

notion of justice. Pugliese seeks to argue for justice for non-humans inevitably caught up or deliberately targeted in military and para-military violence. To do this he seeks to draw on various indigenous philosophies that offer an expanded non-anthropocentric sense of justice focused on 'all our relations' along with the concept of ecological justice. Here he invokes forms of earth jurisprudence that he argues are ascendent and that seemingly point a way to ecocentric law – that of Ecuador's constitutional rights of nature, Bolivia's Rights of Mother Earth / Pachamama framed in the constitution by Evo Morales' government, and the legal recognition of Te Urewera Park in New Zealand with its own 'legal personhood'. Such revisions to law are seen to extend legal systems and ethical obligations to the 'outlaws' of trees, soils, animals and mountains, with legal categories emanating from relationships rather than species. Pugliese

makes a lot of claims for these approaches, particularly around how they question property relations, but these discussions, though interesting, feel underdeveloped here. If mainstream environmental laws have been about regulating the use of the earth through property relations, and are therefore human activity-centred, then law is indeed an area where fundamental transformations in living need to be made, moving towards something more earth-centred. We need more discussions of how this can work when extended outside of indigenous groups that tend to initiate or inspire such earth-centred laws, but also a sense of realism that earth jurisprudence is only complimentary to political struggle.

This review's title is taken from Iman Annab's poem 'An Ode to a Palestinian Olympian Living Under Occupation' (2016)

Chris Wilbert

Protests against reality

John Molyneux, *The Dialectics of Art* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2020). 300pp., £17.99 pb., 978 1 64259 131 6

This book is a significant contribution to the Marxist reflection on art. This is not a 'Marxist history of art', but a Marxist book about art, composed of various essays, some of a general theoretical character, and others concrete studies of artists. It has the great advantage of avoiding the most frequent shortcomings of Marxist works in this area: the fetishisation of 'realism', leading to the rejection of 'non-realist' art; the mechanical economic reductionism; the explanation of art as a pure 'reflection' of existing social conditions; the exclusive interpretation of art works as the expression of 'class ideologies'.

How to define art? Ernst Gombrich tried to avoid the difficulty by simply explaining that 'art is what artists do'. Fine, but how do you define an artist? Gombrich's explanation is both circular and empty. Molyneux's proposal is: art is one of the forms of *non-alienated labour*, a 'free' labour whose works are characterised by the *unity of form and content*. This is a quite persuasive proposition, although it depends on the meaning of 'form' ...

Marx believed that 'capitalist production is hostile to art and poetry'. This provides, according to Molyneux,

an objective basis for the alliance between the Left and Art. Of course, some artists were reactionary – Italian futurists, Ezra Pound, to mention only a few – but most, in the last 200 years, have been left-leaning, from Gustave Courbet to Banksy.

How is one to judge art? The criteria most used in the Western tradition, by art historians, critics and artists themselves, have been: mimesis, skill, beauty, the sublime, morality, emotional power, realism, originality, critical force. Molyneux does not reject these criteria, but tries to show their limits. For instance, 'realism', which after Marx and Engels, was picked up by wide sections of the Left as *the* criterion cannot be seen as the only one, simply because this excludes too much great art, from Leonardo da Vinci to Pablo Picasso.

In a chapter discussing the dialectics of modernism, Molyneux quotes an argument by Trotsky: creative art always begins with a protest against reality, either conscious or unconscious, active or passive, optimistic or pessimistic; with official academic recognition, the rebellion is neutralised. However, soon afterwards, a fresh

revolt emerges, with a new generation: 'Through these stages passed classicism, romanticism, realism, naturalism, symbolism, impressionism, cubism, futurism'. Discussing the evolution of contemporary art from a similar perspective, Molyneux argues that, with the transformation of much contemporary art into the preserve of the super-rich, and the complicity of artists in this process, a 'fresh revolt' appeared, in the form of a *social turn* in modernism: the attempt at a socially-engaged art, moving out of the galleries, and joining protests, rallies and strikes.

Most of the book is dedicated not to general theoretical arguments, but to studies of specific artists, from Michelangelo to Picasso, Rembrandt to Emin. I'm afraid I cannot share Molyneux's interest, even enthusiasm, for some contemporary artists such as Emin and Damien Hirst (in his early works). And I'm a bit surprised that he makes only cursory references to surrealism, by far the most revolutionary movement in modern art. Some surrealist artists, such as Max Ernst or Joan Miro, are favourably mentioned, but others are summarily dismissed. This is the case with Salvador Dalí, 'certainly the most famous surrealist, but his art', Molyneux writes, 'despite its mimetic surface facility, within fairly naturalist representation (of "surrealistic" fantasy scenes), says little or nothing of power or insight about mid-twentieth-century social relations. Essentially, it is superficial sensationalism'. I disagree. During his first years – before becoming, as Breton said, 'Avida Dollars' – Salvador Dalí produced some extraordinary paintings, which belong to the most impressive documents of the surrealist imagination. He was also the co-author, with Luis Buñuel, of the picture *L'Age d'Or* (1930), a radically subversive film, a burning protest against all prevailing social relations, which was outlawed, as a danger to public order, for 50 years by the French authorities. If there is a modern artist to whom the qualification of 'naturalist sensationalism' applies, it is not Dalí, but Damien Hirst.

Nevertheless, Molyneux has a beautiful chapter on Rembrandt, discussing his relation to the Dutch revolution of the seventeenth century and to bourgeois individualism: his self-portraits are one of the wonders of world culture in their visual representation of the individual 'soul'. Moreover, his humanist viewpoint and his empathy with the outcasts and outsiders of Dutch society – gypsies, beggars, Jews – clash with bourgeois values.

The best chapter of the book is, I believe, on 'Michelangelo and Human Emancipation'. It is an outstanding essay, a brilliant excursion in Marxist art history, with few equivalents. Michelangelo belongs to the very small band of individuals – Aristotle, Shakespeare, Goethe, Mozart – who seem to tower over history. How to explain this exalted standing, at the summit of human achievement? Ancient art historians, such as Vasari, refer to his 'divine inspiration'. A secular version of this argument can be found in Gombrich: Michelangelo is a genius, and 'genius cannot be explained'. Trying to provide a more substantial argument, critics, from Vasari to Gombrich, refer to Michelangelo's mimetic skill, the astonishing realism of his paintings. Molyneux rightly criticises this interpretation: was Michelangelo really 'imitating' nature or 'representing reality'? In fact, his art is not at all naturalistic: a work like the Sistine Chapel fresco, *The Creation of Adam*, is very far from any 'reality'. To understand the meaning of his art, it is necessary to refer to its historical context. The Italian Renaissance, an early stage in the rise of European capitalism, was a huge step forward in the emancipation of the human personality. As Engels emphasised, 'Renaissance man' had a fullness of character, which was lost with the servitude of the capitalist division of labour. Michelangelo's art, in works like the David sculpture in Florence or *The Creation of Adam* at the Vatican, express this more clearly, more powerfully and more beautifully than perhaps any other artist in European history. Of course, there is no mechanical relation between his art and the social and economic conditions of his time, as, for example, the Althusserian art historian Nicos Hadjinicolaou seemed to believe; the artist actively responds to deep social forces by developing a personal vision, based on his unique experience. This is an experience which includes, for Michelangelo, a strong homoerotic component, obvious in his paintings, but generally ignored by art historians.

Discussing the Sistine Chapel frescos, Molyneux contrasts the humanist optimism of the ceiling, *The Creation of Adam*, with the pessimism and anguish of the wall: *The Last Judgement*. As Arnold Hauser pointed out, this last piece is 'a picture of bewilderment and despair, no longer "beautiful"'. How to explain the tragic atmosphere of this painting, and of all of Michelangelo's artworks that follow? What happened between the ceiling (1508-12) and the wall (1535-41)? In 1533 the Medicis returned

to power, bringing an end to the Republic of Florence, which had the active sympathies of Michelangelo, and inaugurating 200 years of hereditary Medici rule. That was the end of the Renaissance dream of human liberty in Florence. Although Michelangelo depended on commissions from the Medicis and the Pope for his work, he was often in conflict with them.

Among Michelangelo's late works figure the mysteri-

ous 'slaves' sculptures, considered by many art historians to be 'unfinished'. Molyneux believes that the artist, in conscious or unconscious ways, created four gigantic figures struggling for freedom from the stone, but still held captive by it: a powerful statement about human history and the struggle for human emancipation as a whole. Are we not today, five hundred years later, still fighting for freedom, still gripped by the rock of class society?

Michael Löwy

Throwing rocks

Avery F. Gordon, *The Hawthorn Archive: Letters from the Utopian Margins* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2018). 472pp., £87.00 hb., £33.00 pb., 978 0 82327 631 8 hb., 978 0 82327 632 5 pb.

In discussing with Avery F. Gordon his video installation, *The Beginning. Living Figures Dying* (2013), a project focused 'on the relationship between actors and sculpture in film', the German artist Clemens von Wedemeyer tells of the myth of Deucalion and his wife Pyrrha and their survival from the wrath of Zeus. Upon hearing the myth Avery F. Gordon concludes: 'at the end, we return to the beginning, to a story about the origin of human life from stone, and to what, at this point in our history, we are capable of believing in.' In order to understand why Gordon reaches such a conclusion upon hearing this myth it is pertinent to turn to the myth itself.

Deucalion and Pyrrha were the only survivors of the flood that the capricious Zeus instigated for no reason other than his wish to punish humanity. The myth originally narrated by Ovid in Book I of the *Metamorphoses* talks of these two survivors' loneliness, their desire to renew humanity and their unique interpretation of the Oracle of Themis, which advised them 'to veil their heads and cast their great mother's bones behind them if they wanted to renew humanity'. Deucalion and Pyrrha decided it would be hubristic to throw their mother's bones backwards so instead they cast stones, thereby creatively interpreting the reference to their mother's bones as corresponding to mother earth and stones respectively. Deucalion's stones gave birth to men, Pyrrha's to women. The myth reminds us, as Gordon points out, that humanity is inextricably linked to earth, and that it is in our hands to acknowledge this connection, to ensure that

we don't drive ourselves to extinction by encouraging ecological catastrophe.

This archive is just one example of the myriad materials – letters, photographs, art, recipes – that Gordon interpretively gives us in *The Hawthorn Archive*, and it epitomises its contents. As Gordon informs us, *The Hawthorn Archive* borrows its name 'from the forest tree Hawthorn which is 'known for its longevity' and 'favoured by witches and those internationalists who celebrate the first of May'. The rationale for having the name of a tree heading the book is not made explicit by Gordon. We can only speculate that the longevity of the tree, and its being favoured by radicals, gives rise to hope for an enduring and radical archive.

Whilst Gordon is a sociologist by training, this book diverts from standard sociological writings about utopia, which often either study *existing* utopian communities or offer methodological advice on how to engage with the concept of utopia. Instead, Gordon offers an innovative practice-based approach, to *create* a utopian archive out of the unrealised dreams of those who struggled and are still struggling for freedom and equality. Indeed, like Deucalion and Pyrrha who recreated the world by throwing a stone backwards, Gordon (re)creates a new way of seeing utopia. She throws a stone at traditional understandings of utopia received from Thomas More, Ernst Bloch, Ursula Le Guin and others, not as an act of violence but as an act of creation, creating anew a vision of utopia as 'a collective life without misery, deadly inequalities,