

ART - SYMBOL OR SYMPTOM
A MARXIST PERSPECTIVE

Tania Nally

March 1991

NC 0019966 4



T 730

M0056312,NC

THE NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN

ART: SYMBOL OR SYMPTOM
(A MARXIST PERSPECTIVE)

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO:

The Faculty of History of Art and Design and Complementary Studies

AND

in candidacy for the Degree

FACULTY OF FINE ART - DEPARTMENT OF PAINTING

by

TANYA NALLY

MARCH, 1991

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page No</u>
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS	3
INTRODUCTION	4
CHAPTER I: Ideology in Marxist Theory. A Necessary Base.	6
CHAPTER II	13
CHAPTER III: Modernism and the Realist Tradition.	28
CONCLUSION	41
BIBLIOGRAPHY	43

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

- 1) LEFT: El Lissitzky, 'Up to Date Globe Trotter' from 'Victory over the Sun', 1923 (lithograph), London (Tate Gallery).

RIGHT: El Lissitzky, 'New Man' from 'Victory over the Sun', 1923 (lithograph), London (Tate Gallery).
- 2) Sergie Eisenstein, film still from Que Viva Mexico 1931, 'The Capitalist who wore the Mask of Joyful Death reveals his True Face'.
- 3) Alexander Rodchenko, photomontages for 'Pro Eto', a Book of Poems by Mayakavosky, 1923.
- 4) Vladimir Mayakovsky, film poster 'Born not for Money', 1918.
- 5) Ilya Repin, detail of 'Ivan the Terrible and his son, Ivan', 1851.
- 6) Ilya Repin, A. M. Gorky reads his play 'Children of the Sun', 1905.
- 7) Charlie Chaplin, 'The Great Dictator', 1939.

INTRODUCTION

During the 1930's Mikhail Lifshitz, working in Moscow at the Marx and Engels Institute, first edited material by Marx and Engels on art and literature. He also produced the first study of Marx's aesthetics, 'The Philosophy of Art and Karl Marx' (1973).

Earlier communist writers had not thought of aesthetics as a vital part of marxism, and had drawn instead on other non marxist ideas as the source of their aesthetic theory.

Marx's own writing on art are thin and fragmentary, and not entirely equipped to address the problems of twentieth century life. As a result the scattered comments have been divided into themes, observations and 'remarks'. It is here that the starting point for an interpretation of marxist aesthetics theory begins in all its diversity and of an inconclusive nature, but marxist theory has proved a rich ground for interpretation and theoretical debate. It brings with it Marx's humanist and Hegelian influences, economic and social problems, and industrialism and capitalism in the twentieth century, all in relation to aesthetics. This has brought many into confusion and disagreement as to what the true concept of a socialist aesthetics should be.

This has proved to be a catalyst, prompting some of the most individual thought from twentieth century critics.

The debates will centre on Russian and German thought, these seeming most relevant in the groundwork for a marxist aesthetic. In a wider perspective the debates take on a more personal emphasis as the individuals come to the forefront.

Section one of this thesis deals primarily with the ideological stance leading up to the debate. The main cornerstones are exposed in attempting to surface only the main areas open to discussion in the Marxist theory and raising prominent issues rather than concentrating on one section while minimising the rest.

This thesis is an attempt to put in perspective the marxist theory of art, and the debates which ensued in trying to pursue this theory. It does not however come to a gradual conclusion. Marxists signalled many problems rather than solving them, leaving it instead to the many individuals who dedicated their time and effort, (in Benjamin's case his life), in pursuit of a socialist art. There is not enough scope in this discussion to convey all perspectives though it is hoped that some pattern will emerge from the debates as to what the aims of these individuals were achieving an socialist theory of art.

CHAPTER I

The world is narrow, broad the mind
Thoughts dwell easily side by side
Things collide violently in space. (1)

To view aesthetics not with rose tinted glasses, not, with lofty sentiments, out of step with 'pedestrian vision' credited to the 'ordinary' individual, but to try and grasp the necessity of aesthetics. That is, to try and realise that it is an integral part of the whole structure of life. Not alone a fulfilment in a personalised schemata, but to see aesthetics as part of a whole strata in daily life and society.

If it were not for opinion, or individualism, it is very questionable as to whether or not George Orwell would have written 'Animal Farm' or that Picasso would have painted 'Guernica'. There would be science of only the necessary, and individuality unheard of. Difference of opinion has always abounded however, through dictatorship, war, and all that has discouraged freedom of mind.

The uniqueness of a work of art, is inseparable from its being embedded in the fabric of tradition. An ancient statue of Venus, for example, stood in a different traditional context with the Greeks, who made it an object of veneration, than with the clerics of the middle ages who viewed it as an ominous idol.

There has always been a distrust in relation to art. Plato in his model state dealt with poets by banishing them from it, in the public interest. He had a high conception of the power of poetry. He, however, believed it harmful, superfluous: in a 'perfect' community of course. (2)

The long line of historical concept interwoven into aesthetics is fundamental to its progress.

Nothing comes from nothing, the new comes from the old, but that is why it is new

The above quote comes from Brecht in his essay, 'Popularity and realism'. In it he acknowledges the fundamental importance of tradition. However he stresses the importance of moving on, of progression.

But one must have at least a little historic vision, at least to understand that between our present-day economic and cultural poverty and the time of the fusion of art with life, that is, between the time when life will reach such proportions that it will be entirely formed by art. More than one generation will have come and gone, whether for good or bad, the lathe like art will remain for many years more and will be the instrument of the artistic and social development of the masses..... (Trotsky)

There is no one ideology, but only ideologies in the same way as there is not one art but the various arts, or as there are several relevant artistic trends to be distinguished corresponding with the various influential social strata. This does not alter the fact that in any historical period one class predominates, but it reminds us that this predominance does not go unchallenged by competitors in the spiritual realm any more than in economics or politics. Works of art are not closed, self-contained and transcendent entities but are the product of specific historical practices on the part of identifiable social groups in given conditions. Therefore they bear the imprint of the ideas values and conditions of existence in those groups.

There is disagreement about what ideologies are, and there is also disagreement about how ideologies are related to other aspects of social life. In marxist theory, Raymond Williams identifies three common versions of the concept. Alan Hunt recalls that Gurvitch discovered thirteen

different meanings of ideology in Marx, and Colin Sumner lists ten main definitions of the concept. Put most simply the theory of ideology in Marx states that the ideas and beliefs people have are systematically related to their actual and material conditions of existence. (4)

Arnold Hauser speaks of the ideology of art in a similar view, when he writes that the evaluation and reevaluations of art history are governed by ideology not logic. That they relate to the same living conditions, are based upon the same social foundation as are the contemporary artistic tendencies and, like these express and reveal a definite world view.

In Marx's philosophical writings of the 1840's art tends to assume a privileged role in discussions of 'man' in general as a 'species being', where the aesthetic sense or the creativity of the artist prefigures or acts as a guide to the nature of unalienated existence. Art is seen as a particular sector of the ideological level of the superstructure.

Ideology then refers to a system of beliefs characteristic of a particular class or group. Marx elaborates to include 'legal, political, religious, aesthetic or philosophic considerations'. In the same passage Marx's uses the term 'superstructure' to refer to these forms with the general statement that the legal and political superstructure and forms of social consciousness 'correspond' to the economic structure of society, the real foundation. This is the origin of the base-superstructure metaphor which has both aided and confused the study of ideology and culture. The cultural producer has his or her own location in the social structure, potentially generating its own ideological forms arising out of the general economic conditions and the mode of production of that society. Art is clearly an ideological activity and an ideological product.

The theory of base-superstructure, although taken by some to be too rigid in its meaning, has been moulded to allow more flexible definitions. A general example would be of an individual who produces pianos. He or she is a productive worker, as is the individual who delivers them. He or she would be considered as the base, yet the individual who plays the piano is not part of the base, but the superstructure. Many have added to the theory: Althusser, for example, with the notion of relative Autonomy. This being that the elements of the superstructure are not always determined by the base. Cultural production then, encompassing both ideology and the superstructure, is relatively autonomous, and at certain historical moments and in certain conditions can also be historically effective and a force for change.

The distinction between material base and superstructure is not a distinction between matter and spirit, but between conscious human activity aimed at the creation and preservation of the conditions of human life. Human consciousness furnishes reasons, rationalizes and creates modes of legitimation and moral justifications for the specific forms that activity takes. Extending this distinction, we may say that art may partake of not merely 'base' or 'superstructure', but both. Works of art may be part of human conscious productive activity (the base), which would include the role of art in all physical and mental appropriation and remaking of the external world. Also, it may be an aspect of ideological 'false consciousness', which is superstructural. A human consciousness and cultural activity are the so-called superstructure which reflect an economic foundation.

Marx discusses the relationship between art and the society which produced it:

But the difficulty does not lie in understanding

that the Greek art and epos are bound up with certain forms of development. It rather lies in understanding why they still afford us aesthetic enjoyment and in certain respects prevail as the standard and model beyond attainment

Echoing an idealist admiration for the Greeks and his own philosophical past, he wrote:

Why should the historical childhood of humanity, where it had obtained its most beautiful development, not exert an eternal as an age that will never return

There have been criticisms of Marx's suggestion that the enduring appeal of Greek art may be due to the fact that human kind perennially enjoys the freshness and spontaneity of childhood, and that the Greeks were normal children. But Marx seems to be describing childhood in a biological sense as part of the ageing process. The argument from biology fails because it is reductive. Art is not a biological experience, socially mediated, it is in itself a mode of social production.

There are two kinds of positive answers which later marxists have presented; one being that Greek society possessed certain features superior to the European class societies which succeeded it. Its' art retained certain essential human values missing from feudalism and capitalism, where the commodity form is dominant (Lifshitz).⁵ Another is that the great art of any period inherently retains the ability to out-live its origins.

Arnold Hauser has written a very interesting paragraph in 'The Sociological Approach', part of which states that Marx stumbled upon the discrepancy between Genesis and validity in the Greek question:

The so called superstructure has a vitality of its own, that spiritual structures have both the capacity and the tendency to cast loose from their origins and go their own way. In other words they become the origin of new structures that develop according to inner laws of their own, which enjoy more than ephemeral validity. This phenomenon by which the cultural structures that were once vital tools and weapons, were means for mastering nature and organising society, gradually became formalised and neutralised and finally an end to themselves, is no doubt closely akin to the process

of reification. The spiritual structures with their independence, autonomy and immanence, their formal superhistorical values, confront us as so many 'alien natural forces' as Marx terms the institutions of capitalist society

By alien forces, Hauser here refers to art, treated as pure form 'a mere play of lines and tones without relevance to anything historical'. This he felt was closely connected with fetishism. And that which Marx felt to be akin to reification. The beginning of capitalism, the end of human innocence.

FOOTNOTES

- 1) From Schiller's Wallensteins Tod (Act II sc 2) in reference to Blochs quote 'Montage can now work wonders; in the old days it was only thoughts that could dwell side by side'
Lukacs essay 'Realism in the Balance', (Aesthetics and Politics), (Verso Publications), (1980) P. 35
- 2) Extract from essay 'The Author as Producer', Benjamin Walter.
- 3) Extract from essay 'Literature and Revolution', Leon Trotsky, in Modern Art and Modernism, (Harper and Row), (1982), p. 209
- 4) Extract from The Theory of Ideology, Janet Wolff, (The Social Production of Art), (Mac Millan Publishers LTD.) (1981) p. 50
- 5) The passage is in The Grundrisse (Marx 1973) pp. 110-111

CHAPTER II

Prometheus was a culture hero for the Greeks at a time when art had not yet been separated from the crafts. The Titan who at first sided with the Olympian gods, then proceeded to betray them by stealing their fire and bringing it as a gift to mankind. It is long before the crucial break which occurred during the fifteenth century between the arts and crafts, Greek mythology, prefigured the possibility of such a division in the legend of Daedalus, a later more specialised form of artist as hero. There is a sharp difference between these two early heroes of culture, and their respective myths symbolise two distinct phases in the history of early technology. The art of Prometheus is not for himself but, for mankind. He is the primal culture hero symbolising a time when the craft skills were for the first time beginning to produce a surplus. It is Herakles the hero of labour, who rescues Prometheus from the wrath of Zeus. With Daedalus we are in no doubt that his art was intended for himself: nobly born he hangs about courts, a conceptual artist, a happenings man, keen on novelties and innovation. He is the hero, both of a high art and a high technology. (1)

This legend has had repercussions in later theory in relation to art. The romantic notion of the artist, Nietzsche proposed, was that of the artists being an entity in themselves, divine-like in both their persona and their creation. The artists in their isolation are seen as outside society, marginal, eccentric and removed from the visual conditions of ordinary people by virtue of the gift of artistic genius. They were seen as martyrs, leaving 'the warm foothills of humanity, for the cold white peaks of art'. (Clive Bell)

The wealthy patron was insurance for the artist, someone who could guarantee a continued existence. During the quattrocento there was a very

dominant communal force evident in order to cope with extensive undertakings. Factory-like organisations were started with many assistants and apprentices. The artists studio often took on minor orders of a purely technical nature. From the records of Nerr di Bicci it is realised that there was a vast amount of hand craft goods produced. The emancipation of the artists from the guilds was not because of their heightened self-esteem, but results from the fact that their services were needed and had to be competed for. Their self respect was in a sense an expression of their market value.

The shift from patronage to market systems in the arts had begun in the eighteenth century. By the mid-nineteenth century, the decline of the patronage system and the conditions of saleability in a crowded competitive market had placed a new emphasis upon originality and innovation, and rapid fortune and fame were the reward for creative work. On the other hand, however, the uncertain response of a new distant mass middle-class public and sheer dependence on impersonal business considerations encouraged feelings of martyrdom among artists, writers and musicians as it rendered them impotent in a crass and hostile world. Earlier feelings of isolation and the gulf between artist and public had not loomed quite so large, before, but the the 1880s and '90s many were thrown back upon their own selves or their own crafts as a central object of their work with only an avant-guard circle to share it with.

It has been argued that it is necessary for the individual to be separate from society so they have a vantage point to see that society. There is the romantic view that the artist is a social outcast, starving in a garret. It is this notion of the artist and art, which makes both them, an object of curiosity, and the art product a possible fetish.

Yet if we look at the way art is presented there is a notion as to how art became, in most aspects, a collector's item to be revered rather than taken in hand. The museum or the art gallery, which incarcerate works, is embossed with an invisible notice screaming in their frigid forms do not touch objects segregated for scrutiny.

We have firm boundaries around the objects we have projected into being, as we have learned and decided to justify why we have set frames around paintings. By so doing we have made them into special objects. The objects are treated as self enclosures, as totalizations with a self fulfilment that raises them above all non-aesthetic human fabrication. In this way objects of art have become elite, unconcerned with these tangible elements.

Marx encountered the idea of fetishism in a critique of Christian art by the art historian, Grund. In contrast to the reflection of nature and beautiful human mores is Greek sculpture, the fetishistic character of religion is demonstrated by the fact that it worships the material aspect of things, endowing them with the qualities of the living being. This concept of fetishism is clearly one source of the later concept of alienation which would, in 1844, become central to Marx's political philosophy. In, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction',

Walter Benjamin speaks of the cult:

We know that the earliest art works originated in the service of a ritual. First the magical then the religious kind.....in other words the unique value of the 'authenticue' work of art has its basis in ritual. The location of its original use value

Benjamin at one stage, thought that instead of seeing the fetish of commodities as a material reality, it was subjectivised as an immediate fact of consciousness, present in an archaic collective ego.

Society's own pressure of economic aggrandisement has reduced qualitative distinctions to quantitative ones. Society has reduced the question of how much better one item is than another, to the question of how much more must be paid for it. If this is the case, is it not society that has corrupted and materialised the concept value? The function of connoisseurship in the arts has been reduced from the recognition of aesthetic loftiness in objects to investment counselling.

Marx realised that art went beyond physical necessity. The appeal was to the senses and not just to a philosophical, ethical or political intelligence, or an abstract sense of form. Marx insisted on the importance of aesthetic activity for the full education and emancipation of the human senses, made necessary by the capitalist debasement of human desires to the one of possessing or having

There is in art always an element of self purpose in which the creation of formal attractiveness is an exercise of a human capacity for playful material activity, the lack of which in modern capitalist labour is a prime measure of alienation

Marx felt the fetishes of commodity were one of the causes of alienation, of working class sensual deprivation and unhappiness under capitalist conditions. According to Marx, art has become to an important degree a form of alienated labour because of the reduction of it to near commodity status. Marx included the production of art in his analysis of the reversal of purposes involved in all estranged labour under modern capitalist conditions. He emphasised that the process of alienation was intensified by the spread of market conditions. Previously there had been some degree of shared interests, tastes and values between artist and audience. Now what connected them was depersonalised calculations.

However, Marx did not view art, even in the nineteenth century, entirely reduced to exchange values which reflected the pervasive alienation. Even with its halo removed, art was capable of diagnosing and pointing beyond alienation on social and economic conditions. The best art served cognitive functions of piercing through the ideological clouds which enshrouded social realities. By embodying this relative freedom from the more reflective of external circumstance, aesthetic creations could develop the desire for greater freedom from a dehumanising, alienating society.

Marx felt there was an increasing dehumanisation of human labour which, under the relation of production in capitalist society, had observed the real nature of work by its perverted form. In Grundrisse Marx writes of the elimination of labour's character of specificity under capitalism both for the worker and for capitalist, and he contrasts this with labour of craftsmen and guild members. Thus the work done by artists, musicians and writers not yet integrated into capitalist relations, becomes seen as an ideal form. In the division of labour, Vasquez speaks of it as progressively creating groups of people who did not need to engage in manual work directly, and so, increasingly dividing the tasks performed by those who did. In this we have the separated theory in which thought can be completely removed from immediate practical activity. One aspect of this is that, with the division of labour and the ability of the general population to be fed by the work of a section of that population, a group of people exist who do not need to engage in manual labour, and who live as thinkers and intellectuals. Thus the connection between material activity and consciousness has become at least indirect and tenuous.

From this moment onward consciousness can really flatter itself that it is something other than consciousness of existing practice, that it really represents something real, from now on consciousness is in a position to emancipate itself from the world and to proceed to the formation of pure theory. (2)

This points beyond art as alienated labour. It is almost anticipating a utopian state where, in non-alienated conditions, people have the ability and potential to act consciously and with the use of abstract thought and imagination to change nature and their surroundings.

It is a view taken by many marxist writers, but in his later writings Marx abandoned such notions as 'creative labour' and 'practical activity' seeing them to be unscientific abstractions based on a human essence which could not be sustained, and which was in the end as metaphysical as the Hegelians he was criticising.

With the division of labour it became obvious that although art was not in the same category as manual labour, it had never the less, the same dependency tendencies. Although in most ways it was a lot more difficult for the artist to gain ground in the relation of survival, is it any wonder that the idealistic notion of art had soon to make way for a realistic theory if not for ideology, then for survival. Thrown upon themselves in a largely capitalistic society, the theme of alienation was to crop up time and time again, if not in relation to the work they produced, then to the society that necessitated that production if not for self fulfilment then for an existence.

Does not the pianist as they produce music and satisfy our tonal sense, also produce that sense in some respects? The pianist stimulates production either by making us more active and lively individuals or by arousing a new need. But it also supplies a need for the material. But consumption also mediates production. Consumption creates the need for new production. (3)

The artist, no longer in the safety net of patronage, to a large degree has to see things in relation to his/her products and their consumption. The art work is dependent on the consumer in that without the act of

reception/consumption the cultural product is incomplete.

Consumption produces production....because a product becomes a real product only by being consumed for example a garment becomes a real garment only in the act of being worn; a house where no-one lives is in fact not a real house; thus the product, unlike a mere natural object proves itself to be, becomes, a product only through consumption

Instead of seeing consumption as passive, unaltered by what is produced, Marx defined it the active transformation of what is aesthetically and economically supplied. Vasquez, speaks again of the artist's independence of the market when he writes:

The artist is subject to the tastes, preferences, ideas and aesthetic notions of those who influence the market, in as much as he produces works of art destined for a market that absorbs them. The artist cannot fail to heed the exigencies of this market, they often effect the content as well as the form of a work of art thus placing limitations of the artist, stiling his creative potential, his individuality. (4)

Artists and cultural producers are faced with particular conditions or work affecting what kind of work they produce and the manner in which they can do this. In what is referred to as materialist aesthetics or production aesthetics, the emphasis is on the author as producer. The author is not conceived as an ideal, free creative spirit but precisely as someone with a given social and historical situation confronted by conditions of artistic production external to him/herself. The author is seen as producer, whose work it is to use the technical and material tools available and to fashion these into a literary work.

Literature like any other social practice employs determinate means of production to transform a determinate raw material into a specific product

The existing techniques of artistic production situate and confront the artist. The social relations of artistic production based on these

techniques and institutions also form the conditions of artistic production and the artist more adequately within the total social structure, and within their historical context.

This being so we can see aesthetics as part of a whole monopoly of production and consumption? It is not only a reality, but necessity, as part of the whole scheme which sets the ideological process. The individual needs also to have economic sustenance. Perhaps the theory is almost idealistic in that art is not realistically thought of as a fundamental necessity. There are few patrons, and not enough sponsorship to cover all artists. Given this, and the individual tastes of the consumers, it is difficult to satisfy everyone. Art is also directed towards the areas where finance is readily available. It has been said that it would not matter if art works cost only two pence, the poorer section of the community would use the money to buy something else, something more necessary. 'The care burdened man in need has no sense for the finest play'. (6)

Aesthetics is more or less at odds within itself. It is not a product which one uses, it may be thrown away and replaced. Art does have a use, and not in such a sphere of subjectivity where meaning is obscured, and not so elevated that the receiver cannot grasp its essential content.

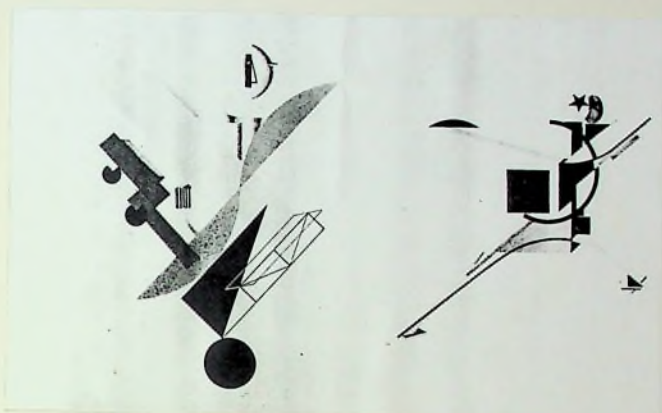
The previous two chapters have emphasised ideology to a large extent. It is the marxist belief that ideology influences society's present, in that it forms a conscious or unconscious base for our preference or certain elements of this society. This belief, is carried through to aesthetics.

In the next chapter. The theory of ideology will take a different perspective and challenged, within the perspective of marxist theory.

under the heading of social realism versus modernism. However it takes on a more complex debate that transcends this ostensible title. The ambiguity of Marx's theory is exposed here. However, there is also the bridging of this ambiguity, into something more definite. Not one theory, but many, equally rich in content and diversity.

FOOTNOTES

- 1) In reference to Greek mythology: Smith, Bernard, (Death of the Artist as a Hero), (Oxford University Press), p. 10
- 2) Marx and Engels: The German Ideology (London: Lawrence and Wishart), (1970), (p. 51,52)
- 3) Quote taken from Williams, Raymond, Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory, New Left Review, 1982, p. 6
- 4) Quote from Vazquez, Adolfo Sanchez, Art and Society: Essays in Marxist Aesthetics, (London: Merlin Press), (1973), p. 84
- 5) Quote from Eagle Ton Terry, "Marxist literary criticism" in Schiff (1977)
- 6) Quote from Aesthetics and Politics, essays of Bertold Brecht against Lukacs, Verso, 1980.





РОДИВШІЙСЯ



ВЪ ГЛАВНОЙ РОЛИ ПОЭТА **ИВАНА НОВА**
ВЕЛИЧАЙШІЙ ПОЭТЬ ФУТУРИСТЬ
ВЛАДИМІРЬ МАЯКОВСКІЙ

ИЗДАТЕЛЬСТВО
ИСКУССТВ
МОСКВА



L. N. Tolstoy in the Forest at Prayer.



CHAPTER III

Modernism and the Realist Traditions

Some tell us we're leaders
Puppets on strings, behind the mask of words
See what is said!
Let's have leaders great in little things -
Straighter than rails, simpler than bread
(Mayakovsky) (1)

In dealing with proletarian art, there was in the years preceding the Russian revolution in 1917, a value system, in direct accordance with the marxist doctrine of ideology. This ideology was to be the bone of contention in certain circles related to and concerned with aesthetics. Marx's own explanation for the endurance of Greek art, although not an orthodoxy, was subject to manipulation to keep the art of the past intact. At no point does marxism investigate the historical nature of art as a conceptual practice. The pretensions to a historical materialist analysis of art are confined to explaining individual works of art as forms and genres of art as the product of historical circumstance.

There was little time for a party programme on aesthetics after the Russian revolution, the economic side of affairs seeming more of a pressing concern. Even if there had been a party programme, Lenin and with him Trotsky felt that the cultural level of the masses was too low, for there to be a successful proletarian art. Lenin with his prosaic view stated that the party should worry about proletarian literature when there was a literate proletarian. There was also a dismissal of such a segregated art, the aim of the revolution was to have a classless society based on evolutionary means. The left wing writers known as proletcult were accused of being 'communist elitists' in their refusal to involve themselves with bourgeoisie art. The formalists who had come into being prior to the

revolution were also rejected, being involved in the structural basis of aim rather than on an ideological stance.

The revolution had provided a new audience for these writers and artists: the semi-literate masses whose objective needs demanded new forms of communication. They set up a group and journal L.E.F., Left Front of Arts. The group consisted of many elements, the futurists, constructivists, production workers, and independent groups, involving Sergei Gisenstein (film), El Lisitsky (designer) and Mayakovsky (writer and artist). (See Ills. 1, 2 and 3).

This new group of individuals brought a new level in understanding aesthetics. It was thought of as a production of a very difficult and complex kind, but a production none the less. Their presenting the familiar in an unfamiliar way (making strange) would, they hoped, make the audience see reality rather than recognising it. It came up against criticism from an influential journal entitled, 'Red Virgin Soil', its editor, Alexander Voronsky criticized the L.E.F. for reducing art to merely craft. He also held the view that art possessed special characteristics which separated it from more mundane activities. He saw in L.E.F. correctly a direct assault on such a view.

With their work L.E.F. brought into being a production element in art in his article 'How are Verses Made'. Mayakovsky dismissed the sentimentalist approach to poetry, writing of poetry, he dismisses those who wait patiently for inspiration feeling that:

The only method of producing it is to gaze skywards in search of inspiration while waiting for the celestial spirit of poetry to descend on the bald patch in the guise of a dove, a peacock or an ostrich

His loyalty to the revolution and to Lenin was obvious (see Ill. 4) . In his production of such poems as '150 million', Lenin spoke of this type of poetry as 'Hooligan communism', of this poem Trotsky too dismissed it stating that Mayakovsky wrote powerfully before aligning himself with the proletariat. But when he decided to swing round to the proletarian line and wrote '150 million' he suffered a most frightful rationalistic downfall, that, in his logic, he had outrun his creative condition. (2)

By 1930 Mayakovsky had died and the L.E.F Journal had dissolved, and its ideas officially censored. By 1934 'social realism' was seen as the official socialist art. It was a single perspective that all artists were to adapt, this perspective being determined by the nature of society. Aazhadanov began his domination of soviet cultural life as soon as the socialist realism was instilled. A dominant style soon emerged, hailing Fadeyevs 'Chadayevev' (1932) and Ostrovskys 'How the steel was tempered'. Both were autobiographical novels of psychological realism and both contributed to the model of the positive hero in Soviet fiction. The model in painting was Repin (see Ill. 5) the democratic artist of the Tsarist era in literature the heroes were Tolstoy and Gorky (see Ill. 6). Anything which was pessimistic and which distorted the novel of psychological realism was anti-humanist.

Revolutionary art is constructive
Revolutionary art is international
Revolutionary art is revolutionary!
(Herbert Read) (3)

The impact the Russian revolution was to have on German aesthetics was of the essence, especially in the emphasis ideology was to have on the work of art. That is, in determining whether the art work was in keeping with marxist theory or was one-dimensional and decadent.

In this German debate on culture four writers, George Lukacs, Berthold Brecht, Walter Benjamin and Theodo Adorno are most prominent. Although the main debate was that involving social realism versus modernism, there were of course untold discussions on other subjects of concern within the debate. Marx's own theory being thin and fragmentary opened the field of debate by his very ambiguity.

All four of these writers came to marxism only after having been sophisticated critics or practitioners of the modern arts, and after developing strong cultural aesthetic and social views. Lukacs, with his knowledge of 19th century culture, contributes an understanding of the differences between literary realism and modernism. Brecht, Benjamin and Adorno bring their understanding of cubist, symbolist, and expressionist aesthetics (respectively) to bear upon the more sympathetic marxist analysis of the arts in this century. There has been a rich diversity in their contrasting approaches in terms of the wide variety of marxist stands and modernist currents, which they reworked in the controversies between the four figures, revised or criticised by them. These contrasting relationships help to clarify not only the work but the relation between the four. There were many others involved in these debates. Herbert Marcuse, Karl Korsch, Ernst Bloch, Max Horkheimer, all of fundamental importance in interpreting the marxist cultural theory and developing it to the needs and concerns of the twentieth century.

George Lukacs first prompted the debate with his essays on social realism. Previous to Lukacs's aesthetic theory, he had been very much preoccupied with the political questions of that time. His return was thought to be by some a retreat from politics. His book 'History and Class Consciousness', was repudiated by the author written by the author. His self-criticism may have been prompted by the fact that if he was to retain an active position

in the communist movement, he had to abandon all 'direct opposition'.

With the rise of fascism Lukacs sought to establish a defetishised humanistic outlook in literature. Lukacs did not have the same determination as Zhdanov, the latter not holding the same thoughts on Hegel and humanism as Lukacs. Lukacs's rejection of modernism made this stance clear as he accused modern forms of dehumanising art.

Lukacs blamed the 1848 revolutions which brought about an ideological shift and a regression of classical realist tradition. The emergence of capitalism brought about a negative aspect of society and a fetishism of commodities. His main concern in regard to aesthetics was the necessary defetishisation of the reader's outlook, and the totality that should be inherent in all works. He felt that the modernist literature should have the same totalising aspect of the classical realist tradition, repudiating them for having, in his opinion, a fetishised view-point of daily life. Their conceptions of human existence were taken from a surface fetiched appearance. Modernization represented alienated subjectivity. Lukacs felt the realists had a totality, a completeness, a social truth in keeping with Lenin's theory of totality whereas the modernists, he felt, only touched the surface.

When the surface of life is only experienced immediately it remains opaque, fragmentary, chaotic and uncomprehended.

He spoke of a knack required in comprehending the modernist literature beyond the 'ordinary people'.

He contrasted the one-dimensionality of modernism to the inexhaustible diversity of realism. Because realist's work can be seen from so many levels, it can appeal to a broad cross-section of people, and prepare the way for revolutionary democracy. He spoke of words that modernists had

used in the past, in relation to history - 'plunder' 'useful legacies' - and the way in which they 'rummaged around at will', in what they considered to be a heap of lifeless objects. He writes of the marxist theory, that of 'appropriation and assimilation of all that was of value in the past era despite its origins' (4) and use it in defence of his theory.

Lukacs was to be challenged on his theories, however. Many of these were of a defensive nature, and did not provide a solution or an alternative method in their ideas for bridging the problems that were clearly on a loose footing.

Lukacs was in a strong position being on the editing board of 'Das Wart', since the fascist rise, and the entry of the popular front. Lukacs found his position one of great influence, in the attempt to defend left wing culture from the forces of totalitarian dominance. Brecht published some essays in his disagreement on Lukacs's theory. His more influential essays were however left unpublished until 1969, with the publishing of these critiques and Brecht's position in Marxist culture was revised. He is seen as an influential essayist, and his alternative interpretation of realism is valid in its productive approach which would be obvious in his works as an artist.

Brecht, in 1938, in an article published in "Das Wart" first attacked Lukacs's theory of totality, feeling that the way forward was not linked to the good old days but the bad new ones. He stated that realism in art, was not a matter of the work's conformity with any particular literary style of the past. For Brecht, the realist work is that which uses science and technique to expose the truth and inner nature of capitalism. True realism in his opinion was not an aesthetic option, it was a political and

philosophical vision of the world and the material struggles that divided it.

Brecht, being more influenced by theatre than literature, (which seemed to dominate Lukacs's thoughts), brought the argument within the realms of theatre. His sympathy towards experimentation within the realms of realism came under attack from the social realists. In relation to this concept is an essay written by Brecht entitled "Popularity and Realism" he states, 'Our concept of realism must be wide and political sovereign over all conventions'

Realism means: discovering the causal complexes of society/unmasking the prevailing view of things as the view of those who are in power/writing from the stand point of the class which offers the broadest solutions for the pressing difficulties in which human society is caught up and emphasise the element of development making possible the concrete, and making possible abstractions from it.

This concept is evident in his theatre plays such as 'The Three Penny Opera' and 'A Mans a Man'. He worked with the audience in disintegrating the tradition which thought of reading the audience only by the emotions. Zhdanovites attacked Brecht for his opposition to the positive hero, and his notion of epic theatre. Brecht felt that the classical plays merely brought about a fetishism in everyday life, for instance, classical theatre gives the impression that what happens on stage is a genuine incident from real life, and what occurs on stage reinforces the audience's unquestioning acceptance of the obvious character of the social environment.

Brecht's innovating techniques, involving technology in radical ways, were to become the subject of a book entitled, 'Understanding Brecht' (published

1973) by a renowned theorist/critic, Walter Benjamin. He also brought Brecht's position to the forefront in his essay 'The Author as a Producer', in which he brings to mind the new importance of technology in the art, which serve in a progressive way in bringing the masses closer to the art form.

'What matters therefore is the exemplary character of production, which is able first to induce other producers to produce, and second to put an improved apparatus at their disposal and this apparatus is better the more consumers it is able to turn into producers, that is readers or spectators into collaborators'.

In the context of The Epic Theatre which Brecht had adapted, Benjamin felt that Brecht's attempts to exploit the disintegration of 'Aura' caused by The Montage Techniques of the camera were invaluable for the structures of his plays to strive for a conscious critical reflection of the characteristics of the social environment.

Benjamin speaks of the classical work and the Aura that surrounds it becoming an object of contemplation rather than participation. The private response elicited by the classical work of art is undermined by the public context of the reception of The New Technical Art works. While the Painting and the novel are directed at an audience of particular isolated individuals, The Cinema Audience is a collection of individuals united by a common experience.

Benjamin's term 'Shock Experience', centres on society and its relation to capitalism, and society's orientation towards shock being continually confronted with the repetition of particular incidents. This repetition

cannot provide us with any insulation against shocks in the next event. Benjamin felt that only the art which uses the techniques of modern technology is able to produce an attitude appropriate to the need for surmounting shock. The montage technique of modern technical art exposes the audience to the shock impact of the particularity of the instance. The shocks delivered by the montage techniques of film, radio and newspaper have a distracting effect on the recipient. The use of montage techniques in this way prevent the viewer from attempting to insulate him/herself against the shock impact of the particular image. For Benjamin, the films shock impact activates the viewer's impatience to assume control over the next event. This theory could be said to identify with Brecht's notion of epic theatre, and the montage and technical modes of communication he uses. This form of communication, so different from Lukacs's interpretation of reality in which the dramatic theatre that supports the actor as hero, leaves the audience observing and having a sense of control over the situation. This form of historical dependence, is discussed by Benjamin, and he warns against the conservatism implicit in a view of history which attempts to use a knowledge of the past to supply a causal explanation. He brushed aside notions of creativity and genius, eternal value and mystery, and specifying what tendencies in art were conducive to a fascist sensibility.

Theodor Adorno rejected Benjamin's view of a total condemnation of The Traditional Work of Art, since for him it contained a positive truth as well. Adorno also rejected the 'Auratic' in art, feeling that it was an essential ingredient of popular culture. He uses Mickey Mouse against Benjamin's view of Aura. Despite their differences, both Benjamin and Adorno realised there was a deeper subjective level within Art than surface discussions, involving technical theory alone. As far as Lukacs and Brecht were concerned, a lot of their theories were based on theoretical

imperatives. Benjamin however, was drawn to the religious, mystical, and aspects, however vague they may appear in his texts. Adorno realised this, and pointed it out in his work on Charles Baudelaire and Paris, capital of of 19th century. Adorno was also concerned with a deeper psychological method of interpreting works, especially in his work with the Frankfurt School. This was a group of Germans, and Marxist intellectuals including Horkheimer and Marcuse, whose work included critiques of traditional philosophy and various studies of cultural phenomena.

Adorno and Horkheimer turned to Freud and Nietzsche in trying to understand the psychic source of self-surrender. Adorno drew upon Freud's notion of archaic and infantile regression in man's alleged passion for authority. He was also interested in Nietzsche's psychology of impotent fear when he examined the alleged need of the modern masses for order, certainty, compulsive work and familiar routine.

Freudian motifs of sadism and masochism were brought in to demonstrate how the culture industry controls the audience. The swift changes of fashion in popular music are explained as a process in which;

'Likes which have provoked revenge the moment the pressure is relaxed. They compensate for their guilt in having condoned the worthless by making fun of it.'

There is a continuous pessimistic approach in Adorno's work which could have been due to Benjamin's influence, and the rising influence of fascism is especially prevalent in Adorno's discussion of music. 'The Philosophy of Modern Music' discusses the music of Schoenberg and Stravinsky. Adorno maintained that Stravinsky's music was rooted in the social contract with reality and is akin to fascism in its preindividuality. Schoenberg is seen as reflecting social totality, but negatively, through negation. This

negation is only affective as long as the music does not resort to a 12 tone system. In Adorno's view rhythms were structurally equivalent to the authoritarianism of military marching music and jazz was seen to be Sado Maschistic. He stressed the Freudian analysis of masochistic dependence on jazz and mass culture.

The Frankfurt school's debate involved the fate of 'High Art' to that of the culture industry, even to the point of suggesting an abolition of symphony concerts on radio, as they felt it destroyed what was a protected realm removed from the society that suppressed it.

Adorno's pessimism grew as concentration camps began to emerge. As a result, Adorno rejected all realism, both Lukacs's and Brecht's. He felt Brecht's satires were in no way achieving the truth and compared his work to that of Charlie Chaplin's satire on Hitler (see Ill. 7). Brecht's portrayal of Hitler as a Chicago gangster could not for Adorno equate with the truth.

Adorno's influence grew in the Frankfurt Institute and he became director. The school's influence was obvious in later years in connection with the student revolts of 1963. Lukacs however, on returning from exile to Budapest, was held in suspicion by the Authorities and his books revised, or banned. Brecht enjoyed a greater freedom, and his work was given full co-operation with the Authorities in East Germany. Benjamin died, a victim of the totalitarian regime, and of his morbid fascination for death.

They form an intricate, and often complicated debate of what Lukacs described as not, a debate of social realism versus modernism, but the fate of art. The discussion in this last section is hardly a thorough study of these works of these for individuals. It could not possibly be described

in the capacity available in this discussion. How could that to which they dedicated their thoughts, to a such large extent, and which cost Benjamin his life, be brought to a conclusion in such an attenuated version. Adorno's thought is particularly valid in this respect, and in discussing the debate, 'Both are torn halves of an integral freedom to which they do not add up'.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 MAYAKOVSKY, Vladimir: Poems (Volume II): Raduga Publishers, 1987
- 2 TROTSKY, Leon: Quote from 'Literature and Revolution, 1982 Modernist Art and Modernism. Francina Francis, Charles Harrison, London: Harper and Row.
- 3 'What is Revolutionary Art', and essay by Herbert Read, Modernist Art and Modernism. Francina Francis, Charles Harrison, London: Harper and Row, 1982.
- 4 Lukacs essay 'Realism in Balance', 'Aesthetics and Politics', Verso: 1980.

CONCLUSION

As Lukacs had said, it was not social realism versus modernism that was in question, but the fate of art. Although these debates were in some cases brilliantly executed, there was a certain idealism apparent. Reality was however somewhat cruder. The 'Masses' are stressed so many times in these debates, but is it correct to speak of the 'Masses' or for that matter 'pedestrian vision' or 'ordinary' and 'normal'? Is this not an underestimation of the true nature of society: a crude categorising into slots of convenience. Are the aesthetics of 'High' and 'Low' culture or 'Fine Art' as in parallel to crafts. This categorisation is to some extent the reason for the divisions in society, and its appreciation of culture. It is an element of society's conditioning. Where theatres and gallery's are alien to some, soap operas and rock concerts are viewed with disdain by others, it is only through a gradual acquiring of knowledge that society can learn to understand and appreciate, and if this were so there would be less dismissal of culture as too 'High Brow' or 'Common'. Art is a borrowed moment in time, to be given back to society, but not on a silver platter. The choice should be the individuals, whether or not to accept or reject.

In stating some of the most dominant themes in relation to the German Debate, there is a question that must be asked: were these concepts really what the people needed, or was it only assumed that this was what they NEEDED? There is an undercurrent of elitism in almost all the essays, in my opinion. Heller states:

The actual needs of the privileged and the leaders of the moment are incarnations of 'universality' and 'socialization' and it is they who decide which of the needs of the class (that is the overwhelming majority of the population) are correct and which are incorrect. Thus the actual existing needs, of the majority are classified as 'false'. The

'representatives' of the social needs then take upon themselves to decide the needs of the majority and to pursue the alleged, unrecognised needs instead of people's real and actual needs

There is almost a patronising element in relation to 'The Worker'.

'I shall never forget how a worker looked at me, when I replied to his suggestion that I should add something to a chorus about the Soviet Union, that it would destroy the artistic form. He put his head on one side and smiled. A whole area of aesthetics collapsed because of this polite smile. The workers were not afraid to teach us and they were themselves not afraid to learn'

Brecht's referral to 'the worker' once more illustrates the idealism inherent in these debates, and the consequent alienation in true labour division style of the intellectual and the worker.

Perhaps it is unrealistic to think of a bridging of class differences. As well as the materialistic aspect, there is also the mental segregation, not a question of intelligence, but of chance and opportunity, to which the term mind over matter does not involve the material aspect, taking precedence, over the opportunity to 'better oneself'.

This does not mean a rejection of Marxist Aesthetics, for at least, the 'Elitism' of past theories have been questioned. And, in their questioning, alternative paths to aesthetic fulfilment have been offered it is up to society to lose, the binding segregation that has been with us since time began, or he shall inevitably fall into decay (as Trotsky suggested) at least in Aesthetic terms, as the Greek society that produces art works of timeless value, but also slavery.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- BENJAMIN, Walter (19): One Way Street.
- BERGER, John (1960): Permanent Red: Essays in Seeing, London: Methuen.
- BERGER, John (1964): Art and Revolution: Ernst Neizvestny and the Role of the Artist in the USSR, Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- BERGER, John (1972): Selected Essays and Articles, Pelican Books.
- BERGER, John (1972): Ways of Seeing, Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- BERGER, John (1985): White Bird, Chatto and Windus.
- DERRIDA, Jacques (1987): The Truth in Painting, University of Chicago Press.
- EAGLETON, Terry (1977): Marxist Literary Criticism.
- FREUD, Sigmund (1985): Freud and the Humanities, Gerald Duckworth.
- FROMM, Erich (1980): Beyond the Chains of Illusion: My Encounter with Marks and Freud: Sphere Books.
- FISCHER, Ernst (1963): The Necessity of Art: A Marxist Approach, Harmondsworth, Penguin.
- FISCHER, Ernst (1970): Marx in His Own Words: Allen Lane: Penguin.
- HADJINICOLAOU, Nicos (1978): Art History and Class Struggle, London: Pluto.
- JAMESON, Frederick (1977): Aesthetics and Politics, London: Verso.
- JOHNSON, Pauline (1984): Marxist Aesthetics: The Foundations within Everyday Life For an Enlightened Consciousness, Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- JUNG, C.J The Spirit in Man, Art and Literature.
- KRIEGER, Murray (1981): Arts on The Level: The Fall of the Elite object. University of Tennessee Press.
- MARCUSE, Herbert (1979): The Aesthetic Dimension: Toward a Critique of Marxist Aesthetics:- MacMillan Education.
- MARX, Karl (1973): Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy: Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.
- MAYAKOVSKY (1987): Plays, Articles, Essays. Volume Three: Raduga Publishers.

- MESZAROS, Istvan (1970): Marx's Theory of Alienation, London: Merlen Press.
- RAPHAEL, Max (1986): Proudhon, Marx, Picasso, London: Lawrence and Wishart.
- SMITH, Bernard (1988): Death of the Artist as Hero, Essays in History and Culture, Oxford University Press.
- TAYLOR, Roger (1978): Art an Enemy of the People: Harvester Press.
- TROTSKY, Leon (1970): On Literature and Art: Pathfinder Press.
- WILLIAMS, Raymond (1982): Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory: New Left Review.
- WOLFF, Janet (1983): Aesthetics and the Sociology of Art, George and Allen and Unwin Publishers Ltd.
- WOLFF, Janet : The Social Production of Art.