineri aware of Marx's saying, 'philosophers have interpreted the world, but the point is to change it' observes that in 'Neue Rheinische Zeitung', 29 June 1848,

"...Marx says that a merely political revolutions is nothing but the ultimate radicalisation of the dichotomy between the particular and the universal; it finally proves that political universality is illusory, since it shows that the state can realise its universality only by disregarding the particularistic content of civil society and abstracting from it. Such a one-sided universality does not constitute a synthesis that incorporates and overcomes particularism..any merely political insurrection of the proletariat trying to create politically conditions not yet immanently developed in the socio-economic sphere is doomed to fail..."18

Avineri sees lucidly that despite the fact that Marx interpreted the political disturbances in France in 1848 as a possibility to create conditions for a social revolution, at the same time Marx was against a political, armed, out and out war against the bourgeoisie. The Soviet revolution is a 20th century example.

The impoverished masses and workers revolted, not allowing sufficient time for the right socio-historical conditions to develop. This violent fast-forwarding of the material dialectical process from a feudal social structure to communism disturbed a process which must evolve organically. The same error occurred in the rest of the eastern European countries after the 2nd World War. All the same Marxism should still be very much alive and well. What has happened in recent history was not the failure of Marxism itself, but the failure of the deformed versions of Marxism. As Gen Doy, a Marxist art historian in her book *Materialising Art History* correctly points this out:

"...Marxism, far from being proved inadequate and flawed by the events of twentieth century history, still provides the best methodological framework from which to understand culture and its historical development...Marxism had very little to do with these (eastern European) societies after the late 1920s, hence their collapse cannot be regarded as a

proof of Marxism's failure."19

It follows that an important task for an art historian should be to rescue Marx from these impatient followers, regardless of the nature of their allegiance.

Doy has a pragmatic approach towards the issues of Marxism and Marxist Art History. She makes the distinction between Marxism and Stalinism advocating Trotsky and Marx to defend Marxism. Materialising Art History is a fascinating study about Marxism's connection to social history in interaction with ideology, politics, and art.

Doy reminds us of Marx and Engels' three laws of dialectics. First the unity and interpenetration of opposites; second quantity transformed into quality; lastly negation of the negation.

The first law pinpoints the antagonistic components within the object and states that nothing is static or fixed. The components are in constant movement within the object at the same time as with exterior factors, whether or not these exterior factors are material or immaterial.

The second law draws an almost mathematical analogy. Activity multiplied by time results in change. Doy gives the classic example of the embryo's growth. The third law as Doy explains:

"...In the course of the unfolding of inner contradiction, a change in the quality of an object takes place...the original thing and the prevailing force that transforms it are both themselves transcended and replaced by a new higher development incorporating aspects of the character of both."20

She talks about the Marxist example of the dialectical processes in the emergence of capitalism which develops the working class as a source of wealth. This emerging working class eventually opposes and abolishes the ruling class becoming the one-class society. It cannot be over-emphasised that the element of time is of the essence in this process.

"While we (Marx and Engels, A.B.) tell the workers: 'You have to endure and go through 15, 20, 50 years of civil war in order to change the circumstances, in order to make yourselves fit for power' - instead of that you say: 'We must come to power immediately, or otherwise we may just as well go to sleep...'21

The dialectical processes show us that the principles of the Communist Manifesto are already at work within a capitalist society. Furthermore, with all its aggressive language, there is no actual call in the Manifesto for an armed, social revolution. For Marx mankind shapes the world and humanises his environment. This dominion over his circumstances enables man to control the conditions in which he previously felt a victim. No longer is his consciousness determined by external forces. Mankind becomes the prime mover and the product of his own history. The power of the state would eventually lose its political character.

Marx did not see society as a separate entity from the individual. "...The individual is the social being. The manifestation of his life, accomplished in association of other men - is therefore, a manifestation and affirmation of social life...(the individual man) is equally the whole, the ideal whole, the subjective existence of society as thought and experience..."22

Does acknowledgement of the individual as a social being create an opportunity to interpret the world in order to change it? For Marx one's relationship to others in society is not merely the means of their existence but also one's *raison d'être*. He sees the interaction and solidarity between individuals as the way to advance social change.

An awareness of how the dialectical process evolves means the capitalist system is ripe for social change, and the unification of theory and practice foreseeable.

However, some of the difficulties in tailoring the cloth of speculative philosophical theory to fit a practical mode of change remain. The tenuous link between philosophy's theoretical manifestation and reality is easily ruptured. Herein exists the danger of theory being about theory itself reflecting a merely contemplative attitude towards the task of

changing society. This attitude, according to Marx, has the object in itself and is therefore object-less and cannot be related to praxis.

However, Marx maintains that the way to overcome this problem is to allow philosophy to fully develop its interpretation of the world. Eventually it ceases to be a philosophy. As the distance between philosophy and reality dissolves, pure action occurs. According to Marx, perfecting theory is the way to change and transcend reality but he criticises Feuerbach, pointing to the lack of practically active elements often found in traditional materialism. The need is to recognise that it is only possible to change the world when we have understood it theoretically.

In the Holy Family Marx again shows us how theory turns into praxis.

"The criticism of those workers is not an abstract personality outside mankind; it is the real human activity of humans who are active members of society and who suffer, feel, think and act as human beings. That is why their criticism is at the same time practical, their communism a socialism that gives practical, concrete measures and in which they do not think but act..."<sup>23</sup>

There is therefore only an illusionary contradiction between the above and Marx's earlier writings in which he maintains that

"..Revolutions need a passive element for this passive element is supplied by human needs that give rise to the possibility of realisation...Theory is only realised in people in so far as it fulfils the need of the people...Will theoretical needs be directly practical needs? It is not enough for thought to seek to realise itself, reality must also strive towards thought". <sup>24</sup>

For Marx life in the new society will have a fresh meaning. Life's purpose and activities are one and the same thing. The individual feels the need of others; social relationships become an end in themselves. Marx underlines the importance of the proletarian associations as the seeds that will grow in future society.

There has never been a successful attempt to put Marxism into practice. The Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia provides a case and point. Yosip Broz Tito and the communist partisans waged a war against Fascist armies in the 2nd World War. Because the Yugoslav army was composed of multiple nationalities and ethnic groups banded together, after the liberation a country was formed with six republics and two autonomies which had the motto: brotherhood and equality. Tito was well aware of Stalin's abuse of Marxism in the Soviet Union when he made a politico-economical arrangement that was called the five year plan. Tito's Marxist integrity was obvious and pure Marxist philosophy was to be observed. After the initial five-year period the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia was to disengage from the Soviet block.

We know that Marx declined to offer a blueprint for a future society simply because the future is not an existing reality. Almost any discussion of the future inevitably turns to philosophical idealism discussing ideas that only exist in the consciousness of each thinker. This is why Marx never tried to rival the detailed plans of the so - called socialist utopians for a socialist society since for him future society will be determined by specific conditions under which it is established. These conditions cannot be predicted in advance.

History continues to grow by human endeavour but this salient fact according to Marx has been misconstrued. Mankind has been enslaved by the fruits of his own labours produced for profitable purposes. Buildings, cars even furniture can take on an independent existence. Our common sense has become a kind of commodity in itself. For Marx mankind's conscious free will has the ability to contemplate its own nature objectively. However, in a class structured society the whole labour force depends on a minority that controls or owns the means of production. The labour force may not recognise itself in the world it has created. No longer an end in itself, their self realisation becomes instrumental only in the development of others.<sup>25</sup> Shaping the material world develops one's individuality, and reveals what one has in common with others. Capitalist relationships are de-mystified.<sup>26</sup>

But even after this realisation the dialectical changes in society must come about gradually. In Critique of the Gothic Programme Marx describes the development of communism as a set of stages. These stages are necessary for the



dialectical unfolding of the principles of an existing society.

Marx does on one or two occasions hint at a possible plan for a future socialist society as in the Communist Manifesto. " Nevertheless in the most advanced countries, the following will be generally applicable: (Numbers: 2,5, 7, 8, 10, 11 omitted AB)

1) Gradual limitation of property ownership in land and application of all rents of land to public purposes...abolition of rights of inheritance of secondary nature (brothers, nephews etc.)...3) A heavy progressive income tax 4) Organisation of labour on to State run agricultural bodies, factories; and the private managers (if they still exist) will have to give the same wage as the State run bodies 6) Centralisation of the credit systems by forming one national bank and abolition of private banks) Free education for all children in public schools 9) Developing associations of workers/citizens and gradually abolishing the differences between town and country 12) Concentration of the overall transport activity in the hands of the nation... however all those measures cannot happen instantly but gradually, each one is pulling with it the next one..."<sup>27</sup>

In the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia almost a replica of this plan was applied. Workers were taxed 50% of their wages. Education at every level was free as was the health service, including medicine. Roads were built voluntarily by the Yugoslav youth; transport was state-run. After the five-year plan a decentralisation act was enforced. Property and chattels were distributed equally among each member of society. The result, at least superficially, was that the grounds for the future birth of a one-class society were laid. Furthermore, it is interesting to observe how art and culture were perceived - again very differently than they were in the Stalinist Soviet Union. Art and culture committees existed autonomously from the state apparatus. Once selected an artist, a dancer, an author, who passed the selection process that they had been obliged to undergo received a state wage and free state accommodation as well as other benefits. Art was important in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia which acknowledged that it is the cognition of life and one of the ways to perceive ourselves and our circumstances. There were absolutely no restrictions or censorship. Complete creative freedom was promoted. At the same time settlements developed comprised of multiple trades and nationalities and various imaginative architectural monuments were erected.<sup>28</sup>

After the 2nd World War in most of the Yugoslav republics especially those republics that were under Ottoman rule until 1913, a resolute battle was waged against the status quo. In the Socialist Republic of Macedonia in 1945 as much as 70% of the population was illiterate, an illiteracy inherited from the previous regimes. This percentage decreased to 5% after three decades.<sup>29</sup> The paramount importance of education is emphasised in *Das Kapital*. Marx refers to the need for a well-rounded human being, instead of the dehumanised creature of capitalist society. The member of a future society will replace the detail-worker of today...reduced to a mere fragment of a man by the fully developed individual, fit for a variety of labours...to whom the different social functions..are but so many models of giving free scope to his own natural powers. <sup>30</sup>

Unexpectedly, controlled private business continued to trade although taxed at 75% of their income. Again this complies with Marx's plan delineated in the Communist Manifesto from which Avineri draws the following conclusion:

" (The plan) ...does not include nationalisation of industry as such: it suggests nationalisation of land but not of industry. The means of production are not taken away from their private owners by a political fiat which, according to Marx, might result in economic chaos, outright political opposition and sabotage and serious dislocation of production. Private industry will be allowed to continue to exist surrounded by such a climate of political and economical arrangements that will slowly, in as peaceful and orderly a fashion as possible, have to transform itself."<sup>31</sup> The Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia until Tito's death in spring 1980 was a good example of how Marxism could be put into praxis. But in 1990 after the Marshal's death the violent and gruesome disintegration that ensued meant that the crude communism of which Marx warned raised its nationalistic head. Marx was critical of other socialist movements because they accepted the first stage of socialism as the ultimate possibility, and a decadent corrupt society as the apotheosis of human development.

## ART & SOCIETY

The dialectics of art history are not necessarily seen in terms of contradictions within phenomena and social movements themselves, but in terms of a struggle between two relatively timeless conceptualisations of art, reality and idealism.

Marx said that in communist society there would be no painters but everybody could paint. Hegel insinuates that the history of development of art would cease with the perfection of state. In a communist society art would integrate and become life. This does not mean that artistic creativity would die out but on the contrary, the human mind would yet be able to develop its capacity in a different form. Yes, anybody would be able to paint if they wanted so, but also if they could.

It is difficult for us to imagine that prehistoric man was conscious of the aesthetic value of his cave paintings nor should we suppose that it was his need to create a world after his own hearts desire - to create something from nothing - that spawned what we now call to as art. Recent archaeological theory suggests that these cave paintings had a very practical purpose indeed because they were an indispensable magical tool for the hunt and it follows an acknowledgement of spiritual life. For almost 30 000 years man's creative will has been linked to his spiritual consciousness. We have had to wait until 1873, a decade later than Clement Greenberg would have it, for Manet's *Gare Saint Lazare*, (plate II) a picture that discards its links with the past and without any other purpose than its own existence - art for art's sake.

From the present art historical vantage point there is a tendency to separate man's creative impulses from their source of inspiration and in so doing consider the cave paintings in the Ardeche valley and Damien Hirst's *Away From the Flock* in a crude, mechanical context, as if the only purpose of a work of art was to record the material conditions in which it was created.

Conversely if we assume a Hegelian perspective (prior to the industrial revolution) with the spiritual dimension of a work of art our primary consideration, the post-modern artist shows us the current state of spiritual values and social mores, in some instances, indirectly and unintentionally. Janus-like our Marxist head will tell us that a post-modern work of art reflects our daily life in the same way that cave man's paintings reflected his. Our Hegelian head will reason that a post-modern work of art is the mirror of late capitalist spirituality alienated from the Idea. Both heads would concur that art is not merely the mirror but also one of the necessary components of reality essential to the dialectical processes of that reality. In the first years of the Soviet Union, an uncorrupted Marxism recognised the powerful allure of art's potential to change reality.

"First of all, art is the cognition of life...Art is not the expression of merely the subjective sensations and experiences of the poet; art is not assigned the goal of primarily awakening in the reader 'good feelings'. Like science, art cognises life. Both art and science have the same subject: life, reality."<sup>32</sup>

Conversely Hegel says that painting "can be seen in two ways, as visual appearance and as a representation of something other than itself, but both are ultimately understandable as manifestations of the Spirit - painting as representation and as painting is pure appearance of the spirit contemplating itself." <sup>33</sup> What determines the content of the work of art is subjectivity aware of itself. Hegel calls for a work of art that presses on "to the extreme of pure appearance, i.e. to the point where the content does not matter and where the chief interest is the artistic creation of that appearance."<sup>34</sup> For Hegel the Ideal treads into the sensuous but remains self - contained.

For example the nude is indifferent to the spectators gaze, male or female. Its symbolic gestures are emblematic rather than psychological. Its step into the sensuality of its own time does not disturb the autonomy of the absolute idealism. The Ideal is genuinely beautiful.

To enliven our argument let us look at Eduard Manet's *Le Dejeuner sur l'herbe* (1863 Louvre, Paris) (plate III) with the same detachment that the female nude in Manet's picture looks at us. In fact, we remember that she is a sex change, based on a male nude that we know through Marcantonio Raimondi's famous engraving after a lost cartoon by Raphael (circa 1525-1530). (plate IV) Clearly she is genuinely beautiful, perhaps the latest embodiment of Hegel's

concept of the Ideal, a fact that her two clothed male companions (also nude, one a river god in Raphael's design) acknowledge by their indifference to her erotic possibilities. Her confident mein and considered glance alert us to her 16th century origins. This homage to Raphael cannot be the dawning of modernist art but a gauche tentative link to all the works of art that preceded it, which were based on the nude. We will return to the subject of the predominance of the nude as the humanisation of the Ideal in the chapter Et in Arcadia Ego and discover a picture with a dominant new millennium nude based on one of the reclining figures from the east pediment of the Parthenon, the so-called Ilissus - unknown to Michelangelo and Raphael - that re-establishes links with Hegelian principles.

However a Marxist art historian like Plekhanov thought that there was no place left for the Idea: "All ideologies have one common root: the psychology of a given era". This maxim reminds us that for a Marxist art historian art primarily reflects the material conditions in which it was created.<sup>35</sup>

"Works of Leonardo were conditioned by the social milieu of Florence, and later those of Titian by the altogether different development of Venice. Raphael, like any other artist, was conditioned by the technical advances made in art before him, by the organisation of society and the division of labour in his locality, and finally by the division of labour in all the countries with which his locality maintained relations. Whether... (he AB)... is able to develop his talent depends entirely upon demand, which in turn depends upon the division of labour and the consequent educational conditions of men".<sup>36</sup> Lifshitz's observation evinces a feisty naiveté about the giants of renaissance art. To equate art with ideology does not present the full circle of dialectics in art history. A work of art has the ability to transcend the circumstances of the material conditions in which it is created by subjectively expressing its objective potential albeit consciously or unconsciously.

Relating the laws of Material Dialectics to art Doy speculates that for Marx paintings are not merely symbols but have an "ontological status of their own, and their being made in a 'realistic' way should not alter this fact".<sup>37</sup> This status is unchangeable, whether the works of art are realistic or abstract. Doy should have understood that only realistic art could be acceptable to Marx <sup>38</sup> because in Marx's scheme of things an abstract picture such as Vasily Kandinsky's 1913 Study for a Composition VII, Staditche Galerie, Munich, (plate V) would have been inconceivable. Such a pragmatist philosopher would have been drawn to the type of pictures that illustrate literally his universal worker, in Soviet realistic pictures. (plate VI) Doy attempts to support her argument by pointing out that although painting has a social status, it does not need to represent material life.

"Dialectical Materialism sees the relationship of the concrete and the abstract as essential, and real, concrete material reality needs to be apprehended also by abstract thought and method, so it is not really the case that Marxist, as materialists and also as dialecticians, would automatically be realists...Nor would they necessarily be opposed to forms of art which abstract from material reality in dialectical relationship to concrete phenomena since this is what the dialectical method is supposed to do anyway..."<sup>39</sup>

In the chapter Concretising the Abstract Doy notes what she considers the unnecessary tendency by Marxists to avoid the existence of non-figurative abstract art. Discussing Malevich she points out that it is not necessary to move away from Marxism in order to understand abstract art and that it is possible to study philosophical texts (Malevich being interested in philosophy) by a historical method. She argues that just as one should not over-philosophise abstract paintings like Malevich's Black Suprematist Square, (plate VII) one should not search for political meanings in images where they cannot be found. In Representation and Consciousness Doy questions the relationship of the individual and class to visual culture. Acknowledging the complexity of the question she makes the salient observation that not all images are about class, nor can they change in any way the viewer's awareness of class structure, irregardless of the artist's intentions. In fact, without exception artists have tended to elevate their subjects to the highest status. Carravaggio's depiction of a drowned prostitute as the Virgin Mary in the Louvre masterpiece The Death of the Virgin is a useful example. (plate VIII) Doy thinks that while some images can in some way effect one's consciousness and aesthetic sense, this does not presuppose that a moved spectator would become class-conscious:

"Representations of workers do not equal class consciousness either on the part of the producer or the spectator. Given that one's place in the economic order does not automatically determine class consciousness, then how might such consciousness be represented, or offered as a reading possibility for the viewer of a given image? How do artists become conscious of what they want to visualise and produce as imagery and can we take the finished image as a part

of the artist's experience?"<sup>40</sup>

Doy's obtuse suggestion ignores the almost automatic idealising process we have mentioned above. We could take the finished image as part of the artist's personal experience but, at the same time not necessarily reduce its meaning to only the artist's experience. All kind of factors could influence our perception of a work of art. This means that a dialogue, indefeasible by time, is established between the spectator's inner life and experience and the work of art, a dialogue that becomes its essence and meaning. The dialectical process is a dialogue.

We should also bear in mind that while the artist is at work, elements of chance and unconscious surface. For a work of art to alter our consciousness it must draw us into a lively dialogue that could well lead to new insights. At the very least if these insights only produce a class-consciousness in the Marxist sense, certain constricting circumstances must have prevailed for such a limited vision.

While Doy searches for her meaning, another spectator, more receptive on other levels may discover a diversity of meanings in the work of art and the animated dialogue thus established becomes both the object and the subject.

Gen Doy also addresses other issues that are considered Marxism's shortcomings:

"...if you have a separate black or gay or woman's revolutionary party you will not be able to destroy capitalism, because proletarians must take the lead in this. They may be lesbian, black or Jewish proletarians, but proletarians they must be."<sup>41</sup>

Admitting that there is not a lot of Marx's writings on gender or race - or art for that matter - Doy feels the need to remind us that women also are part of the working class and that Marxists do not have "monolithic notion of politics of gender but attempt to see the contradictions within and between such notions".<sup>42</sup> She argues that it is necessary to address those problems from a position that will encompass the specific historical and economical circumstances which give rise to class as well as gender, or race issues.

However in my opinion Doy's attitude towards idealism is short-sighted. Idealism or even philosophy are very much a part of this world. They are the product and therefore the affirmation of their time. Philosophical ideas should be applied in socio-historical manner, not in a merely abstract, a-historical sense.

Succinctly, Peter Suchin in *Occupational Hazard* (1998), points out that art education has not succeeded in integrating the artist into society. The 19th Century image of the artist as an esoteric eccentric outsider prevails in British and American culture.

In the art schools today contempt for art theory exists. It is perceived as a restraint for self - expression rather than a civilising discipline. Suchin makes the salient observation that democratisation of higher education has lowered standards of the inborn talent and abilities of applicants interviewed for degree courses. Indeed, technical skills are not promoted any longer in art schools.

Matthew Collins notes:

"It's true that life drawing in art school is more or less out now. You could easily go through your art school years today without doing one. But it's not true that you would actually be encouraged to never do one, or punished if you secretly did one." <sup>43</sup>

This could be a cause for alarm for the art student that just paints. A picture may not appeal to us immediately and is not a novelty. Have we all forgotten what a painting is? Have we forgotten that a picture is to be contemplated - that aesthetic contemplation demands time? Could we have been coerced into forgetting that a work of art should be outside of time and that a picture's dialogue with the spectator continues through the centuries? If this is not so then how is it that an old Greek work of art can still be aesthetically enjoyed today - in material conditions very different from the ones in which it was created.

Suchin calls for art organisations curatorially well informed with an “acute awareness of the demands involved in presenting work within the public domain.” He concludes that Brit art's hyped sense of novelty and originality is the result of the lack of critical distance between the orthodox and alternative theories. The current atmosphere discourages analyses, or as S. Craddock puts it :44 “To have an 'overview' is to 'judge', and judgement similarly carries the inadvisable arrogance of common denominator. Post-history drags judgement into the experience of individual encounter, and away from intangibility.” She points - and rightly so - to the superficial attempts by New British Artists to make art socially or politically concerned. “To “deal with” or “in” subjects is not necessarily political at all.” Craddock demands to know if the attitude summed up by the hackneyed words mundane and banal needs to be repeated so often.

Today there is not enough discernment among art historians and academics because the influence of technology and science and the global advance of capitalism in the last decade has produced a bureaucratic, self - seeking culture of mass consumption which produces the the- emperors-new-clothes type of so called artists that lay bricks, erect tents, leave to posterity their soiled unmade beds and pickled sheep. As Damien Hirst declares himself: 'If you can 'do' the art world at 32, it means that there is something wrong with the art world, not that you are a genius'.45

The success of artist - led organisations does not mean for Suchin an artistic success and overall he deplores the fact that British Art is engulfed in a cloud of exaggerated importance. For him, future critics will describe contemporary British art as “a frenzy over an immense spectacle, a vast but transient distraction.” As for museums, their changing role could be construed as a progressive step, because overtly it seeks to be educational. In the New Tate Modern the galleries are themed in an effort to make the art works more comprehensible. While the danger of presenting a curatorial stew prevails, this attempt to make New British Art more accessible to a bewildered public unsympathetic to such elite art works could achieve another desired side effect, tax relief for multinational companies. This cultural opportunism also elevates corporate entities on the New British art pedestal, a consummate media illusion.

All attempts to abolish past art for the creation of something new are doomed. Freedom in expression comes out of a historical process. However if the attempt to fast-forward the historical dialectical processes is doomed, it is also necessary. Pure action is not consciously aware of itself. Do we embrace every aspect of a dialectical process and is that making us a merely contemplative, indifferent entities?

For Marx art is not in contradiction with the undeveloped social level from which it sprang.46 According to Vygotsky, this does not mean that social conditions do not completely determine the character and the effect of a work of art; it merely shows that they determine it indirectly. The feelings and thoughts aroused by a work of art are socially conditioned.

## THE GRAND NARRATIVE

Poststructuralist theory evolving parallel to postmodernism has challenged western metaphysics and the accepted premise that historical interpretation has something to do with truth has been shaken by the deconstruction theory expounded by Jacques Derrida. The theories of J.F.Lyotard aggravate the challenge. Habermas puts it to us like this: “to Derrida by way of running from Bataille through Foucault.”47 Often enough these theories are thought as Nietzsche's offspring.48

Post-structuralism's gauntlet is a question about the validity of language and the meaning of the meaning. Saussure's theory of the sign is the cornerstone of Post-structuralism. For Saussure language is a chain of signs that consists of signifiers (words) and the signified (meaning). The word's and the meaning's position within the sign is variable and there may be no real connection between a word and its meaning.

If structuralism demonstrates that we are able to see a truth beyond the text or image, Post-structuralism goes further by pointing out that meaning is not fixed or static but active and moving. The interaction of text and reader is a meaning in itself that necessarily accentuates our awareness of the fact that language invests historical narratives with present values.

A medieval or Renaissance artist or spectator would have thought that just as the sacred scriptures are made up of words and meanings so are pictures made up of colours and meanings. If we take words as they are and not understand their meaning it would be useless to read them. Likewise, if we just look at the colours of a painting and ignore the the meaning which could be expressed in the colours and forms we would not benefit.<sup>49</sup>

If we accept that a text, even a sacred text like a work of art must have more than one interpretation, its truth is ambivalent. This means that one plausible interpretation offers us part of a truth; a second plausible interpretation another part of a truth and a third plausible interpretation...and so on ad infinitum. If this multitude of interpretations becomes dogmatic or if these poststructuralist interpretations oppose one another diametrically, the meaning depends on language and is within its structure and eloquence.

If the sum of all the possible interpretations is linked to the time and place in which it is produced, we must ask who and what determines which interpretation as most valid. That facts speak for themselves is refuted by Post-structuralism. Foucault categorically insists that history is different with every new interpretation and that mutability brings a truer and better understanding of the subject. When all is said and done Foucault reminds us that history is written by the victorious. The positivist historian believes that objectivity is fixed and attainable and that interpretation depends for the most part on empirical evidence contrary to Post-structuralist historians who emphasise the fact that historical narratives owe more to language than has been traditionally accepted.

"It now seems possible to hold that (a historical) explanation need not be assigned unilaterally to the category of the literally truthful on the one hand or the purely imaginative on the other, but can be judged solely in terms of the richness of the metaphors which govern its sequence of articulation...Then we should no longer naively expect that statements about a given epoch or complex of events in the past "correspond" to some pre-existent body of "raw facts". One's very understanding of the text is mediated by it.

The historian should not only 'read the text but enter into a dialogue with it...just as the historian questions the text, says LaCapra, so the text questions the historian"<sup>50</sup>

Hayden White thinks that language has autonomous power "as a constitutive agent in the production of historical narratives" and it is the only key to understanding history.

Only by means of language can history be encountered. The question is where are these raw facts?

Keith Moxley in *The Practise of Theory* notes that according to Dominick LaCapra, there are no real events and experiences for the historian to encounter when dealing with a text because understanding of the text is a matter of personal perception. The historian should not only "read the text but enter into a dialogue with it...just as the historian questions the text, says LaCapra, so the text questions the historian".

Although historical narrative and knowledge are embedded and interrelated to the social circumstances in which they are produced, for Moxley this awareness should not impose our political values on our understanding of the past:

"A persuasive historical argument would be one that made every effort to grapple with the strangeness or "otherness" of the historical horizon it sought to understand. It is only through radical alterity of the past that we can become aware of the particular qualities of the cultural and intellectual environment in which we ourselves operate... Those interpretations that flatten the texture of the historical horizon through the imposition of a reductive political agenda do violence to the complexity of what is to be interpreted and blind us to the way in which the past can effectively illuminate the values that have determined the interpreter's own point of view."<sup>51</sup>

Moxley calls for acknowledgement that the narratives we construct are products of our own time and values, infused with a committed form of art historical interpretation. This view of ahistorical historicity Moxley identifies in Derrida's theory a way for new interpretations that refuse to be static in definition.

The answer is rather in the dialogue between the spectator and the object examined. Logocentrism does not discredit

the historical narrative. After all "Every narrative, including deconstructionist one, is invested with transcendental values whose claims exceed the signifying power of language"<sup>52</sup>. Post-structuralism is just another grand narrative, critical of grand - narratives but this line of thought could backfire if the Poststructuralist theory is seen from a Marxist viewpoint. Post-structuralism is part of a dialectic process which encompasses the: Art for Art's sake (thesis); Modernism (anti-thesis); and Post-modernism / Post-structuralism (synthesis). The unfortunate poststructuralist hunter that knows that his prey, an idea, cannot be caught, and that he could become the Grand Narrative's target. Perhaps Post - structuralism is a celebration of a Tower of Babel that can never be built.<sup>53</sup>

In 1992 the American post-historian Francis Fukuyama has announced the death of history and the grand narrative.<sup>54</sup>

"Both Hegel and Marx believed that the evolution of human societies was not open-ended, but would end when mankind had achieved a form of society that satisfied its deepest and most fundamental longings. Both thinkers thus posited an "end of history": for Hegel this was the liberal state, while for Marx it was communist society"

Hegel and Marx could have responded to Fukuyama's naiveté paradoxically - because the two German philosophers were sure that the end was the beginning. For Marx life began only when one was a happy Marxist in the communist state. If our thoughts and ideas interrelate to the circumstances from which they arise, they will assume a different form in circumstances that have had satisfied mankind's deepest longings. For Hegel philosophy becomes "serious" when it no longer loses itself in the object and its subjective reflection, but concerns itself with the activity of absolute knowledge. As a Marxist we would ask how is this possible. If absolute knowledge is absolute, it is incomprehensible to subjective thinking. Contact with the Absolute automatically means the annulment of philosophy or rather, its metamorphoses into actuality. However, philosophy's fulfilment is not its end.

## NEOMODERNISM

### ET IN ARCADIA EGO

Political correctness has wrought considerable havoc with the traditional symbols of European art, but one symbol, the lamb, has fared better than most. One could say that the lamb has enjoyed a mystical re-birth as a symbol for art in a picture by Andre Durand which reflects with considerable humour, tongue and cheek on a post-modern work by Damien Hirst. The lamb (sometimes a sheep or ram) begins its gamble through the history of art when the early Christians adopted this sacrificial animal to represent an innocence that defeats sorcery - and pagans - gentleness, purity and self - sacrifice. If the lamb bleeds into a chalice it represents Christ's crucifixion; if it carries a banner it becomes a symbol of Christ's resurrection. We had to wait to the close of the 20th century and Durand's picture *Et In Arcadia Ego* which includes a lamb in a high tech fish tank to realise that Hirst's *Away from the Flock* (plate XII) has achieved icon status as a symbol of art - art that has gone astray. Not only does the lamb in Durand's picture assume new symbolism, but the elliptical title *Et In Arcadia Ego* takes a new meaning quite different from the analogue that was coined in the 17th century.

George III believed Arcadia was a place of perfect bliss and Utopian beauty far removed from reality but Greek authors knew the real Arcadia was the domain of the great god Pan, who played the syrinx in a place that was actually a bleak, rocky country devoid of all the comforts of life. Virgil idealised Arcadia.<sup>68</sup>

The pastoral kingdom of Arcady has been a constant source of inspiration for innumerable artists. Among the most celebrated pictures by Guercino and Poussin (plate XIII) give central importance to a tomb that is supposed to be the final resting place of an unknown shepherd that died from grief - some say of unrequited passion. The Utopian bliss of Arcady could not heal his broken heart.

*Et In Arcadia Ego* could have other definitions such as: I, too, was born, or lived, in Arcady or, Even in Arcady there I am.<sup>69</sup> After much deliberation, Erwin Panofsky (*Meaning in the Visual Arts*, Doubleday Anchor Books, New York, 1955) concludes that it is not the ghost of the shepherd that declaims to us from the depths of the rustic sarcophagus, but Death itself - there is Death even in Arcadia.

Just when we thought that the definition of this esoteric anagram had been elucidated by Panofsky, Andre Durand gives

it another spin as he titles a picture painted during his tenure as artist in residence at Kingston University's Stanley Picker Gallery, *Et in Arcadia Ego* (plate XIV).

The Art Lovers could be an ironic subtitle for Durand's composition which gives as much portent to Damien Hirst's *Away From the Flock* as Poussin gave to the symbolic sarcophagus. Durand's four Arcadian shepherds adopt a very different attitude to the presence of Hirst's post-modern sepulchre, an attitude unprecedented in any of the other pictures Durand must have considered before he painted his own version of *Et In Arcadia Ego*.

In every picture of this subject the shepherds examine carefully the tomb they have come upon. In Durand's *Et In Arcadia Ego* all four shepherds refuse to scrutinise Hirst's lamb embalmed in formaldehyde. They turn their backs to it. If the artist had not painted himself as one of the shepherds we might wonder what this Arcadian quartet could be thinking. With a self-portrait to remind us of Durand's personal commitment to the content of his picture we can safely guess that these shepherds could have art historical questions on their mind. This supposition is substantiated by another likeness. The eldest shepherd in the upper right-hand of the composition is a portrait of Dr. Andrew Ciechanowiecki, the classical scholar and collector of renaissance bronzes.

We note that Hirst's icon, like all post-modern endeavours, mocks the autonomy of aesthetics and form and painting generally, however the four generations of shepherds in Durand's picture understand the truth in Hirst's flippant comment (quoted above) that there is something definitely wrong with the art world and that he is certainly not a genius. Durand has said that he saw *Away from the Flock* in the Serpentine Gallery on the day that ink was spilt into the formaldehyde. The thought of a black sheep must have triggered his imagination - a blackened, dead, post-modern lamb. So often a victim in European art, the lamb suddenly became a symbol for art itself; the tank a tomb. Hirst's pickled sheep had become a symbol of how far art had gone astray.

Durand's *Et In Arcadia Ego* with its traditionally painterly values evinces an epiphany of Hegel's Idea made eloquently manifest in the nude shepherd who's self-contained beauty fills the composition linking the picture's iconography to ancient Greece. Like Henry Moore, Durand has spent many hours in the British Museum contemplating and drawing that indisputably great piece of sculpture, the so-called *Ilissus* (plate XV) from the east pediment of the Parthenon which represents a formal discovery as valid as the formulation of a philosophic truth.<sup>70</sup> We understand why it was often the artisans who painted the Greek sculptures who were paid higher wages than the carvers when we study the way Durand has rendered the luminous flesh tones of his shepherd in oil on canvas. Here we are confronted with a nude equal to any that preceded it - an implacable *Ilissus* to greet the millennium. A classical nude emerges and signals a new direction in the history of art which we will title with a tortology - Neomodernism.

The Idea and the symbol of the Nude are two of the criteria of a Neomodernist picture but Durand's *Et In Arcadia Ego* has Albertian depth, as invented by Brunellesco and tempts us to concur with Arthur C. Danto in the *Nation Magazine* ("MoMA: What's in a Name", July 17th, 2000) and abandon Greenberg's exceedingly narrow conception of Modern art as a self-inquiry which he saw in modern picture's "ineluctable flatness of the surface".

The heady mixture of a post-modern icon, the Nude, the sense of space and depth (a Latin title to boot) in Durand's *Et In Arcadia Ego* fuses seamlessly into an image that supersedes postmodernism dialectically. No wonder the shepherds do not tend Hirst's sheep because *Away from the flock* has been entombed in Durand's Neomodernist Arcadia. Postmodernism is dead. Spirituality and beauty in painting have been resurrected. We still have the power to recognise and acknowledge the Idea. True, art had gone astray, but Durand's *Et in Arcadia Ego*, continues the inexorable dialectical process of movement from so called high art to postmodernism and onwards. The Arcadian shepherd, Hegelian or Marxist, should welcome this U-turn in the history of art. Neomodernism brings back the traditional and eternal values of art and at the same time contemplates the essence and potential of the present.

## CONCLUSION

Logic demands attention for Marx's suggestion that Communism would first emerge in the most developed capitalist countries (England was predicted) because communistic elements already exist within the capitalist system and thought must be acknowledged as a part of a dialectical processes of existence and is not to be treated autonomously. If as



Hegel believed, life precedes from the Ideal to mankind it is the mature Marx that insisted life growing upwards from mankind towards the Ideal. Mankind and his earthly existence are the products of his concepts and ideas; Life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life is what Marx says.

“We set out from real active men, and on the basis of their real life process we demonstrate the development of the ideological reflexes and echoes of the life process. The phantoms formed in the human brain, are also, necessarily, sublimates of the material life process, which is empirically verifiable and bound to material premises. Morality, religion, metaphysics, all the rest of ideology and their corresponding forms of consciousness, thus no longer retain the semblance of independence, They have no history, no development; but men, developing their material production and their material intercourse, alter, along with this their real existence, their thinking and the products of their thinking.”<sup>71</sup>

How could Marx's real active man become real? Certainly he did not mean that the material is primary to the Ideal nor could he have meant the opposite. Marx thought thought - he did a lot of thinking himself - integral to our life on earth. For him every human activity is infused with consciousness. Our ideas have to be analysed in the context of our environment. They demand a continuous everyday interaction between thought and matter. Can we assume confidently that there is no such a thing as a progress in art? Yes, must be the answer. Truth is one and universal, forever in motion

. A Marxist view would not necessarily refute this idealistic premise. It would seek to situated it within the appropriate ontological conditions. A Marxist wants to know where, when, why and how did this one timeless truth come in to being. A Marxist view would seek to build the material body of life parallel to a spiritual life developing both symbiotically. The two enter into a dialectical process borrowing from each other like the Yin and Yang symbol, twins within a circle.

It would be unwise to deny the potential of human action to transform or even transfigure our human predicament. We should instead emphasise that all human activity is a dialectical process between thought and action in the same way that day and night proceed and follow each other. We have not refuted praxis, but analysed dialectically its content and realised that we could work for life itself, not motivated by mammon.

Although it has been important to insist on Hegel's influence on Marx, we have not ignored their divergences and differences. Hegel writing volumes of essays on his philosophy of fine art, aloof in his philosophical tower, believed we could obtain the Idea by thought alone. Marx wanted to take hold of the world and the Idea by striving for it practically. For the material dialectician, Hegel had stripped us to the bone and did not feel constrained by the limitations of ceaseless theoretical contemplation.

For art's sake we have said that Marx agreed with Hegel to the extent that there is an objective meaning in history, and progressive history is our creation. Art is intrinsically involved in mankind and simultaneously detached. Sometimes a mirror, on occasion a catalyst. Is there progress in art. No. Only change. A dialectical process.

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