As is well known, Marxist art history (a.k.a. "radical," or "critical" art history) in the U.S. received a significant boost with the arrival of TJ Clark and other mostly English and German scholars in Los Angeles in the early 1970s. But what is surprising is that this new scholarship did not arise in the context of a movement for social change, but a world-historical failure and what I would call, (after Russell Jacoby), a "dialectic of defeat." This lecture will be a tale of two academic coasts, and an examination of the social, political, economic and biographic factors that led to the creation and near-destruction of a mode of critical analysis essential for understanding the visual world and the current global crisis.