1 / Policies

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1.1 / Traditional versus Modern Art

/1 STRUCTURAL CONFLICT

/1.1 MODERNIZATION AND TRADITION

/1.1.1 DECLINING SELF-ADJUSTMENT

During the two centuries before the French Revolution, the so-called *querelle des anciens et modernes* (*struggle between ancients and moderns*) as a venue for the competition between what counted for traditional and modern art in France and England had as a rule been adjudicated within a professionally organized artistic culture that was structurally all-embracing, no matter how politically conflictive and ideologically diverse. This artistic culture was conditioned to regulate itself: economically through market competition based on quality and fashion, socially through diversified offerings of art production to clienteles of different classes, and politically through corporative art institutions supervised by state governments. It was diverse enough to accommodate competing trends of change. As a result, modernization in art and architecture worked in tandem with other areas of culture, whose scientific and technological advances artistic culture stood ready to incorporate into its own professional development. However, it was limited by an admiration for the past that it often strove to emulate, thus preventing it from pursuing any straightforward ideal of progress. It vacillated between monumentality and modernization.

During the 19th century, professional parameters of artistic competition as a transitional adjustment, to be resolved according to an emerging correspondence between developmental logic and changing demand, became ever less inclusive. Competing artistic interests tended to obviate them, seeking alternative venues for success and posturing as unaccountable 'avant-gardes.' By the end of the century, artistic culture had ceased to be self-adjusting. It was no longer capable of resolving the conflictive processes of professional innovation, just as the underlying society was no longer capable of abiding by established social and political institutions in the effort to resolve the conflicts brought on by economic modernization. Artistic innovation styled itself as 'revolutionary.' Now the "quarrel between ancients and moderns" turned into the "struggle for art," as one early 20th-century controversy in Germany was called, that is, into a lasting structural antagonism of incompatible positions and convictions. Artistic culture came to be perceived, over and above

professional and aesthetic competition, as an extension of social conflicts enacted in the public sphere.

The structural problem with this development was that it also created a permanent asymmetry between majority and minority positions, because emancipation from traditional artistic culture was spearheaded by hard-headed individuals who insisted on self-empowerment against collective regulation, priding themselves of their minority status as a refusal to conform. When toward the end of the nineteenth century small groups of artists, defying established professional corporations, organized in interest groups for business, they often called themselves 'secessions,' by analogy to the walk-out of the Roman *plebs* from aristocratic government, with the difference that they were the opposite of a majority. The 'German Artists League' (*Deutscher Künstlerbund*), an association of such groups, was founded in 1904, to "guarantee an individual talent's possibility to follow its artistic conscience unmolested and to aid it in its struggle against the multitude for its rightful place. For it is clear that in art only the exception is of value," in the words of its program, written by Count Harry Kessler.(1)

/1.1.2 UPPER MIDDLE-CLASS ART POLICIES

It was the upper middle-class that started to give a political voice to this kind of artists' professional emancipation. Since the 19th century, as part of its drive for political empowerment, it had drawn artistic culture into the public sphere of principled debate, transforming competition from a bid for professional acceptance into a manifestation of irreconcilable cultural claims. Artistic culture was thereby turned into a representative venue for the antagonism between state government and upper middle-class political emancipation. The altercation about tradition versus innovation in the arts turned into a battlefield between mutually hostile ideologies. The underlying struggles about cultural policy at large were ultimately rooted in class conflict. As a result of the attendant institutional clashes and exasperated press campaigns, the challenge to tradition in the arts resonated with implicit calls for political change. "The principle that brought the Artists' League into being: to protect and further individualism in art [...] will also have to be accepted in the political life of the nation," demanded Count Kessler in his program.(2)

Such efforts, however, were not aimed at a 'secession'—that is, a walkout—of art from state culture into a culture of privacy, but at making inroads into the direction and administration of cultural policy on behalf of the upper middle-class. Even absent a fully-fledged political democracy, they were part of a quest for greater influence on state policy regulating museums, academies and other art institutions. Therefore, in the period between 1871 and 1914, the contest between traditional and modern art took the form of a negotiated inclusion of modern art into government-sanctioned artistic culture. This process worked to temper modern art's provocative social postures,

even at their most aggressive, as a measure of its professional success, but also, in reverse, the defensive hostility of its opponents. In 1874, for example, impressionist painter Claude Monet and his colleagues called their newly-founded private exhibition group *les intransigeants*, adapted from the name of an earlier Spanish leftist opposition party.[3] Forty-four years later, Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau offered a set of Monet's *Water Lilies* to the nation in celebration of France's victory in World War I.

That there was no broad embrace of modern art by the organized working-class, despite leftist sympathies harbored by many modern artists, made its class limitation a political risk for the future. Insistent outreach efforts vis-à-vis leftist organizations or journals by the self-consolidating modern art establishment tried to mitigate this disparity with limited success. Commenting on the modern art scene in his Vienna exile, clandestine Bolshevik leader Lev Trotsky wrote as early as 1913: "Bourgeois society showed its strength throughout long periods of history in the fact that, combining repression and encouragement, boycott and flattery, it was able to control and assimilate every 'rebel' movement in art and raise it to the level of official 'recognition.'"[4] Every time such accommodation was attained, Trotsky went on to write, "from the left wing of the academic school or below it—i.e. from the ranks of a new generation of bohemian artists—a fresher revolt would surge up to attain in its turn, after a decent interval, the steps of the academy. [...] Nevertheless, the union of art and the bourgeoisie remained stable, even if not happy."

/ 1.1.3 THE CRISIS OF THE DEPRESSION

For five or six years after the First World War, modern art enjoyed a short-term rise on opposite extremes of the European geopolitical spectrum. On the flourishing French art market, flush with reparations money, it was made fashionable as the art of the rich. The first government of the early Bolshevik state vainly offered it to the working-class as the art of revolution. The changing presentation of Vladimir Tatlin's Monument to the Third International spans this early phase.[5] In the summer of 1920, the artist re-dedicated his model of December 1919, then simply titled Monument to the Bolshevik Revolution, to the Comintern on the occasion of that body's Second Congress, which hailed the advancing Soviet attack on Poland. Three years after the attack had failed and other foreign setbacks had made the Comintern shelve its plans for world revolution, Education Commissar Anatoly Lunacharsky and War Commissar Lev Trotsky repudiated the monument. In 1923, the Bauhaus show in Weimar featured it as a model of constructivist design. In 1925, Tatlin crafted a streamlined replica for the Paris World Exposition of decorative art.

During the latter part of the twenties, attention to commercial markets for architecture and product design sought to align modern art with industrial modernization. With such claims to a social base expanded beyond its collectors' clientele, modern

art lent itself to celebrating the perceived beauty of mechanized efficiency. It strove to turn the sparse surface of technology into an aesthetic setting. The Depression put a stop to this or any other kind of market expansion on the part of modern art, as governments endeavored to redress unemployment with make-work programs that cut back on labor-saving equipment. As a result, the aesthetics of mechanization lost much of its economic reason, and the stylish appeal of modern art in visual culture at large began to fade. Eventually, the Depression deprived art of whatever observance—traditional or modern—of much of its market, institutional or private. When, as a result, modern artists started to seek state support, they exposed themselves to the politics of state intervention, whereby European governments sought to overcome the slump. Only democratic France, and less so Fascist Italy, gave them a small chance.

As governments took political management of national economies into their hands, they embarked on art policies designed to reactivate the customary functions of traditional art for asserting political stability and social cohesion. They turned to traditionally-minded artists whose work had proven their public appeal, even without committing them to professing any political allegiance. Still, in the three totalitarian states, numerous artists, both traditional and modern, initially tried to outdo one another with expeditious ideological professions. Soon, however, the populist premises underlying the preferences of all governments for traditional art were confirmed by its majority acceptance. If modern artists did not adapt their work, they relapsed to an outsider status. In the three totalitarian states, thorough reorganizations of artistic culture within four years or less made their traditionalist preference official. Only in democratic France did the constitutional continuity of even-handed art policy allow artistic culture to persist in a protracted competition that gave modern art a fighting chance against traditionalist predominance.

/1.2 POLITICAL STABILIZATION AND SOCIAL EMANCIPATION

/1.2.1 ENDURING DISPARITY

Counteracting traditional art with an ever-growing self-assurance was an art based on the free market rather than on state guidance or support. It was advanced by independent-minded artists and their associated dealers, writers and collectors, who made their opposition to 'official' standards the hallmark of an alternative aesthetics expressing social independence. This art was championed as 'modern,' not because it claimed to mirror the relentless modernization of capitalist economy and society, but because it promised to redeem the attendant emancipation of the individual, to a point of a principled nonconformity with any kind of prescriptive culture, not only of aesthetic preference, but of political judgment. Incessant repudiations of traditional art orchestrated the market ascendancy of modern art in the public sphere. They often

claimed to go beyond aesthetic or professional concerns toward a fundamentalist cultural critique. In Germany, the writings of Friedrich Nietzsche—himself no advocate of modern art—provided one of the most influential platforms for this posture.

As a result of the structural bifurcation sketched out above, the history of European art from the late 19th century through the end of the Second World War was conditioned by an enduring disparity between two antagonistic venues of artistic culture, styled traditional and modern respectively. It became a two-track art history that pitted both venues against one another rather than recognizing them as complementary. Defenders of modern art used to represent this disparity as a mere time lag in its advance towards cultural preeminence by analogy to modernization in general. However, it never displaced traditional art at all. All the more defiantly was it fashioned as the art of the epoch. It was written up in one-sided accounts that dismissed, or simply ignored, traditional art's persistence. That eventually modern art should have prevailed in the artistic cultures of most capitalist societies is the outcome of a protracted contest, fought out in recurrent conflicts of cultural policy. This contest came to a head in the political confrontation of the arts during the decade of the Depression, because it became part of the conflict between totalitarianism and democracy.

Until the end of the Depression, state governments of whatever constitutional stripe pursued cultural policies promoting traditional art as a majority culture of political stabilization. A historic continuity of art, even reaching back to pre-modern times, helped to strengthen the legitimacy of such policies, provided they claimed to address contemporary social concerns. State guidance of the arts filling in for dried-up markets was not confined to patronage of public buildings and art collections. It extended to institutional systems of art education, professional organization of artists, public competitions and awards, and explicit or implicit codes of censorship. As a component of public policy, it had been drawn into the political upheavals following the First World War. While the Fascist and National Socialist regimes, their capitalist art markets intact, assiduously professed the freedom of the arts from state control, the Bolshevik regime, its art production increasingly regulated by the Party, made no bones about artists' obligation to follow instructions. Yet all three totalitarian states empowered themselves to foster an aesthetics of public order.

/1.2.2 ART OF DISSENT

Turning their backs to any consolidated tradition from the past, modern artists and their advocates took to claiming either a radical enhancement of subjective expression that ignored the common codes of social behavior, or a quasi-anthropological affinity with the arts from outside the borders of European culture and beyond the timeline of European history. Modern artists' resolve to ignore traditional norms entailed an aesthetic self-validation of their work, unresponsive to social expectations,

which culminated in the ideal of autonomy, of art for art's sake. Their minority audiences from the upper middle-class welcomed such self-fulfilling standards as an aesthetic validation of their own dissent from social conventions. Since the late 19th century, some of the most celebrated modern artists such as Vincent van Gogh and Edvard Munch led a socially marginalized existence whose well-publicized biographical specifics added to their renown. Their self-claimed license for autobiographical expression came to be appreciated as an aesthetic paradigm of social nonconformity.

In rejecting the standards of academies, patronage systems, and juried exhibitions, modern artists disputed the authority of state art institutions to decide artistic merit. Their conservative opponents retaliated by branding their professional independence as a challenge to the social order. Discontented segments of society, on the other hand, sympathized with them for just this reason. Foremost among those segments was the upper middle-class, the so-called bourgeoisie, principal sponsor of modern art until the First World War. Pushing for inclusion of modern art in state-run exhibitions and public museums pertained to its bid for more political influence on semi-autocratic or conservative governments which failed to honor their economic achievements with a due share in the conduct of politics. Often the partisanship of upper middle-class circles for modern art landed them in a strained political position, since the last thing they aspired to was an upset of the political order. Against an all too literal understanding of the term 'revolution' in which modern artists and their advocates tended to indulge, they felt obliged to assert their patriotic loyalty.

When after the First World War the political influence of the upper middle-class was in decline, the culture of modern art found itself in need of expanding its social base. With its strengthened foothold in some state art institutions, it started to promote itself as an aesthetic corollary of post-war reconstruction and productive technology, to the point of advancing hypothetical precepts for society at large. However, in the conflict-ridden social and political environment of post-war Europe, such categorical postures never attained enough of a political backing to be significantly implemented. Instead, their utopian rhetoric served to draw modern art into an increasingly overheated public culture of political strife. The claims of modern art for social change remained confined to ideology. No matter how emphatically the culture of modern art asserted its relevancy for all people, it could never shed its upper middle-class cachet. Its tentative initiatives of outreach to the working-class were rarely honored by political agencies of the Left. At the start of the Depression, its increased prominence in the public sphere could not conceal the fact that its class base had not significantly expanded.

/1.2.3 DEPRESSION SHOWDOWN

During the Depression, the long-term conflict between traditional and modern art moved to historic center-stage of public politics. It blew up in an all-pervasive

political confrontation of the arts that ran in tandem with the mounting conflicts between the European states representing four antagonistic political systems, all the way to the start of World War II. In a lecture entitled "Political Position of Today's Art," delivered on April 1, 1935, to a group of writers and artists in Prague calling itself "Left Front,"[6] surrealist writer André Breton evoked imaginary "banners that have abruptly been set up to fly all over Europe, opposing to a national front, the last battle formation of capitalism, a common or social front, a united front or a red front [...]."[7] No matter how vaguely Breton drew the fault lines of the confrontation, his conclusion "that we live in an epoch in which man belongs to himself less than ever, in which he is held responsible for the totality of his acts, no longer before a single conscience, his own, but before the collective conscience of all," declared the arts to be a matter of political conscience.

For Breton, the political conscience now required from artists pertained to the self-assertion, or self-defense, of their creative freedom under mounting political pressure. But he was wrong in positioning artistic freedom, which he understood as the freedom of modern art, schematically on the left. Already one year later, he was disabused of this self-delusion. Rather, the confrontation was enacted on the antagonism between traditional and modern art and ran across all political systems in such a searing fashion that the decade of 1929-1939 came to mark an upset in the balance between the two. It compromised traditional art as a medium of oppression and revalidated modern art as one of freedom. However, such a polarity was never defined in terms of contemporary politics. The fallacy of the confrontation was that it never properly addressed the relationship of modern art to democracy. Only after the hiatus of World War II was the ascendancy of modern art from a minority culture of independence or dissent to a representative culture of political democracy accomplished, and modern art displaced traditional art in that capacity.

At the start of the Depression, the public ascendancy of modern art seemed to be stalled. In the capitalist democracies of Germany and France, it had lost its connection with the ideal of technological modernization. The Fascist regime had curbed it into propaganda service, and the Soviet regime had stripped it of its revolutionary credentials. At the end of the decade, by contrast, modern art had regained some of its public prominence through ideological alignments with the Popular Front governments of France and Spain, with the revolutionary postures—anarchist or communist—of the Surrealist movement, and with the manifest regime critique advanced by German artists driven into exile. This ideological rebound of modern art was due to its inherent dynamics of dissent from political order which was now turning into oppression. In Germany it was clandestine, and in the Soviet Union, where state control was even more oppressive, it never occurred. In France, on the other hand, democracy appeared too weak to encourage any ideological alignment.

/1.3 THE AVANT-GARDE IDEAL

/1.3.1 FROM LEADERSHIP TO NONCONFORMITY

The key term of the two-track history of art was that of the avant-garde, detached from its broader significance originating in the political culture of the French Revolution. In the writings of Saint-Simon and his followers, around 1825, the term became crucial for the social advance of culture in general. In the culture of modern art it was narrowed down to denote an unaccountable leadership of individuals. In Saint-Simon's maximum extension of the term, 'avant-garde' denoted all "men of imagination," a trail-blazing expert group of intellectuals, including but not limited to artists, who were professionally qualified to chart the progress of society, not through idiosyncratic visions of their own, but by implementing Saint-Simon's projection of utopian socialism. Such individuals who dared to buck convention were expected to prevail as the future elites of a reformed society, at which time their dissent from the status quo would subside. Saint-Simon and his followers never specified what this perspective meant for the arts in particular. For over fifty years, 'avant-garde' remained a generic claim for cultural alternatives.

Only in the last two decades of the 19th century did non-conformist artists seek and find sympathetic audiences who conceived of themselves as social minorities in their radical dissent from the dominant artistic culture and its sustaining social order. Although they rarely used the term 'avant-garde,' they embodied it in their social attitude, unconcerned about its underlying social mission. Now modern art became linked to alternative lifestyles labeled with the catchwords 'Decadence' or 'Bohème'. Even though its adherents predicted that artistic avant-gardes would eventually attain general acceptance, it was their incompatibility with current social norms which made them attractive to middle-class clienteles uneasy about the codes of their own social life. Diverging from Saint-Simon's premise that avant-gardes, as they turned into elites, were dynamic movers of society at large, some modern artists' disregard for extant society came to be rated as unbridgeable. With his phrase "One has to be absolutely modern" at the end of his book *A Season in Hell* of 1873,[8] Arthur Rimbaud seemed to demand nothing less than a renunciation of culture for the sake of art.

It was in the self-assurance of their avant-garde posture that before World War I some modern artists sympathized, or even associated, with leftist or anarchist movements questioning the social order. At times, they found themselves politically compromised against their own intent since they had to face the original, that is, political, version of avant-garde leadership, which put artistic autonomy at risk. Marx had addressed the inherent contradiction in his political critique of the Bohème and its affinity to what he styled as the "Proletariat in Rags" (*Lumpenproletariat*), an idiosyncratic

counterculture of disenfranchised and impoverished segments of society that lacked class-consciousness, the precondition for the formation of political will, as it was cultivated in the organized working-class. Different from Marx, Vladimir Ilyitch Lenin, in his *What is to Be Done* of 1902, argued for a self-empowerment of his Bolsheviks as the proletariat's avant-garde, a minority of determined intellectuals authorized to act on behalf of the uneducated masses. Left-leaning modern artists in the Soviet Union believed to be included in this kind of avant-garde, though at their peril.

/1.3.2 AESTHETIC TRANSPOSITION

Once modern artists shunned the institutions meant to anchor art in a social order where they found no place, they converted the transition from artistic avant-gardes to social elites envisaged by Saint-Simon into a non-representative, self-confirming leadership postures. They would devise hypothetical social orders of their own design as settings for their claims to individual authority. In 1903, Russian painter Vasily Kandinsky, living on inherited wealth, turned down a professorship at the School of Arts and Crafts at Düsseldorf in 1910, and instead chose to promote his art from within two tiny Munich artists' groups attached to private galleries. By 1914, he was recognized by some as Germany's foremost expressionist painter solely on his own achievement. Concurrently, in his book *On the Spiritual in Art* of 1912, Kandinsky coined a graphic metaphor for the avant-garde ideal. It was a steadily rising triangle with artists at its tip, so as to position art as he saw it at the apex of mankind's ascent toward spiritual fulfillment. At this point, he professed to expect, the aspirations of all political, social, and cultural initiatives would concur with the artist's vision.

Once the avant-garde posture of modern artists had gained a limited but growing acceptance and marketability, the structural transition from avant-gardes to elites envisaged by Saint-Simon seemed in reach, albeit not for society at large, but merely for a minority culture which seemed to champion social dissent, even though few of its participants if any were leading a marginalized existence. This minority culture, complete with elite artists of its own, was backed by upper-middle-class clienteles, first on the market, and then within public museums and institutions, where officials from that class advanced to leading posts. Here the avant-garde defiance of traditional art was upped into its rejection as no longer adequate to modern life. Thus, the ideal of an artistic avant-garde materialized within the circumscribed realm of an alternative culture without any social, let alone political, accountability. Due to the structural aptness of closely-knit upper middle-class elites for self-entitlement, it tended to assert its own exclusive standing against the traditional mainstream. The ensuing stalemates conditioned the two-track history of 20th century art.

After the First World War, and throughout the decade to follow, the avant-garde's hypothetical challenge to the social status quo was accommodated in a public

culture of mutual provocation. This culture licensed modern artists, exempt from any significant political affiliation, to dramatize their nonconformity as a spectacle of social or political critique. The Futurist manifesto of 1909, the Dadaist performance culture of 1917-1920, and the Surrealist manifesto of 1924, all generated from within the art market and the literary scene, marked high points of an ever more vitriolic attack culture, eager to scandalize public opinion with its denunciations, a culture which could not be stopped by ever-recurring interference on the part of the authorities. This culture of provocation was bound to propel modern artists beholden to avant-garde ambitions into venues of political conflict. While the Futurists were informed by anarchist ideologies with little political resonance, the Dadaists, and even more so the Surrealists, professed 'revolutionary' Communism with so much fanfare that communist parties disowned them, mindful of their working-class constituencies.

/1.3.3 POST-WAR RISE AND FALL

Following the First World War, modern art's short-lived embrace by the Soviet regime, as well as its involvement in various political upheavals pervading Western European democracies, expanded its public resonance beyond the upper middle-class that had promoted its pre-war ascendancy. From the public sphere of artistic culture, it entered the political arena of ideological debate. This ideological expansion was related to the weakening of post-war democratic governments, which had culminated in the Bolshevik and Fascist takeovers of October 1917 and October 1922 respectively, and in the precarious start of the Weimar Republic since November 1918. The 'revolutionary' posture of modern artists grew louder in response to those governments' vacillating politics. Artists such as Vladimir Tatlin, Felipe Tomaso Marinetti, or Walter Gropius, backed up by their circles of adherents, but uneasy with the political parties of their choice, reasserted the customary avant-garde ambitions for art to transcend into 'life' with a vengeance. On the strength of their own convictions, they called for principled changes of state and society.

Modern artists placed in charge of early Soviet art institutions construed themselves by analogy to Lenin's doctrine of a political avant-garde. Aligned with, but not subject to, party leadership, they strove for what painter and writer Nikolai Punin called a "dictatorship of the minority" with "muscles strong enough to march in step with the working-class."(9) Under Marinetti's personal leadership, Italian Futurists likewise fancied themselves as an artistic pendant to, rather than a professional segment of, Mussolini's Fascist Party, vacillating between demonstrations of allegiance and reassertions of independence or even temporary breaks. Eventually, their claims to leadership in cultural policy were rebuffed even sooner than those of their Soviet counterparts. In Germany, finally, a new elite mindset, based not on any party affiliation but on the support of social democratic and liberal governments, informed some circles

of modern artists, led by architects, with a missionary zeal of social or even political reform. The most prominent of these circles, the 'Working Council for Art,' took its name from the workers' organizations of the November revolution.

The start of the Depression brought an ever-growing state encroachment upon society in the three pertinent states, which in a matter of years turned into totalitarian dictatorships, with Germany trailing the other two in time. This growing primacy of politics left no more room for modern artists' claims to social renewal, no matter how assiduously they tried to toe the line. The political overreach of artistic avant-gardes in the Soviet Union and in Italy was now reined in by party and government elites that were keen on framing and enacting cultural policies designed to curb personal projections. The National Socialist government, which never had a similar constituency of artists, let alone modern artists, made short shrift of those who belatedly professed their allegiance. "Our principal critical task, in the present period, must be to disentangle in *avant-garde* art what is *authentic* from what is not," wrote André Breton in 1935.(10) However, by setting up Rimbaud and Lenin—absolute outcast and absolute leader—as personifications of co-equal artistic and political avant-gardes, Breton still upheld the political independence of art now being jeopardized by the Depression.

/ 2 POLITICAL COMPETITION

/ 2.1 ARTISTIC AND POLITICAL CULTURE

/ 2.1.1 ART IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE

The political confrontation between traditional and modern art during the Depression was the end result of the long-term convergence between the art market and the public sphere that had started in the 18th century. At that time, art critics working for a press with diverse political affiliations took to writing up exhibitions of competing artists in terms of ideological rather than aesthetic criteria. This convergence accelerated after the failures of the 1848 revolutions, when economic, and hence artistic, freedom faced a curtailing of political liberties. Debates ostensibly confined to art proved more elusive to censorship than direct expressions of political opinion. In France, by the time of the Second Empire, a thoroughly politized art criticism was in place. The careers of Jacques-Louis David, who rose from change-bent activism within academic milieus to political leadership in revolutionary governments, and of Gustave Courbet, who topped his ideological exhibition strategy with organizational work for the Paris Commune, provide the most famous examples of how artists rose from ideological publicity to political practice.

The convergence of artistic culture with the public sphere was a corollary of the transition from socially circumscribed patronage to an anonymous market which

required public self-promotion. It propelled the competition between traditional and modern art into the political culture at large. Transcending the politics of state institutions and state patronage, it linked tastes to ideologies. On the one hand, the increasingly politicized artistic culture suited artists, critics, and their backers who wished to use the arts as a venue for voicing or contesting political opinions. On the other hand, it drove them to insist on divorcing art from politics in order to shirk political retribution on the part of their opponents. Hence a constant push-and-pull ensued between political intent and political denial. In 1912-1914, for example, cubist painters Pablo Picasso, Georges Braque, and Juan Gris fitted cuts from center-right, mass-circulation newspapers into their *papiers-collés* in order to express their anarchist condemnation of political events reported there. Even though they made these pictures under contract for a dealer's showroom, with next to no public exposure, they pretended to be taking a stand in a press debate.

Before the First World War, the rampant politicization of an artistic culture drawn into the public sphere was still largely being driven by professional interest. Primarily concerned with state control or state support, it nonetheless contributed to the definition of free artistic expression as part of civil liberties and public discourse. No matter how intensely this artistic culture strove to engage in and was affected by politics, it still stopped short of becoming an operative part of political culture, that is, a venue for affecting government or party politics. It remained focused on state art politics or on free political expression. Its primary concern was the defense against encroachment rather than demands for change. Only in the aftermath of World War I was artistic culture in the public sphere energized to become an operative ingredient of the political process by governments and parties, particularly of the rising totalitarian regimes. By the time of the Depression, it had been so thoroughly made serviceable for public policy that Hitler, in a speech of 1933, could call art "a sublime mission obliging to fanaticism."(11)

/ 2.1.2 MODERN ART ON THE LEFT

When by the turn of the century modern art began to be perceived as complicit with the Left, it was not because socialist parties or labor organizations had come round to embrace it, but because its opponents linked its dissenting cultural postures to political dissent from conservative governance, and because some modern artists sympathized with the Left out of conviction. Socialist parties and labor organizations, on the other hand, envisaged their constituencies not as social fringes receptive to an artistic counterculture, but as disenfranchised majorities with a claim of their own to the art of the mainstream. Their political goal was no validation of minority lifestyles, but to secure standard living conditions for a stable mass society. For this reason, the visual culture of the organized Left was committed to traditional art, because it was

intended to convey political messages to mass audiences excluded from the educational privilege of the upper middle-class. Its agendas were best conveyed by a realist representation of life and work or by a clearly readable symbolic illustration of political struggle.

On the other hand, an independence from politically organized culture was axiomatic to the quest for the aesthetic and expressive self-determination of modern artists. If they did associate with leftist political milieus, these tended to be anarchist, that is, averse to the current social order, bent on utopian schemes, and distrustful of strategic organization. It was not artists who first advanced expressly leftist claims on behalf of modern art, but sympathizing writers of middle-class origin who worked for the socialist press. Ready to carry their taste for modern art forward into a disavowal of their own class culture, such writers voiced its inherent challenge to conservative culture in approximative Marxist terms. Munich art writer Wilhelm Hausenstein, for example, an early promoter of Vasily Kandinsky, Franz Marc, and Paul Klee, was an upper-middle-class academic who joined the Social Democratic Party in 1907. He taught in a workers' night school, edited the culture section of the *Socialist Monthly* (*Sozialistische Monatshefte*), and advocated a 'sociological' art history based on Marxist principles.

The connection of modern art with Communism was the historic, if not coincidental, result of the initial empowerment of modern artists by the Bolshevik government as officials for the implementation of its art policy. As a result, its tenuous ideological associations with the Left from before the First World War became politically explicit, not only in Russia, but throughout Europe. It is the fundamental contradiction of Soviet art history that after the October Revolution, state-directed artistic culture in Russia did not draw on the Western European tradition of 19th-century Socialist art with its penchant for working-class themes and mass audiences, but was steered by a tightly-knit group of previously anarchist artists of modern observance at its extreme. That such artists should have prevailed over the mass organization of Proletarian Culture (*Proletkult*), where workers were to participate and engage in artistic activities, spelled the defeat of Marx's proposition that in a communist society art should be an integral part of social life rather than an exclusive profession. Theirs was a short-lived attempt to fuse an artistic with a political avant-garde on Lenin's terms.

/ 2.1.3 POLITICIZATION

The Depression widened the public sphere into an arena of precipitous political change, most trenchantly in the three totalitarian dictatorships which had dispensed with constitutional constraints, less so in the Third Republic, whose constitutional stability was strained to the breaking-point in the riots of 1934. This politicization of the

public sphere swept the arts along. The long-term convergence of artistic and political cultures, already accelerated in the preceding decade, had readied the arts to be made politically operational. Ideological demands or protests would no longer do. Art policy turned from "politics aimed at the arts" to "politics made through the arts."(12) The arts were drawn into the political process to an unheard-of degree. Many artists had underestimated the disruptive potential of projecting the competition between traditional and modern art onto the political spectrum of right versus left at a time when Europe was about to plunge into an all-out conflict on those terms. They had not foreseen the demands and restrictions to which the politicization of artistic culture would subject them.

Totalitarian regimes largely preempted the economic nexus of open market and public sphere as an expanded field of artistic competition. They were ill disposed to grant the public any sphere without political regulation. Thus, they supervised or even organized the public functions of the art market with the aim of fostering its political conformity. In the Soviet Union, the new government art policy inaugurated by the April Decree of 1932 began with stopping the public competition between artists' groups, continued with an adjustment of the art press from a forum of ideological discussion into a mouthpiece of Party precepts, and culminated in the promulgation of Socialist Realism as an obligatory style whose exegesis was the only subject of debate. The other two totalitarian states, which had left their capitalist economies intact, pursued quite different paths. The Fascist government turned the public sphere into a non-compulsive arena for traditional and modern artists to vie for ideological conformity. The National Socialist government, within three years of its accession, squelched it altogether by decree, yet failed to fill the void with prescriptions of its own.

The Popular Front movements in France and Spain also intensified the convergence of artistic culture and the public sphere toward a politicization of the arts. First, they engaged artists in their electoral campaigns. Once in office, they fomented vociferous debates aimed at reconciling traditional and modern art on platforms of political activism. Consistent with their origins in the public resistance of the left against the right-wing riots of February 1934 in France, and against the bloody repression of workers' uprisings of October 1934 in Spain, both movements succeeded in mobilizing artists who had kept apart from politics thus far on the assumption that art in the public sphere was able to contribute to political change. However, both Popular Front governments empowered artists much less than they made it appear in their ceaseless ideological debates, which rarely fed into the art policies of their officials in charge. Their speedy fall from power in 1938-1939 disabused those artists of their confidence in the efficacy of their activist participation in the public sphere of democracy under duress.

/2.2 CLASS LIMITATION OF MODERN ART

/2.2.1 ART OF FREEDOM

The mindset of perpetual contest intrinsic to modern artistic culture could not have lasted had it not suited the mentality of its upper middle-class clientele. Part of this clientele found modern artists and their works to mirror their own, muffled dissent from dominant social and cultural conventions, which suited their culture of individualism, but stopped short of political dissent. Since the late 19th century, some modern artists had led a socially marginalized existence, whose well-publicized biographical circumstances added to their posthumous or even contemporary celebrity. The autobiographical profile they had given to their work came to be appreciated as a paradigm of an idiosyncratic blend between aesthetic and social nonconformity. Starting with Henry Murger's novel *Scènes de la vie de Bohème* of 1847-1849, books and journals glamorized the life and work of non-conformist artists. Self-doubts rampant in upper middle-class circles about the morals of their social norms, which had long found expression in the literature they read, were rarely addressed in the art provided by academic professionals for the decoration of their homes.

The undisputed hero of artistic dissent was the poet Arthur Rimbaud, who after putting forth a small but celebrated body of poetry left France for Africa at age nineteen, never to write another line. His famous phrase "One must be absolutely modern," from the conclusion of his prose poem *A Season in Hell*, was no call for modern art, but one for the wholesale rejection of European culture. Painters Vincent van Gogh and Paul Gauguin attained a similar celebrity within a few years of their deaths. Both had turned their backs on city culture, one in the countryside, the other in the South Seas. Unlike Rimbaud, they had lived for their art until the end. One had died from a self-inflicted gunshot, the other deprived of medical care. Paintings tied to their suicide attempts became mementos of their fate. After the turn of the century, Pablo Picasso's rise to fame was marked by two famous masterworks, the *Saltimbanques* of 1905 and the *Demoiselles d'Avignon* of 1908. Their themes—migrating street performers and prostitutes on self-display—transfigured social marginality, if not social transgression, into paradigms of aesthetic authenticity for the upper middle-class to watch.

In embracing modern art, the upper-middle-class and its associated writers idealized such artists' nonconformity as an aesthetic template for their own intellectual emancipation and emotional self-release. In response, a deliberately provocative social conduct, as opposed to conventional respectability, became part of the public appeal of modern artistic culture. The term 'decadence' denotes the conflictive, social ambivalence inherent in this appeal. While hostile critics of modern art used the word as an index of depravity, modern artists and their advocates embraced it as a distinction. It

was used to either extol aesthetic nonconformity as a lifestyle of freedom, or brand it as deviancy from civilized behavior, even as 'degeneracy' from biological norms. The penchant of upper-middle-class culture to transfigure its ideals into existential or historic absolutes exacerbated those controversies. Once modern art, a fraction of art production, was transfigured into the art of the epoch, and traditional art, the mainstay of art production, was dismissed as obsolete, modern art became liable to being called on its class limitation.

/2.2.2 EFFORTS AT CLASS TRANSCENDENCE

Before the First World War, support for an art that counted for modern because it had broken free of national traditions suited the internationalist outlook of the upper middle-class, which sponsored it as a culture to flank its international business interests. Its opponents, on the other hand, claimed to protect the integrity of the national economy along with that of national culture. In the first decade after the war, a time of recapitalization and reconstruction, modern art came to be aligned with technological modernization all over Europe. It was propelled from a private taste to the aesthetic surface of an optimistic public culture. Audiences beyond its clientele, down to the working-class, were persuaded to view it as a paragon of progress. This new ideological link-up of modern art to the class-transcending ideals of modernization shared by society at large served its internationalist promotion across the antagonistic political systems of democracy and dictatorships, be they Bolshevik or Fascist. When the Depression revealed modernization as a temporary measure, modern art ran the risk of being called on its class limitations.

The waning success of modernization, combined with the economic, and hence political, decline of the upper middle-class during the first decade after World War I, exposed modern art to political challenges from both Right and Left. Such challenges were backed by growing social segments and political constituencies that had always clung to traditional art. On one side of the political spectrum, a host of academically-trained artists, who kept plying their trade in private, local, or regional environments to satisfy the demands of lower middle-class clienteles, organized in opposition to the modernist predominance, perceived or real, on the art market, in the art press, and in state art institutions, and tended to adopt nationalist ideological postures. On the other side, cultural organizations of the communist and other leftist parties and their public outlets repudiated modern artists' self-professed leftist sympathies, because of their failure to elicit any working-class appreciation. Their ostentatious nonconformity was denounced as 'bourgeois' self-indulgence, invalidated by its shirking of commitment to any party politics.

Since the late 19th century, artistic high culture in capitalist Europe, with its inherent tendency toward high achievement, financial gain, public success, and social

standing, had to contend with the resentment of an overflow of academically-trained artists who failed to succeed on those terms. Classified as an "art proletariat" by analogy to the working-class, they became a source of concern for artistic culture. As soon as these disadvantaged artists and their associations found a voice in the public sphere, they claimed to be rooted in a people's culture held in disregard and started to promote their interests in populist and nationalist ideological terms. Their complaint was that modern art remained inaccessible to the general public, did not represent its cultural ideals, and offended its sound tastes. The more headway modern art made in public culture after World War I, and the more post-war economic hardship exacerbated competitive antagonisms in artistic culture, the more did traditional artists vent an anti-'bourgeois' resentment against modern art as an art of privilege—most aggressively on the populist platforms of the ruling Bolshevik and the rising National Socialist parties.

/2.2.3 DEPRESSION BACKLASH

Since the start of the Depression a growing discrepancy between modern art's sweeping claims to epochal standing and its de-facto class-based minority status in society made it vulnerable to being put in its place. Its subsistence base in a declining upper middle-class became endangered by the ground swell of populist mass politics unleashed in response to the economic crisis. When German architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe built the Tugendhat luxury villa and the German Pavilion at the Barcelona World Exhibition of 1929 in the same style of ostentatious material affluence, he endowed the architectural representation of the Weimar Republic with an upper middle-class profile which contradicted the precarious social diversity of is population in distress. However, alignment of abstraction with technological modernization was merely taking the sting out of modern art's aesthetic idiosyncrasy. Precarious conditions in post-war capitalist society gave modern artists no reason to desist from their provocative social or even political critique, although they found no lasting base in any political organization to turn activist.

The class-based minority status that modern art could never shed prompted its deliberate marginalization, and eventual repudiation, on the part of totalitarian regimes. These regimes strove to foster a class-transcending artistic culture combining majority acceptance with historic legitimacy, both of which could only be had from traditional art. They could not admit alternative expression, let alone dissent. When in 1932 the Soviet Union had finally succeeded in dislodging modern art from its initial predominance, two defamatory shows branded it as 'bourgeois.' The contemporary Communist press of the Weimar Republic called it the same. The National Socialist Party, still in opposition, tied it to Jewish money interests, a racist variant of this kind of attack. Only the Fascist regime in Italy, successful in obtaining upper-middle-class

support for its policies, was willing to enlist modern architects to its ideological platform of modernization, and on this premise granted modern artists a chance to comply. Its offer of conformity, on the condition of foregoing individual dissent, steered clear of any perilous disruption of Fascist artistic culture.

In democratic France, the success of modern art on the private market during the first decade after World War I did not entail its acceptance by state institutions and state patronage, because these operated on the basis of a political representation by diverse professional groups. Modern artists, however, relying on the dealer system, never organized into similar groups. In the Weimar Republic, on the other hand, where modern artists did take part in professional organizations that were able to deal with governments—the 'German Artists League' (*Deutscher Künstlerbund*) first and foremost—those governments lacked the financial wherewithal to translate the proportional equity between traditional and modern artists into even-handed support. By 1936, half-hearted efforts by the Popular Front in France and Spain to promote modern art on the strength of its ideological credentials were thwarted by de-facto preferences for mass-based cultural policies, for which traditional art continued to work better as a propaganda style. Thus, modern art was still dependent on private markets in distress.

/2.3 MARKET DECLINE AND POLITICAL STRUGGLE

/2.3.1 QUEST FOR STATE SUPPORT

When in all three states with capitalist economies considered here the Depression made art markets decline, competition between traditional and modern artists turned to state support. In the Soviet Union, this turn had started earlier, even before the private art market had fallen victim to the abolition of the New Economic Policy. As a result, artistic competition became politicized. In 1929 and 1930, in all four states, regardless of their economic and political systems, architects' and artists' organizations were being formed or newly energized to position their members on the spectrum of traditional and modern art in cultural policy. Efforts to obviate such allocations—most spectacularly by the Congrès d'Architectes Modernes—were unsuccessful. By 1931 and 1932, many of these associations and organizations had politicized themselves to such a degree that political interests—government or party agencies in the two totalitarian states in place by then, and left- or right-wing opposition movements in democratic Germany and France—enlisted them for their promotion, using their ideologies for propaganda.

It was in the two totalitarian states already in existence that such regimes' political responses to the artists' plight were most deliberate. The Fascist Associations of Fine Arts and the Soviet Artists' Cooperative, both formed in 1929, were established

to organize exhibition and sales networks, at first without state subsidies. Within two years, political authorities had absorbed them. That same year, in Germany, the 'Combat League for German Culture' (*Kampfbund für Deutsche Kultur*) was founded as an anti-modern pressure group affiliated with the National Socialist Party, still in opposition at the time. One year later it joined a 'Leaders Council of the United German Art and Culture Associations,' which expected the Party to support traditional artists once in power. Also in 1929, the French 'Union of Modern Artists' (*Union des Artistes Modernes*) seceded from its umbrella organization to promote modern arts and crafts, but without political affiliation. It was the 'Association of Revolutionary Writers,' founded in January 1932 under Communist auspices, and soon renamed 'Association of Revolutionary Writers and Artists' (*Association des Écrivains et Artistes Révolutionnaires*, AEAR), that made support of artists without work a cause for leftist politics.

In Italy and the Soviet Union, the coordination of the new, politicized artists' organizations with government or party agencies occurring between 1930 and 1932 produced two different forms of politically tested ideological alignments, whose outcome was the same demotion of modern vis-à-vis traditional art. In Italy, it was reduced to conformity, in the Soviet Union it was sidelined altogether. In Germany, the change of political system enacted after January 30, 1933, with lightning speed, prompted a one-sided political adjudication of the contest, which dispensed with debate, but still produced no clear winner. The new government swiftly fulfilled the 'Leaders' Council's' demands for a removal of modern art from public culture, but rebuffed its claims to shape the representative art of the National Socialist State. In France, finally, modern artists who placed their hopes in the populist platform of the 'Association of Revolutionary Writers and Artists' had to endure a conservative backlash which also engulfed the 'Union of Modern Artists'. The short-lived tenure of the Popular Front government since July 1936 did not net them an enduring increase of state purchases and commissions.

/2.3.2 COORDINATION

As artists' organizations pursuing political strategies for professional advancement were embraced by government agencies or political parties eager to incorporate art policies into their programs, the ideological overdetermination of artistic culture, long rampant in the public sphere, introduced the competition between traditional and modern art into mainstream politics. The most emphatic incorporation of organized artists in a grand political scheme was their enlistment for the promotion of the First Five-Year Plan in the Soviet Union. Similarly, though less oppressively, artists in Italy were pooled in government projects designed to monumentalize the corporative organization of Fascist working society. In both these states, government or party officials

were involved. In Germany and France, activism of politicized artists' organizations remained confined to electoral politics. In 1930-1932, the NSDAP staged mass rallies to denounce modern art with uniformed SA troops standing guard. In 1934-1936, the 'Association of Revolutionary Writers and Artists' staged mass demonstrations for the election of the Popular Front. Once elected, however, both governments had no use for their populist appeal.

As soon as parties and governments became aware of the ideological potential of artistic culture as an ingredient of politics, they embarked on framing cultural policies which raised the practical relevance of the arts for overcoming the social crisis brought on by the Depression. In the process, artists' political activities tended to be steered by politicians. It was the Bolshevik Party which, through its operational conduct of art policy down to the minute detail, was capable of organizing artists for propaganda tasks. The corporative policies of Fascist Italy, by contrast, placed leading artists who were ready to abide by prescribed ideological parameters in charge of political projects. In both states, participating artists felt inspired rather than curtailed. The National Socialist government, by contrast, discarded the ideological frenzy of the 'Combat League for German Culture' and its successor organizations under the aegis of Alfred Rosenberg. As late as 1939, organized artists, overheard by security agents, complained about a lack of directions from above. The government preferred to run its art policy through artists empowered by the leadership principle.

Totalitarian governments succeeded to different degrees and at different times in meeting the economic aspirations of artists whom they had forced to organize on their ideological platforms, all of them of traditional observance. In Italy and the Soviet Union, these aspirations were largely met by 1936. German artists had to wait until 1938, when the credit-induced boom of the war industry had taken hold. In all three totalitarian states, the process reduced the market chances of modern artists, albeit to different degrees. The Fascist and the Soviet government conceded them a greatly diminished niche, which in Italy entailed some stylistic license, while in the USSR it required rigorous stylistic adjustments. Only in Germany was modern art shut out entirely. Democratic governments in France, by contrast, were unable to foster an across-the-board economic recovery of artistic culture during the full length of the Depression. The one-time stimulus program for the 1937 Paris World Exposition still favored traditional over modern artists. Thus, the competitive antagonism between traditional and modern art was never resolved.

/2.3.3 **DELIVERY**

When it came to dealing with the multifarious, intricate, perpetually changing commission and purchase schemes of government or party agencies, artists' organizations remained at the mercy of selection procedures administered by political

appointees. No matter how they tried to politicize their posture, it did not net them any inside tracks toward professional success. Moreover, such organizations never succeeded in advancing any significant policy initiatives. They remained competitive pressure groups with no political clout. In the totalitarian states, they ended up being run by political liaison officials from party headquarters or government ministries. In the Third Republic, despite its pluralist art policy, they had no delegates in the committees of the Fine Arts Administration. How politically organized artists in totalitarian states could be induced to produce an art to serve political objectives remained uncertain nonetheless. Political and administrative authorities were aware that such an art could not be accomplished by following orders, only by a compelling linkage between economic and political success.

Only in the Soviet Union was such a linkage between economic and political success consistently enacted from above, because the state economy established by the First Five-Year Plan made politically supervised art production the only way to sell, and because eventually a single umbrella organization was set up to be the exclusive venue for individual artists to compete. In Italy, by contrast, the corporative convergence of the capitalist economy and government economic policy became the premise for a political self-regulation of the arts under market conditions the government could rely upon. It induced artists to empathize with rather than submit to Fascist ideology in their professional drive for market success by an unending sequence of shows for sale. Germany alone failed to solve the equation between supervised 'coordination' and political delivery, as the government had to acknowledge after four years in power. Its art-political measures had failed to make the vast majority of traditional artists compete according to political criteria. For its big-time projects, it fell back on a non-competitive art production by fiat from above.

Democratic France was the only one of the four states where politicized competition never worked, not even during the interlude of the two Popular Front governments. Fierce ideological struggles between the camps of traditional and modern art lasted throughout the decade without affecting artists' professional success one way or the other. The Fine Arts Administration, whose bureaucratic apparatus was bent on enacting a steady policy as governments of various political composition came and went, provided an effective buffer against artists' organizations' political demands or protests, all of which failed to influence its operations, no matter how strong their resonance in the public sphere. Even the Popular Front government never granted the AEAR, by far the largest and most activist political artists' organization, any influence on art policy-making, since the AEAR's communist leadership had no party representation in the cabinet. As a result, the public prominence of the AEAR's art-political ventures remained an inner-party affair.

/3 STATE INTERVENTION

/3.1 POLITICAL STABILITY AND POPULIST APPEAL

/3.1.1 POPULIST ART POLICY

The turn in 1931-1932 from deflationary austerity policy to deficit spending, which inaugurated the second phase of the Depression, enhanced the interventionist impact of state governments on their economies and societies, because they were now in a position to regulate them by granting or withholding financial support. The shift had a decisive impact on the political history of art as well. On the one hand, the self-centered disregard for world market interdependence, whereby governments embarked on national economic policies, was flanked by an increasingly nationalist political culture. On the other hand, their measures to alleviate unemployment were flanked by propaganda drives aimed at social restoration. Hence their support for a traditional art with national credentials. To act decisively, all governments strove for mass support beyond their original constituencies. While totalitarian regimes could engineer such a support with a showy semblance of mass politics, democracies in France and Spain remained beholden to an unstable balance between antagonistic segments of society, which denied them any cohesive self-representation through the arts.

Within their expanded political range, totalitarian regimes embarked on populist art policies designed to appeal to mass audiences over and above social divides. In Italy and Germany, such divides were ideologically overridden; in the Soviet Union, they were forcibly suppressed. Democratic France, on the other hand, upheld its diversified republican culture, even under the Popular Front government. All three totalitarian regimes lived by the historic premise that viable states must enhance their legitimacy through their care for the arts and by an artistic display of their political culture, both of which they sought to thoroughly refashion. The Third Republic, relying on its constitutional continuity with the past, felt no such need, and merely adjusted its art policies to the Depression. Hence only in totalitarian states did state intervention in the economy, through deficit spending, include systematic efforts at stimulating a politically aligned artistic culture designed to fashion an aesthetic environment of maximal consent. The Third Republic took such an environment for granted, subject to ideological strife in its modernization, to be sure, but in no need of being refashioned.

To ensure the economic viability of an artistic culture with a political purpose at a time of economic hardship, new art policies had to be aimed at majority acceptance by both the art public and the artists' professions. Such policies could nowhere be pursued in the way of autocratic patronage, only on platforms of popular participation, no matter how contrived. As a result, a realignment of the arts with accustomed

aesthetic conventions came to be the precondition for a mutual reinforcement of public spending and ideological appeal. In totalitarian states, it was geared toward the political culture of mass spectacles as venues of a performed reciprocity between leaders and people. In France, this kind of political culture was deemed unnecessary. The last thing mass art policies had any use for was an art such as the modern, which had made its inroads into culture as a minority position of dissent, thrived on a manifest disdain for majority taste, and prided itself of having broken with tradition. Its post-war alignments with the machine culture of modernization lost much of its credibility at a time of industrial production in distress.

/ 3.1.2 CHALLENGE TO DEMOCRACY

Once the Depression had made art policy into a significant component of governance or electoral politics, habitual calls for an art with majority acceptance gained in political virulence. They became part of the challenge to democratic governments whose support of modern art, no matter how limited, was being denounced as contradicting their legitimacy as the rule of the majority. While the art policy of the Third Republic, secure in its traditions of content and form, never favored modern art until the advent of the Popular Front, and then only to a limited degree, the art policy of the Weimar Republic, with no artistic tradition of its own, supported modern art to the point of incurring charges of undue preference from the conservative opposition. In the USSR and in National Socialist Germany, the rejection of modern art because of its minority acceptance pertained to their repudiation of 'bourgeois' democracy as a de-facto disenfranchisement of the majority, which they countered with their claims for overwhelming mass support. In Fascist Italy this challenge was obviated by granting modern art the minority status it deserved.

In a speech at a National Socialist Party rally in Munich on January 26, 1928, entitled "National Socialism and Art Policy," Hitler for the first time addressed the lacking public approval of state-supported modern art as contradicting the majority tenet of democratic government, a tenet he promised to restore by supporting traditional art as the art of the majority he was campaigning for. "What is supposed to happen if the broad mass will really participate [in cultural policy]? Why this [state of affairs] in a nation with equal political rights? I will either enfranchise a people politically, then it must also be *culturally enfranchised*, otherwise [sic] one has no right to concede political equality to such a people."[13] As soon as art relies on government, it must abide by its rules, Hitler reasoned. At a time when the Weimar Republic still seemed economically and politically stable, Hitler blamed the undue predominance of modern art in its culture on a disregard for its electorate. The dismal performance of his party in the elections of May, 20, 1928,—2.6 percent of the vote—still proved him wrong, but two years later, the NSDAP reached 18.3 percent, and the predominance of modern art began to be at risk.

In May 1939, a propaganda brochure accompanying the art show in the Soviet Pavilion at the New York World Fair evoked the mass response to the huge shows of state-sponsored art in major Soviet cities as a proof for the assertion that Soviet art corresponded to the mass democracy enshrined in the new Soviet constitution of 1936. Here state art and people's art seemed to coalesce. "In his work the Soviet artist primarily addresses the people. His art is democratic. That is why hundreds of thousands of visitors attend our art exhibitions, that is why the Soviet people take the successes and failures of their favorite artists so much to heart, that is why such heated discussions arise about various paintings."[14] In this way the Soviet art show was made to fit the Fair's celebration of U.S. democracy. This international promotion of an art policy enacted by maximum oppression and serving to dupe a populace forcibly subdued by the purges of 1936-1938, as a successful implementation of popular demand, was an especially reckless challenge to democracy. It did not outlast the demolition of the Soviet Pavilion one year later, when the USSR, in league with Germany, invaded Poland.

/ 3.1.3 ART WITH A MANDATE

With its origins in the artistic culture of the French Revolution, the official or officious art of the Third Republic was cast in terms of the classical tradition, both in concept and in form. Its enduring, cumulative presence assured it of a long-term civic acceptance which successive governments could take for granted when they cast their own art programs into classical form. Jules Dalou's multi-figure bronze sculpture *Triumph of the Republic*, inaugurated in 1899 after a ten-year delay, set a paradigm for the convergence of state art and working-class imagery in classical form. Its public appeal was boosted by the sculptor's credentials as a former member of the Paris Commune, who had spent nine years in political exile until he returned to France. Just as paradigmatically, the installation of Rodin's *Thinker* before the Paris Pantheon as a monument to the unknown French worker in 1906, a time of intense labor strife, validated the ability of state art policy to address the cultural aspirations of the working-class, even with the most daring modernization of traditional art that could still be fitted into a classical environment.

The different receptivity of the Weimar Republic and the Third Republic to modern architects' political aspirations goes to show how official reticence vis-à-vis artistic innovation was tied to democratic legitimacy. While the precarious German governments tended to embrace such aspirations, at least tentatively, the safely legitimated French art administrations kept them at a distance. Social democratic and liberal governments in Germany were prone to adopt modern architects' far-flung schemes of urbanist renewal, which attempted to fuse technical innovation, functional economics, and social reform into a new aesthetics at the cost of surface embellishment, and

hence fell prey to conservative opposition whenever they lost their majorities at the polls. In France, by contrast, the most prominent modern architect, Le Corbusier, projected his work as a challenge to the architectural policy of democratic government under the catchword "Architecture or Revolution," as he titled a book he published in 1924. For his radical social theories of architectural renewal, he sought backing in oppositional syndicalist, or even crypto-fascist, political milieus.

It is in the self-assurance of its democratic credentials, even in the midst of the Depression, that the art administration of the Third Republic had the core buildings of the Paris World Exposition of 1937 designed in a 'modernized' classical form. Not only did it count on the professional predominance of traditional architecture with its attendant imagery, but also on its unquestioned public acceptance. Paul Valéry's golden-lettered mottoes for the twin façades of the Palais de Chaillot toward the central plaza—"It depends on him who comes whether I'm tomb or treasury"—commissioned in 1937 by Fine Arts Director Georges Huisman, validated the artists' work by the democratic engagement of its public, consistent with the Third Republic's emphasis on public education. In the same year, Christian Zervos, editor of *Cahiers d'Art*, the leading modern art journal in France, confirmed modern artists' principled disavowal of popular acceptance. "There is no graver error than to mix up the artists with the community," he defiantly proclaimed,[15] recalling the popes of the Renaissance as precedents of a patronage from on high.

/ 3.2 PUBLIC BUILDING

/ 3.2.1 POLITICAL ECONOMY AND ARCHITECTURAL POLICY

Starting in 1931, capitalist states switched from deflationary austerity to state-guided deficit spending, while in the Soviet Union the premature fulfillment of the First Five-Year Plan released capital from industrial investment. As a result, public building took off as part of the political economy all over Europe. In the process, representative architecture took the better of public housing. The combination of financing and state supervision through newly-created mixed building companies in Italy and Germany proved most efficient for accomplishing such projects. Neither the outright government commissioning of the private building industry in France nor the state-run building industry in the Soviet Union were as successful. As early as 1926, the Fascist government set public works on a course of monumental architecture, followed by the National Socialist government soon after its accession in 1933. The Soviet government had projected such a course since 1931 with great fanfare but failed to see it through in its intended scope. French governments, on the other hand, never envisaged it.

In all three capitalist states, architectural policies aimed at redressing large-scale unemployment stepped back, to a greater or lesser extent, from the cost-efficient,

industrialized building methods which during the preceding decade of post-war reconstruction had sustained the aesthetic appeal of modern architecture as a progressive undertaking, where "form followed function." The return to the labor-intensive makeup of traditional architecture cancelled the convergence of technical modernization and architectural style. Yet, unlike in earlier epochs, the new massive, highly decorative architecture did not result from affluence, but from a social policy of job creation. Hence its 'monumental order,' as it has been called, tended to extol the state. In the Soviet Union, on the other hand, where unemployment was no political issue, hyperbolic designs of monumental architecture, more grandiose than anywhere else, were billed as tokens of a promised socialist affluence, surpassing the architecture of capitalism in decline. The near-failure of the Second Five-Year Plan prevented most of these projects from being built.

The extent to which public building was allocated to infrastructure, housing, rearmament, and representation, was differently calibrated in each one of the four states, as they were pursuing concurrent policies of economic recovery, political stabilization, and readiness for an approaching war whose priorities were hard to reconcile. Of the three totalitarian states, Germany proved most efficient in building monumental architecture, eliminating unemployment, and preparing for war all at one and the same time. Italy pursued its architectural policy at the expense of rearmament, banking on a postponement of the war. The Soviet Union, which had to conclude the Hitler-Stalin Pact to buy rearmament time, was unable to fulfill its grandiose building plans. Only France did not include monumental building in its economic development policy, as its momentary cancellation of the Paris Expo in 1934, and its later failure to get all its Expo buildings ready for the opening, go to show. Its deficit budgets were spread too thin by the simultaneous tasks of modernizing infrastructure, alleviating the housing shortage, and building the fortifications of the Maginot Line.

/3.2.2 FROM URBANISM TO MONUMENTALISM

During the austerity phase of the Depression, from 1929 to 1932, state support for public works was primarily targeted at infrastructure, urbanism, and housing. Thereafter, all three totalitarian states, but not the Third Republic, shifted their support from utilitarian to representative priorities. They endowed public works with the political mission of monumentalizing building far beyond function. How this shift in architectural policy was to be implemented in planning depended on the governments' abilities to reconcile it with their infrastructure and housing requirements. Italy managed to uphold a precarious balance between the two. In Germany and the USSR, monumental building was assigned priority. The Third Republic had no need for representative building and yet did not alleviate its housing shortage. When Hitler, in a speech of September 23, 1933, announced his new architectural policy—"I see the effective way of leading

the German people back into the working process in recharging the German economy first of all through large monumental works"[16]—it was at a highway construction site. Barely one month later, he laid the cornerstone of the House of German Art, his intended paradigm of monumental architecture.

In the official book issued in 1939 upon the completion of Speer's New Reich Chancellery in Berlin, one writer, anticipating charges that the project had preempted housing, asserts that most of the city's construction workers were employed on other sites, and that the bricks used on the Chancellery were but a small fraction of those used city-wide. Still, the book never addressed the funding of the lavish building. Similarly, Politburo member Lazar Kaganovich, in his message to the First Soviet Architects' Congress of 1937, asserted that "the proletariat does not only want houses; it wants to live not just comfortably; it wants these houses to be beautiful,"[17] as if the monumentalism of Soviet architectural policy had any bearing on housing. Of the three totalitarian regimes, only the Fascist had an architectural policy in place that struck a balance between monumental architecture and public housing, albeit in hierarchical stratified zoning schemes. The successive master plans for the rebuilding of Rome foresaw a ring of low-cost settlements on the outskirts for those displaced by the enhanced monumentalization of the center.

Eventually, the fast turnaround from an economy of recovery to one of war within the six-year time span between 1933-1939, which stalled or stopped the pursuit of their architectural schemes to various degrees, spared all four states the test of resolving the social contradictions between housing and monumentality inherent in their public building policies. Eventually, in the three totalitarian states, the ideological aestheticization of urbanism at the expense of functional practicality forwent any balance between funding, function, and feasibility. The mere planning of ever more sumptuous representative architecture became a policy end of its own, substituting large-scale mock-ups, publicized through films and photographs, for future buildings. The Paris World Exposition of 1937 dramatized this turn of events. The three totalitarian pavilions showcased deceptive accomplishments of a monumental architectural policy, supplemented by large-scale models of their future capitals. The Third Republic could barely match them with a one-time effort unrepresentative of any overall architectural policy, and uncompleted.

/ 3.2.3 TRADITIONAL VERSUS MODERN ARCHITECTURE

Because it pertained directly to state intervention in the arts, the aesthetic detachment of a monumental architecture of traditionalist appearance from the functional look of urbanism proved to be the most salient issue of the newly exacerbated contest between traditional and modern art during the Depression related to both labor and living standards, not merely to aesthetic perceptions. Modern architects,

ascendant during the preceding decade, had stressed a non-decorative functionalism in the planning, technology, and purposes of their buildings. Clinging to the ideological alignment of modern art with technological modernization, they sought to vindicate the sparse appearance of their buildings by aspiring to an aesthetic convergence with abstract art of constructivist bent. Now their opponents, who charged them with compromising the artistic distinction between public and utilitarian architecture—of making government buildings look like department stores, as Hitler had written in *My Struggle*—gained the upper hand. In the three totalitarian states, the traditional decorousness of public buildings was tantamount to a monumentalization of strong government.

Internationally, the opposition between traditional and modern architecture for representative buildings was first publicized in 1928-1930 in the course of the protracted debate about the competition for the Palace of the League of Nations in Geneva, where modern architects, including Le Corbusier, had incurred a categorical rejection they did not take lying down. Although Swiss architects Hannes Meyer and Hans Witwer, authors of the most functionalist project, expressly disavowed any aesthetic aspirations, Meyer exalted its stylish modern look as an expression of the democratic world order to be promoted by the League of Nations. The eventual choice of an ornate design was never justified on ideological grounds. In 1928, reacting to the outcome of the competition, a network of modern architects came together in the Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne (CIAM), intending to promote functionalist architecture on an ideological platform that claimed to override fundamental differences between political systems. When in 1932 the Soviet government revoked the group's invitation to convene in Moscow, this platform had not worked.

Most of the arguments in favor of the totalitarian regimes' resolve to detach representative architecture from the look of modernization were rehearsed during the sequence of competitions for the Palace of Soviets in Moscow, held in 1931-1933, against whose outcome the CIAM issued a letter of protest. Its author, Le Corbusier, even dared to contend that the eventual choice was at variance with Communism as he understood it. Similar debates within the Fascist Corporation of Architects in Italy came to a head in 1933-1934 during the first, inconclusive competition for the Palazzo del Littorio in Rome. Here representatives of modern architecture, some of them related to the CIAM, attempted to salvage their stylistic tenets by subordinating function to monumentality. However, none of their compromise designs were chosen. In July 1933, barely six months after becoming chancellor, Hitler cancelled the ongoing competition for a new Reichsbank building, one of whose finalists was Ludwig Mies van der Rohe. He thereby swiftly acted on his long-standing conviction, already laid down in 1925 in his book *My Struggle*, that a strong state ought to reaffirm the monumental distinction of public from private building.

/ 3.3 REVALIDATION OF TRADITIONAL ART

/ 3.3.1 RECOIL FROM MODERN ART

Traditional art was the obvious choice for the clearly understandable, symbolically charged representations of social and political ideals envisaged by the state art of the Depression. For centuries, it had been trained on such assignments, while modern art had been cultivated outside professional networks of state commissions and conceived averse to public functions. The few inroads modern art had made on state patronage were confined to acquisitions by public collections or museums, most often through social networks of dealers, collectors, wealthy donors, and sympathetic museum officials, hardly ever on the initiative of state authorities. The limited public acceptance it had won on its own terms entailed no adaptation to public service. In 1937, Georges Braque turned down a commission to paint a mural in the Palais de Chaillot, to be paired with one by neo-classical painter Louis Billotey. In the same year, he painted *The Duo*, one of his atelier pictures, an introspective reflection on the political challenges facing modern art (see Chapter 2.2 / 2.3.1). The state purchase of this painting two years later respected this posture of non-participation.

The recondite, idiosyncratic appearance of much modern art, sustained by the educational privilege of its upper middle-class clientele, became a liability for any cultural policy aimed at majority support. Its appreciation was confined to an expanding coterie which prided itself of its alternative tastes. Public art education in schools and universities was not yet disposed to bridge this class divide. The fusion of ideology and life experience as a subject for uninitiated viewers germane to public art was neither the theme of modern art nor did it affect its form. On the contrary, its attendant literature extolled its penchant for distorting subjects beyond recognition to the point of declaring the distortion to reveal their essence. Literary initiation was a precondition for its understanding. When after the First World War modern art expanded in public culture, photography attained the status of a modern art form. Arising from documentary, scientific, or commercial photography, it allowed painting to divest itself of the task of imaging reality. Modern photography had little difficulty to be embraced by totalitarian regimes which otherwise clamped down on modern art.

In the first decade after the First World War, the social self-sufficiency of modern art was compromised as modern artists expanded their cooperation with institutions and commercial ventures of the decorative arts and crafts. Under the catchword purity, their clean abstraction appeared to jibe with a sober-minded aesthetic validation of structures and materials. They contributed to a new lifestyle. The advance of machine production as part of post-war re-capitalization related such aspirations to technological ideals of functional design. Streamlined sparseness and reductive

regularity made modern art appear akin to the rationalization of production and to the shapes of machine-made objects. It served to aestheticize modernization, both capitalist and communist. Thus, for a few years, the optimistic, or even utopian, outlook inherent in the post-war ideology of modernization made modern art appear affirmative rather than critical. However, this kind of social acceptance began to wane when, at the start of the Depression, industrial rationalization lost its economic productivity, social promise, and hence cultural appeal.

/ 3.3.2 RESTORATION AND ENFORCEMENT

Over and above the differences between political systems, the new art policies in all four European states proceeded from the premise that traditional art was to be restored to its original majority status in public culture, but on populist grounds rather than for the sake of returning to the past. They were meant to redress an undue prominence attained by modern art in the preceding decade. This backlash against modern art was rarely founded on any alternative aesthetic ideal pronounced by the authorities, but rather on the quest for a clearly circumscribed spectrum of contents and form inviting popular understanding and appreciation. What counted was the capacity of public art to use accustomed visual modes for endowing Depression policies with ideological self-assurance. The revalidation of traditional art confirmed an incremental turn away from modern abstraction and expressivity toward realist veracity or classical poise. In Italy and the Soviet Union, it had long been promoted in ideological debates. In France, it was called "return to order," a conservative catchword based on the phrase "rappel à l'ordre" coined by poet Jean Cocteau.(18) Only in Germany was it presented as a return to a previous practice.

This revalidation promised to restore the social balance of artistic culture, where modern art had gained a prominence at odds with its minority status. It suited the cultivation of a mass base on the part of totalitarian regimes. Its enforcement was part of their practice of enhancing their mass base by coercive measures. Traditional art was used to frame their policies as experiential reality. However, if the customary defenders of a conservative artistic culture had hoped to be entrusted with shaping the new art policies, they were disappointed. A nationalist restoration of academic art alone was not sufficient for the task of forging a mass culture with a contemporary look where the arts could be readied for new political functions. While the art administrations of France and Italy were acting with enough circumspection to avoid an anachronistic appearance of the traditionalist art they sponsored, those of Germany and the Soviet Union failed to reconcile the doctrinaire traditionalism they espoused with their quest for an art to inspire their mass societies for technical modernization.

Although such art policies claimed to restore traditional artistic standards, they were simultaneously aimed at an art of social innovation, and, in totalitarian states,

radical political renewal. They included a self-contradictory demand for modernization of traditional art while upholding its accustomed appearance. Therefore, it was not simply a matter of rejecting modern art in the name of tradition, but of devising a modernization of traditional art's appearance that would overcome the critical standoffs which had plagued a hundred years of two-track art history. Such an incremental modernization was expected to reconcile past and present rather than deciding between the two. This is how the French art administrations of the thirties justified their traditional preferences, how the Italian regime sought to devise a Fascist style in the manner of a corporate synthesis, and how the Bolshevik Party shaped its First Five-Year Plan propaganda culture. Only the German art administration made no effort in this direction.

/ 3.3.3 REALISM OR CLASSICISM

For an art of political stabilization, the relationship between the populist appeal of academic realism and the authoritarian appeal of the classical tradition became the primary alternative to define. After several centuries of steady attempts at their fusion, in the latter part of the 19th century the two traditions had parted ways and were applied to different kinds of themes. In the art of the Depression, both styles were championed even more, but kept even further apart. They were thematically polarized. Few works were realist and classical at once. The relationship between both styles was calibrated depending on either populist or authoritarian trends of art policy, an ambivalence that overrode sporadic attempts at making them converge. The art-political stakes in deciding between the two in the reassertion of traditional against modern art were so high that their mere retrieval was criticized whenever attempted. In this regard, Russian realist painters or Italian classicist sculptors were equally rebuffed.

Since state art programs of the Depression were focused on public building as a showcase for the arts at large, the emulation of classical architecture entailed an emphasis on power and control as salient features of the imagery. Insertion of imagery into architecture was largely released from subordination to classical orders, thus emphasizing its rhetorical aplomb. In all four states, the classical tradition was drawn upon as a means for transfiguring the human factor of technical productivity into heroic achievement. It made for a symbolic show of politically energized working societies. Drawing on mythological as well as socialist iconographies, it overstressed physical strength beyond its classical poise and organic limits. This transfiguration of labor replaced the machine aesthetics of the preceding decade, which had contributed to the public ascendancy of modern art in the name of technological investment. Its classical form suited both the celebration of biological strength and its insertion into coventional power schemes.

Academic realism, in so far as it stayed clear of classical idealization, was primed to infuse representations of everyday life and work with the expression of social

cohesion and political allegiance, both of which had been largely absent before. It was for this purpose, not for reasons of aesthetic appreciation alone, that it was being revalidated. The required adjustments were at variance with its creed of truth to nature. As soon as practitioners of academic realism in totalitarian states fell short of the ideological overcharge assigned to their accustomed style, they incurred criticisms of professional triviality, or worse, of lacking political commitment. While in the Soviet Union such a critique was rampant throughout the decade, in Germany it surfaced only in 1937, but with a vengeance. In the art of the Popular Front, art officials had a choice between an academic and a non-academic realism, the latter a tradition reaching back to Gustave Courbet and ideologically enhanced by leftist connotations. Eventually, not unlike their totalitarian counterparts, they opted for the academic variant whose idealistic surface made it serviceable for mass education.