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1.3 / Democratic Art Policy

/1 FRANCE VERSUS GERMANY

/1.1 DISPARITY OF STATE SUPPORT

/1.1.1 FRENCH EQUITABILITY

Of all European states, democratic France had the most thoroughly organized state administration of the arts, with an institutional continuity dating back to the founding of the Third Republic in 1871 or even earlier. Detached from government oversight, the French Fine Arts administration operated on a fundamentalist concept of democratic culture impervious to electoral change. Normative, liberal, and representative concerns converged in the agency's enduring cultural policy, which derived its mandate from the institutional representation of its various professional constituencies. Reaching into academies, museums, monuments, and state collections nationwide, it regulated the arts and at the same time shielded them from passing political interference. As a result, fast-changing governments and their parliamentary factions pursued no art policy on behalf of any party program until the accession of the Popular Front government in July 1936. Education ministers who came and went wielded no authority over the Fine Arts Administration and its strong-willed directors, whom they appointed when the post was vacant but who stayed when they stepped down.

Maintaining a long-term bureaucracy over successive government officials, the Beaux-Arts Administration prided itself on its even-handed support of diverse, competing artistic tendencies, so long as it rated them as significant for its mission to foster an all-embracing, national artistic culture which would respond to diverse public expectations and demands. The Conseil Supérieur des Beaux-Arts, its consultative body, gave artists a voice and a share of votes, but only as representatives of duly constituted professional associations or other groups it recognized as relevant. Relying on a multitude of boards and commissions for narrowly circumscribed decisions, it strove to balance a plurality of corporative and political aspirations. The intricate organization of the Beaux-Arts Administration with its ever-adjusted consultative bodies managed to bring together whomever it recognized as leaders of artistic culture: administrators, artists, curators, critics, dealers, and even 'art lovers' of some standing, many of whom also sat in the 'art groups' of the Chamber and Senate of the National Assembly.

When it came to committee selections, purchases, and commissions, the Beaux-Arts Administration rated modern artists and their representatives as the minority they were, no matter how high their profile in the public sphere. Modern artists in turn acquiesced in their minority rating, because they cultivated it as a hallmark of their 'independence.' From the start of the century until well into the Depression, they could count on a flourishing private art market in steady expansion. They were assured of a clientele made up of educated segments of the upper middle-class and aristocracy. The less they needed state support, the more proudly did they parade their distance from the art that was supervised and promoted by the state. Until the Depression, therefore, a coexistence of traditional and modern artistic cultures, open to mutual overlaps in any case, prevented any trenchant confrontations on matters of cultural policy between the two. Their public debates were often ideologically framed, to be sure, but hardly ever translated into serious political conflicts pertaining to the art administration.

/1.1.2 GERMAN IMBALANCE

The Weimar Republic, founded in 1919 through a revolutionary system change, lacked the Third Republic's constitutional continuity of nearly fifty years and the ensuing uncontested legitimacy. Although it had to be stabilized by the military against workers' uprisings, as the Third Republic had been back in 1871, it started out with the deceptive political culture of a revolutionary beginning. And, just as the Third Republic had inherited its politically shielded art administration from the Second Empire, the Weimar Republic inherited an altogether different kind of art-political administration from the Wilhelmine Empire: direct government oversight of the arts through the culture or education ministries of its regional component states. The new democratic flexibility imposed on this perpetuated system gave elected state and city governments—with the steadily social democratic government of Prussia in the lead—an impetus to reshape their art policies in accordance with their party programs. By the same token, it exposed them to political attacks in parliament and in the public sphere and to changing majorities of the vote.

Social democratic and liberal art administrations of the Weimar Republic tended to privilege modern over traditional art, not only to rectify the unilateral support of traditional art by past imperial administrations in the direction of proportional equity, but in a preferential treatment meant to showcase their commitment to social modernization. Appointments of modern artists as academy professors, unheard of in France, as well as modern preferences in museum purchases, drew the competition between traditional and modern art into polarized art-political debates between liberal and conservative constituencies, debates which became more acrimonious the less stable the government's electoral base. Any disregard for traditional artists, real or

perceived, exposed cultural officials and museum directors to charges of passing over majorities of national traditions, made modern art vulnerable to unspecific, sweeping attacks by conservative parties and pressure groups, and thereby drew artistic culture into the bitter divisiveness of Weimar democracy.

However, the financial constraints under which the Weimar Republic had to operate throughout its existence prevented national and state governments from implementing their pro-modern art policies by substantial state commissions and acquisitions for public collections as in France. After the short-term, pre-inflationary boom of the German art market had subsided, modern artists' financial prospects turned precarious. Striving for academy professorships and other forms of state support, they started to promote themselves on ideological platforms of radical renewal, in polemical opposition to the conservatism of their traditional competitors. Because the artistic culture of the Weimar Republic suffered from a structural convergence of economic scarcity and institutional politicization, traditional and modern art were not pursued in disparate coexistence, as they were in the Third Republic, but in an ambience of heated controversy, which by the time of the Depression fed into the political struggles for the protection of democracy.

/1.1.3 COMPETITION IN REVERSE

When the declining art market of the Depression impelled artists, traditional or modern, to turn to state support, the conflictive competition between traditional and modern art in both democracies unfolded in reverse. In France it was modern artists, in Germany traditional ones who claimed to be disadvantaged by government art policy. At issue was the political rapport between modern art and democratic government. In France, support of modern art was somewhat increased because the number of its practitioners and adherents on the various boards of the Fine Art administration had proportionally grown. In Germany, a disproportionate preference for modern art by state agencies and institutions appeared to contradict democratic equity. While in France in 1932 a new center-left government responded to the newly-founded modern architects' and artists' pressure groups with incremental policy shifts, in Germany similar pressure groups of conservative architects and artists challenged government art policies to no avail. Ultimately, some of them supported the National Socialist electoral campaigns.

In France, incoming education minister Anatole de Monzie strengthened government influence on art policy by reinstating the post of sub-secretary of fine arts, abolished in 1917, as a liaison with the Fine Arts Administration, and engineered the replacement of traditionalist Fine Arts Director Paul Léon by Emile Bollaert, a more even-handed, open-minded public official. As part of his more inclusive art policy, de Monzie, who personally favored modern art, reshuffled the Beaux-Arts Council's elaborate

committee structure to give more representation to modern artists—including one of their most prestigious practitioners, Henri Matisse—so as to redress their disadvantage when it came to state commissions and acquisitions. As a result of these adjustments, new modern artists' pressure groups—the Union des Artistes Modernes, founded on May 15, 1929, and the Communist-initiated Association des Ecrivains Révolutionnaires, including artists, founded in January 1932—operated within a still principled but now more elastic institutional framework whose legitimacy they found no grounds to question.

In Germany, by contrast, while the national government paraded its support of modern art in the international exhibitions of Barcelona in 1929 and Oslo in 1932, state and city governments, with mounting numbers of National Socialist deputies in their legislatures, found it necessary to retreat from pro-modern art policies in the face of growing right-wing pressure groups. The conservative architects' organization, 'Block,' founded in 1928, was still backed by the Deutschnationale Volkspartei (DNVP), which abided by democracy. But the larger, more activist 'Kampfbund für deutsche Kultur,' founded on February 26, 1929, under the aegis of National Socialist party leader Alfred Rosenberg, assaulted modern art as part of an overall attack on the Weimar 'system.' As soon as the NSDAP attained parliamentary pluralities, as in the state of Thuringia, where Interior Minister Wilhelm Frick banished modern art from art schools and museums in April 1930, and in the city of Dessau, where its majority in the city council was large enough to force the closing of the Bauhaus in August 1932, the pro-modern art policy of the Weimar Republic started to unravel.

/1.2 POLITICAL DIVERGENCE, 1929-1934

/1.2.1 MODERN ART ON THE LEFT IN FRANCE

As long as modern artists in France did well on the art market, their political engagement was limited to the circle of the surrealists, who did not care to be acknowledged by the Fine Arts Direction. Since 1930, reneging on their initial anarchism, they expressly sided with the Communist Party—at that time still a fringe group under police surveillance—in calling for an anti-democratic revolution. For all its stridency, however, the impact of the surrealists' engagement with Communism was minimal. When, starting in 1929, the Communist Party began to broaden its electoral base and embarked on devising practicable policies for parliamentary enactment, it rebuffed the surrealists even more categorically than did government art agencies, which had merely kept them at arm's length. Henceforth, the surrealists' political interventions fell short of affecting the political process, if not the public sphere. The political culture of modern art in France proceeded without them, on implicitly constitutional lines, in a persistent effort to secure and enlarge its foothold in a state-administered artistic culture, and therefore never disruptive for all its attendant polemics.

The Communist-sponsored Association des écrivains révolutionnaires (*AER*), with an affiliated artists' group, had been founded in 1932, the first year the Depression hit the French economy and the government started to curtail the arts budget. In 1933, its journal *Commune* published proposals for economic aid to artists which far exceeded those envisaged by the government. The AER's new interest in politics contributed to drawing even more artists into its ranks, so that in 1934 it renamed itself AEAR to include them on an equal footing with writers. Its proposals tied in with the Communist Party's pro-labor stance in framing its anti-Depression politics. Accordingly, its artistic initiatives were aimed at making the arts responsive to working-class concerns. As the Communist Party broadened its appeal to artists through its economic policy, it was quick to sever its ties with the surrealists, who had initially joined the AEAR but were soon expelled. André Breton dramatized the break when he refused to write agitational texts for the gas workers' journal from within his Party cell. Henceforth the surrealists went on to cultivate a Communism at odds with the PCF.

The rightist riots of February 6-7, 1934, and the ensuing formation of the Watch Committee of Antifascist Intellectuals (*Comité de vigilance des intellectuels antifascistes, CVIA*) on March 5, calling for a unity of action with the proletariat, precipitated the rallying of modern artists (other than the surrealists) to Communist cultural politics, not just out of economic self-interest, but out of anti-fascist conviction. Fernand Léger, who had already joined the AEAR in January 1934, was one of the most prominent new members of its painters' section, turning his earlier self-alignment with industrial workers on account of his machine aesthetics into a posture of proletarian solidarity. In July 1935, he would go as far as to proclaim his allegiance to Communism in a declaration titled "We are in the Light."[37] From 1934 on, the AEAR painters' section, eventually even boasting Picasso as a member, turned the 'Maison de la Culture,' the Communist cultural institute in Paris, into an expansive art center. It is here that all-embracing Communist platforms for the arts were hammered out, blending economic and political demands. Two years later, these demands were publicly touted in the so-called 'realism debates.'

/1.2.2 TRADITIONAL ART ON THE RIGHT IN GERMANY

By contrast to France, the struggle between traditional and modern art in the Weimar Republic fed into the wider-ranging political conflicts being fought out between Right and Left in the public sphere. It became exacerbated as some modern artists, in sympathy with the short-lived political ascendancy of their Soviet colleagues, stridently positioned themselves on the 'revolutionary' Left. Conservative groups of architects and associations of the building trades saw it in their interest to oppose the ascendancy of modern architects in public housing programs of state and municipal governments backed by the Social Democratic and Liberal Parties. Relying on the

labor-saving economics and functional practicality of modernized building, these programs canvased an aesthetics of minimalist design. A call for supporting traditional against modern art in general, written into the first National Socialist Party program of 1920, remained inconsequential because of the party's insignificance until the start of the Depression. Meanwhile, it was the right-wing German National People's Party (*Deutschnationale Volkspartei, DNVP*) that first included a defense of traditional architecture in its agenda.

The closing of the Bauhaus in Weimar by the incoming right-wing state government of Thuringia in 1925, and the short-lived suppression of its more moderate successor school at Dessau by an even more right-wing city government in 1930, were interventions against modern art that could boast democratic legitimacy. Their national resonance made art policy a propaganda issue for right-wing politics everywhere. In 1925, a coalition led by the DNVP, including a small faction of right-wing extremists, and in league with the regional 'Union for the Preservation of German Culture in Thuringia,' removed the Bauhaus faculty from the Weimar art school system and re-established the older art academy, albeit under the new directorship of Otto Bartning, a modern-minded architect. In January 1930, however, the NSDAP's plurality in Thuringian state elections entitled them to place one of its national leaders, Wilhelm Frick, as Minister of Interior and Education in a conservative government. Frick proceeded to suppress modern art in state institutions and appointed Party ideologue Paul Schultze-Naumburg to head a new but short-lived art school at Weimar.

In his speeches of 1928-1929 on cultural policy, Hitler promised for the first time to call on disadvantaged traditional artists for an anti-modern renewal of German art in general. As a result, the growing mass base flocking to him since 1929 from diverse social segments included such artists, their supporting critics, and their potential public, who did not always subscribe to his policies in general. The cultural organization developed to back up the NSDAP's electoral campaigns was the 'Combat League for German Culture,' its ranks swelling, and out to vilify modern art according to the original party program. Its annual congress, held at Weimar in June 1930 while Frick was Education Minister in Thuringia, chose Schultze-Naumburg as its principal spokesman on matters of art. During 1931 Schultze-Naumburg delivered his standard lecture 'Struggle for Art' at mass rallies in six German cities under the guard of SA platoons in uniform. Here the defense of traditional against modern art was made into a political campaign issue whose populist resonance exposed the tenuous political grounding of modern art's prominence in Weimar culture.

/1.2.3 PARTING WAYS

The demise of democracy in Germany at the hands of Hitler's government since January 30, 1933, on the one hand, and its constitutional survival in France after

the unsuccessful coup d'état attempt of February 6, 1934 on the other, enhanced the differences between the allocation of traditional and modern art in the political culture of both states as they had taken shape during the preceding decade. Because the suppression of modern art in Germany coincided with that of democracy, the relationship between the two became the foremost issue of art policy across the Rhine. For the government and the public sphere of the Third Republic, the new German art policy became one of the yardsticks for cultural detachment by the Left and cultural rapprochement by the Right. From 1933 on, democratic art policy remained an issue for France alone, albeit as a venue for strife. One year later, and three years after the Depression had started to affect France, the representational equity of the Fine Arts system started to be contested. In 1936, the Popular Front government reclaimed its democratic credentials for the benefit of modern artists.

Traditional artists sympathized with Hitler's government, ignoring the curtailment of civil liberties inherent in its anti-modern measures. The apparent revalidation of academic standards in the arts seemed to continue the policies of cultural restraint which had prompted conservative Weimar governments since 1930 to cut back on their support of modern art teaching. The failure of the extremist 'Combat League for German Culture' to influence the incoming government's political reorganization of the arts, and the unchanged mechanisms of state patronage and the private art market, even under political oversight, deluded modern artists into believing they would be able to work in their accustomed manner, without express allegiance to the new regime. Because the anti-Weimar polemics pervading the National Socialist denunciations of modern art pointed to the abolished Republic's revolutionary origins at the expense of its constitutional legitimacy, they appealed to artists who were fearful of Communism as a disruptive movement, overlooking the new regime's hostility to democracy as the basis of cultural freedom.

French modern artists, with the self-proclaimed revolutionary André Breton at the helm, rallied to the defense of the Republic when the coup attempt of 1934 put it under siege. However, the subsequent electoral restoration of more conservative governments did nothing to improve their standing, stuck in their proportional underrepresentation within the Fine Arts system. Thus, from 1935 on, driven by a mix of economic discontent and anti-fascist conviction, French modern artists started flocking to the Left. Many lent their support to the electoral campaign of the Popular Front, whose platform included far-reaching demands for widening state support of the arts as part of make-work measures and the expansion of leisure culture. It took the new strategy of the French Communist Party, which in turn was heeding the Comintern's policy change of 1934, to channel this leftward drift on the part of a growing artists' constituency into a democratic rather than revolutionary form of action, which nonetheless reclaimed the populist aspirations of the French Revolution of 1789 for a renewal of the Third Republic.

/1.3 POLITICIZATION IN FRANCE, 1934-1936

/1.3.1 MODERNIZING TRADITIONAL ART

Electoral shifts from radical to conservative governments in the wake of the riots of February 1934 entailed a recoil of art policy to the status quo, that is, official preference for traditional artists. This relative retrenchment affected the planning of the 1937 World Exposition, the major French venture of public-works art programs, cancelled and relaunched later that year. Throughout the following two years, until the accession of the Popular Front government in July 1936, entrenched institutional networks restrained the new Director of Fine Arts, Georges Huisman—a career political official appointed on February 4, 1934 by incoming radical Prime Minister Édouard Daladier—from acting on his modern preferences. Under the center-right governments of 1934-1936, the decline of the art market due to the Depression and the creeping curtailment of the state art budget, underway since 1932, exacerbated the competition between traditional and modern artists, particularly since Huisman's office promoted traditional styles, enhanced by modern features, for art ventures sponsored by the state.

In the 'Pavillon International des Beaux-Arts' of the Brussels World Exposition of 1935, four rooms were allotted to France. True to the principle of equitable representation observed by the Fine Arts Direction, three of them were assigned to the three leading artists' associations, and the fourth to "Independent Painting," that is, to unorganized artists of modern persuasion. The façade of the French Pavilion, designed by Jacques Carlu in a stripped-down classical style, featured three large-scale murals on the theme of "France at Work," which spelled out the conservative government's vision of integrating the arts into the economic process: *Art and Thought* by Jean Souverbie, *Commerce and Agriculture* by Natacha Carlu, and *Industry* by Roger Chastel. Thus, when it came to illustrating the French economic policy of dealing with the Depression, the government turned to organized professional artists who delivered on pictorial clarity, as long as such artists did not cling to academic conventions but enhanced their traditional forms with a 'modern' veneer of decorative abstraction. This incremental modernization conveyed its cautious industrial policy.

Concurrent with the preparations for the Brussels world exhibition, it was decided to build a new Museum of Modern Art for the extant state collections, to be opened at the next world exposition in Paris three years later. The competition for the building, announced on September 15, 1934, turned into the widest-ranging display to-date of the Third Republic's diversified artistic culture. Over 300 architects submitted 128 projects to a jury composed of 51 members, including the leadership of the Expo organizing committee, as well as politicians representing state and city governments.

The participating architects elected six additional jury members among themselves. The competition thus turned out to be an exemplary venture of democratic art policy implemented by institutions. On December 24, 1934, the first prize was awarded to a team of four academic architects—Dondel, Aubert, Viard, and Dastugue—in studied disregard for modern competitors such as Le Corbusier and Mallet-Stevens. Covered and surrounded by sculptures of classical appearance, the new museum embodied the incremental modernization of traditional art as a democratic consensus project.

/1.3.2 MODERN ART IN POLITICAL OPPOSITION

The democratic credentials of conservative art policy made it difficult for modern artists to oppose it, particularly when it presented itself flexible enough to discard a merely academic art without some 'modernizing' features. Hence, the "Manifesto of Mural Painting" and another manifesto of the 'Union des Artistes Modernes,' both issued in 1934, demanded no policy change, only a more flexible acceptance. A more deliberate challenge to the government, founded on political arguments rather than professional grievances, came from the leftist response to the February riots. It started with the 'Comité de vigilance des intellectuels antifascistes,' founded on March 5, 1934, and was joined by numerous modern artists, resulting in an unofficial network coalescing one year later in the Communist Maison de la Culture. Flocking to the shows and events of the Communist-led 'Association of Revolutionary Writers and Artists,' modern artists combined their bids for professional recognition with their anti-fascist convictions. In their ideologically charged-up public debates, they questioned the self-proclaimed impartiality of the Fine Arts Direction and agitated for a change of government in the forthcoming elections.

The Maison de la Culture, founded in April 1935 under Communist auspices as an all-arts cultural institution, offered the professional disgruntlements of both traditional and modern artists an organizational venue and a shared ideological platform for turning their disappointment with the art policies of conservative governments into political opposition. The stepped-up cultural activities of the French Communist Party under its new inclusive policies impelled by the Comintern were centered in this institution with its ambitions for national outreach. The Maison's secretary-general, formerly surrealist writer Louis Aragon, organized various programs for its arts section aimed at making modern art part of leftist culture. The Maison de la Culture succeeded in pooling modern artists' long-standing but diffuse drift to the left, when Henri Matisse joined three figurative painters on the honorary governing board, when André Masson and Fernand Léger taught well-attended art classes to lay students there, and when Le Corbusier propagated his *Ville Radieuse* within its lecture program.

However, the inclusive shows and mass debates held during 1934-1936 under the auspices of the Maison de la Culture obliged modern artists, supported by a well-to

do clientele, to forego their habitual claims to a self-validating counterculture, and to measure up with traditional artists in a style- and class-transcending culture of political partisanship. The exhibition organized at the Maison de la Culture to follow up on a debate held on May 9, 1935, under the catchword "Where is Painting Headed?" presented no more than a medley of pre-existing works in heterogeneous styles ranging from the realist to the abstract, and in little or no thematic or stylistic compliance with the demands that had been raised in the debate. In his essay "John Heartfield and Revolutionary Beauty," written on occasion of a show featuring Heartfield's anti-National Socialist photomontages and sponsored by the 'Association des Écrivains et Artistes Révolutionnaires' in April 1935, Aragon invoked mainstream realism and caricature aesthetics to exalt Heartfield's press collages to the distinction of Courbet and Daumier.

/1.3.3 COMMUNIST ART PROGRAMS

Starting in 1934, of all political parties in France, only the Communist Party worked to frame a comprehensive art policy to match its expansive platform for the general electorate. It strove to develop an art beyond its customary class base, to reinvigorate ideological traditions of the Left in the most inclusive terms, and to redefine French artistic culture along populist rather than elitist lines. This strategy was implementing the new, inclusive Comintern policy, first of the United Front, and, since 1935, of the Popular Front, which released parties abroad from heeding the strictly anti-modern line of current Soviet art, as long as they could make modern artists subscribe to its domestic and international policy goals without necessarily making them heed their organizational discipline. The Comintern's elastic art policy under the Popular Front allowed for the promotion of modern art in Western Europe as a potentially revolutionary culture, in line with the leftist ideological leanings that modern art had cultivated since the beginning of the century, provided it toned down its exaggerated revolutionary rhetoric to meet the test of popular acceptance.

Both traditional and modern artists came under scrutiny for their relevancy to the PCF's new political agenda within the Popular Front coalition. But when modern artists eagerly embraced the charge by stressing their alignment with industrial technology, they fought a losing battle against traditional artists on the issue of their styles' communicative potential. Eventually, a thematically focused, ideologically sharpened version of 'realism' prevailed in PCF-sponsored exhibitions such as 'Return to the Subject' of January 1934 and 'International Exhibition About Fascism' of March 1935. Its potential for political agitation was highlighted in the Heartfield show of April 1935, followed, in the same year, by one-man shows of George Grosz and Frans Masereel. The most prominent modern artist to publicly side with the PCF was Fernand Léger, who joined the AEAR in January 1934, and in July 1935 publicly pledged his Communist allegiance (see above, 1.2.1). However, the ideological update

of his cubist abstraction, offered under the cachet of labor-friendly technology, met with Aragon's unremitting criticism.

The Communist Party's management of guided debates on the plurality of styles, along with its axiomatic partisanship of Soviet domestic and foreign policies, put the Surrealist writers and artists, until 1930 the only ones to manifestly side with it, under so much pressure to forego their own political judgment that in 1935 Breton led most of them to abrogate their Communist posture. The surrealists' breakaway was inaugurated by Aragon's attendance at the Second Congress of the 'International of Revolutionary Literature' at Kharkov in October 1930. Although Aragon had a motion vindicating Surrealism passed upon his arrival, by the time of his departure he signed a letter disavowing the Second Manifesto and calling for Party censorship of surrealist literature. At the Congress of Writers in Defense of Culture, held in Paris in May 1935, with Aragon amongst the organizers, Breton was barred until the last minute from speaking to defend his stance. In immediate retaliation, he and Paul Éluard, in their anti-Soviet Manifesto "When the Surrealists were Right,"(38) led a public walk-out of most surrealists from the Communist Party.

/ 2 ART OF THE POPULAR FRONT

/ 2.1 CAMPAIGNING WITH THE ARTS

/ 2.1.1 DEMOCRACY VERSUS DICTATORSHIP

In the art of the Popular Front, the long-term convergence of artistic culture and the public sphere that characterizes 20th-century art in democratic states attained its peak. For the first time, the arts were attuned to electoral politics, as artists were encouraged to forge ad-hoc coalitions between the disparate cultural constituencies of parties on the center and on the left. The art of the Popular Front was an attempt at a democratic response to the politicization of the arts underway in totalitarian states for several years. However, neither in France nor in Spain did the public culture of democracy allow the arts to be politically directed, no matter how zealously government agencies strove to exceed their predecessors in this respect. Most interventions into artistic culture by the parties, and later governments, of the Popular Front were orchestrated with an ideological rhetoric that sounded the more self-assured the less certain their results turned out to be. Their principled reasoning was meant to match the totalitarian semblance of political will, but it lacked a comparably coherent ideological platform.

Even though they were constrained by the economic and political limitations of their short and tenuous hold on government, the Popular Front coalitions of both France and Spain sought to match the arts programs of the Soviet Union and Germany in public appeal. They were tacitly drawing the line against the former and openly

directed against the latter. The difference stemmed from the geopolitical alignments of both democracies in the accelerating military conflict of the decade, which barred them from an ideological confrontation with the Soviet Union. French defense policy was anchored in the Soviet military alliance against the German menace. In in its civil war, Spain was the recipient of Soviet military assistance and the target of German military attacks. Because of these foreign policy constraints, the art of the Popular Front was bound to fall short of an equitable determination of what an art of democracy under totalitarian challenge might be like. While its denunciation of German art policy was part of its public appeal, its detachment from Soviet art policy, hardly ever expressed, was to ensure its freedom.

Artists flocked to the Popular Front driven by an ambition to transcend the commercially encased, upper-middle-class artistic culture on which they had been thriving before, but whose economic viability was now imperiled by the Depression. To make up for the loss, they sought various forms of political patronage, championing the significance of art for society at large. Starting in 1934, these artists were drawn into expanding networks of party agencies and newly-fashioned artists' organizations, set up to enlist them to work toward a change of government in the upcoming elections. The organizations were modeled on workers' unions, publicized in meetings and journals, animated by supportive intellectuals, and financed by party funds. To what extent they tended to align artists in a new political conformity of its own remained an open question. In his *Manifesto for an Independent Revolutionary Art* of 1938, Breton summarily denounced the cultural endeavors of the Popular Front as a juggernaut subjecting them to political management and compromising their freedom of judgment.

/2.1.2 ART UNDER DEBATE

Popular Front art policies were intended for traditional as well as modern artists to share. They were debated back and forth within an intense political culture of public discussions, lectures, shows and journals. Such debates were to broaden the social scope and political relevancy of the arts, and thereby to increase artists' opportunities for work. Their elusive ideal was a majority culture of the Left. This artistic culture of debate was promoted as an alternative to 'fascist,' and to some extent even Soviet, government guidance. It was focused on the question of how the arts could be made politically functional without compromising the artists' creative independence and aesthetic integrity. The underlying ideal of democratic freedom in France was never spelled out as such, however. Those debates were aimed at reinvigorating artists' civic engagement according to a republican tradition of almost one-hundred and fifty years whose immediate relevancy was at issue. A stronger Communist leadership and the urgency of wartime politics in Spain, which lacked such a tradition, narrowed the debates to defining a mission of support for the Republic under siege.

In France, art-political debates were centered in the newly-founded, communist-directed Maison de la Culture. Its secretary, Louis Aragon, promoted an ideological medley of John Heartfield's poster photomontages with the grand tradition of French 19th-century realism in the wake of Courbet, while opposing the machine aesthetics of Léger and Le Corbusier. Between May 14 and June 20, 1936, on the eve of the Popular Front's election victory, the 'Association of Painters, Sculptors and Engravers of the Maison de la Culture' organized and publicized a series of three mass debates, attended by almost 2,000 representatives of the Paris art world. Ostensibly focused "on realism," these debates envisaged the fundamentals of art policy in general. In a speech at one of these meetings, the art official of the incoming government, Jean Cassou, took pains to safeguard the electoral coalition of traditional and modern artists by reassuring them that the imminent politicization of the arts would entail no choice between the two.

In Spain, communist-led artist groups spearheaded an activist engagement for leftist electoral politics. Already in 1932, photomontage artist Josep Renau founded the 'Union of Proletariat Writers and Artists' in Valencia, followed in 1933 by the 'Spanish Association of Revolutionary Artists' in Madrid and Barcelona, both affiliated with their Paris namesake. The Valencia art journal *Nueva Cultura*, edited by Renau, and several other art journals issued by both associations, sought to give shape to the propaganda activism they demanded from the arts. After the February election brought the Popular Front to government, their political line changed from Communist class struggle to an inclusive republican culture. This political platform was more articulate and more activist than the coalition umbrella of the French debates with its axiomatic promise of freedom from government control. It insisted on committing 'abstract' art—the generic term for modern art—to an unequivocally anti-'bourgeois,' if not outright revolutionary, mission that would complement, if not exceed, the populist appeal of traditional art.

/ 2.1.3 COMMUNIST LEADERSHIP

In both Popular Front movements, it was the Communist parties that gained a disproportionate amount of leadership in the politicization of artists on the Left—despite being minority partners to socialists and radicals, and hence with a limited influence on shaping policy—because their professional networks, unmatched by those of other parties, welcomed fellow-travelers with ideological elasticity. The new Comintern policy of forging coalitions required that Communist parties in democratic states desist from the oppressive political control of the arts practiced in the Soviet Union since the April Decree of 1932. Hence these parties, although their preferences were traditional, encouraged long-standing claims of modern art as a venue of 'revolutionary' dissent. In both France and Spain, party politicians took a back seat to artists

and writers of Communist convictions with ambitions to leadership—figures in the mold of Mayakovsky, who had long been disempowered in the USSR. Such personages were better suited to forge coalitions and strategies whose appeal beyond party orthodoxy depended on foregoing discipline.

It was on the question of Popular Front art policy that the two leading surrealist writers with emphatic allegiance to Communism, Louis Aragon and André Breton, came to clash. While Aragon rose to oversee the art programs of the Maison de la Culture, Breton became a bitter opponent of the Popular Front on the issues of party supremacy and self-serving subordination. The split between the two came to a head in November 1934, after Aragon's attendance at the Kharkov writers' congress and subsequent manifest disavowal of Surrealism. While Breton clung to the group's fierce unyieldingness as a minority, Aragon returned to Paris with his authority in art policy confirmed, all set to forge a majority culture of the Left. From his office at the Maison de la Culture, Aragon attempted to construe a French national tradition of socially committed realism as an alternative to the art of the First Five-Year Plan. Stopping short of Socialist Realism, it was a coalition platform meant to attract both artists of traditional persuasion and artists adhering to an aesthetics of modernization.

In Spain, it was Josep Renau, an erstwhile anarchist graphic designer turned Communist, in 1931, who rose to uncontested leadership as an organizer and political writer—all the way from forging alliances between artists' groups on behalf of the Popular Front's electoral campaign to enacting national art policy as a Director of Fine Arts in both the first and second Popular Front governments. Being an artist, Renau, unlike Aragon, had a functional grip on the conduct of art policy as an effort at making artists of disparate tendencies collaborate. The ideological platform he outlined for that purpose likewise combined Soviet-style propaganda art with a national tradition of realistic painting, with Jusepe de Ribera and Francisco Goya as models from the past. Renau was the only artist in any democratic state whose career during the Depression ran the complete trajectory from politically engaged practitioner to organizational leader and on to all-but plenipotentiary government official. In France, with its semi-autonomous Fine Arts Administration, such a career would have been unachievable under any government, right or left.

/2.2 FROM MOVEMENT TO GOVERNMENT

/2.2.1 EXPANSIVE ART POLICY

Once Popular Front coalitions had formed governments in France and Spain, they carried their art-political campaign activism into expanding and reorganizing state art agencies for new political missions. They acknowledged what their cultural constituents had contributed to their election victories. Propaganda culture, including

the arts, became a steady feature of governance. The newly created or expanded government agencies were charged with developing and enacting new art policies. They went beyond the equitable political management of artistic culture by which previous governments had abided, not only because their adherence to fair and equal treatment had been challenged during the campaigns, but also because it was rated as falling short of populist ambitions. Thus, in the summer of 1936, the two foremost democratic states of continental Europe belatedly attempted to match the cultural activism pursued by the three totalitarian ones since the first years of the decade. In politicizing their artistic cultures, they positioned themselves against Germany, their adversary, while keeping an unacknowledged alignment with the Soviet Union, their ally.

Incoming French Education Minister Jean Zay, of the Radical Party, even planned to split off a Ministry of Arts from that of Education, and when that proved unfeasible, envisaged a 'Ministry of Cultural Life,' subdivided into branches for 'National Education' and 'National Expression.' The ideological designations of these hypothetical ministries betray their propaganda purpose. However, the severe financial crises that brought down the last of three successive Popular Front governments on April 8, 1938 reduced Zay's augmentation of the arts account within the overall credits budget to a passing stopgap measure. The last-minute, substantial enlargement of the Paris World Exposition remained his only art-political achievement. Severe budget cuts in the Fine Arts administration made the adjustments of purchase policy envisaged by Director Huisman and supported by Education Ministry liaison Cassou illusory. Zay's new appointments of sympathizers to purchase committees added only some scattered works by socially committed or modern artists to state art collections.

In Spain, Communist Education Minister Jesús Hernández presided over the creation of a comprehensive 'Superior Council of the Culture of the Republic,' plus a 'National Institute of Culture,' to be followed by a sub-secretariat, later Ministry, for Propaganda. All these new institutions were charged with promoting a politically activist art of the Republic in the making. As a result, the social and political networks of artistic culture on the Left were expanded and restructured to a degree unheard of in France. Hernández' policies enabled the government to cooperate with artists' unions, party or army cultural agencies, and other professional groups, all bent on animating an art to flank the propaganda for the defense of the Republic. It was on the basis of such interactions that Undersecretary of Fine Arts Josep Renau, who was also Director of Fine Arts in personal union, held a position of authority unmatched by his two separate homologues in France, who acted independently from one another. As a result, the art of the Popular Front in Spain could be politicized in order to contribute to a public culture of the Civil War.

/2.2.2 SOCIAL PROGRESS AND CIVIL WAR

The Spanish Civil War became the defining event of ideological divergence between the art policies of the Popular Front governments in France and Spain. Since the Third Republic felt obliged to abide by neutrality rather than come to the aid of the Spanish Republic, internal struggles on this issue compromised the anti-fascist credentials of its culture. The numerous pavilions added to the Paris World Exposition of 1937 by the French Popular Front government and its affiliated unions dwelt on the convergence of scientific, technological, and social progress, promoted on the premise of a peace that at this moment was already in jeopardy. They ignored the lurking military threats apparent in their totalitarian counterparts. The Spanish Republic, on the other hand, used its state-run propaganda agencies to make its pavilion a double-edged statement flying in the face of the Expo's peace platform. It advertised both its social policy of progress and its military policy of dealing with its nationalist insurrection, no matter how irreconcilable both policies turned out to be.

The French Popular Front government's self-representation through the arts was emphatic but temporary. It was concentrated on its many last-minute additions to the Paris Expo—the Pavilion of Railways, the Pavilion of Air, the Palace of Discovery, the Solidarity Pavilion, the Pavilion of Labor, and the Peace Column, all of which gave it international exposure, but only for the duration of the Expo. Taken together, these six temporary buildings and their art work visualized the Popular Front government's largely utopian projections of having social and labor policy, technological progress, and international pacifism all converge on a consistent platform on which no previous French government had ever set its sights, and which subsequent governments were quick to shed. Its presence at the Expo, keyed to the exhibition's pacifist façade, seemed forgetful of the simultaneous work on the World War I monuments flanking the construction of the Maginot Line, (see Chapter 10/3.1), long-term projects launched by previous governments. By contrast to the three totalitarian states, but also to its Spanish counterpart, the French government played down its rearmament for self-defense.

Spanish artists eager to cooperate with the government were drawn into a culture of state projects with set programs or into poster printing agencies, complete with distribution networks. Taking the form of a democratic rally to a common cause, this cohesive artistic culture matched those of the totalitarian states in the underlying political will, but without political coercion. Different from the subjugation of organized artists in the Soviet Union, Renau's art administration kept the debate culture of the electoral campaign afoot, even under conditions of wartime censorship, so that the enlistment of the arts for the Republic presented itself as a spontaneous cooperation, even though it may have been prompted by professional necessity. The loose but efficient pooling of sympathizing Spanish artists culminated in the setup

of collective ateliers for producing the bulk of the works for the art exhibition in the Spanish Pavilion at the Paris Expo, assembled under Renau's personal direction. Its thematic coherence did not restrain participating artists from indulging in their widely disparate personal styles.

/2.2.3 THE CIVIL WAR DIVIDE

Right from the start of the Civil War, the Spanish government planned to organize an elaborate war art program, staffed by little-known, mostly traditional artists, through collaboration between artists' unions, government workshops, and army propaganda units, all pooled to make the arts politically operative in public campaigns. Its primary venue was the poster, which became an art form of its own. A professional poster designer, Renau adopted John Heartfield's poster concept as a model to follow for painters rather than photographers. Painters were enjoined to conceive of posters as a popular art form, persuasive enough to extol the defensive war with messages of righteousness, determination, and endurance, but keeping hollow assurances of victory to a minimum. Renau did use photographic material in the first systematically conceptualized self-representation of a democratic state, whose constitutional tenets he illustrated one by one. This series of color photomontages illustrating Prime Minister Juan Negrín's *Thirteen Points* for a settlement of the Civil War was to be displayed at the New York World Fair of 1939, but by then the Republic was no more.

In the summer of 1937, the Communist Maison de la Culture in Paris mounted a show called "Spain 1930-1937: They Will Not Pass," intended to promote French arms aid for Spain, as Aragon demanded in his preface for the catalog. The show featured works by well-known realists such as Edouard Goerg and Frans Masereel along with photographs from the front. Six months later, government art official Jean Cassou co-organized another war art show at the Billiet-Vorms gallery entitled "Cruel Art," whose defeatism was blatant. The show was dominated by Pablo Picasso's and André Masson's symbolic equations between the bullfight and the Civil War, which Cassou in his catalog text extolled as testimonies of an unflinching will to fight. These two shows of defiance and despondency in quick succession indicate the contradictions in the government's neutrality policy toward the Spanish Republic, a policy which was opposed by the Communists, part of its own parliamentary majority. At a time when the Republic appeared on its way to defeat, all the French government was ready to do was to provide a venue for pro-Spanish artists to muffle their helpless ire.

The divergence between state-sponsored and private art about the Civil War in Spain and France suggests that, by now, only traditional artists could be prompted to produce an affirmative war art in defense of democracy. Modern artists, on the other hand, were no longer confident to picture the Civil War as a winning cause in

the absence of any political support. The Spanish Pavilion at the Paris World Exposition was the only venue where the Popular Front ideal of committing traditional and modern artists to a common program was implemented, because Spanish ambassador Luis Araquistain was able to enlist sympathizing Spanish modern artists living in France—Miró, González and Picasso—to work alongside traditional artists from their home country. In the end, however, only Miró with his *Reaper* and González with his *Montserrat* came up with vigorous personifications of the people's unbroken will to stand up to aggression. Picasso, on the other hand, in his publicly documented, step-by-step elaboration of *Guernica* over several weeks, ended up with a gloomy lament of military loss and civilian mayhem.

/2.3 MODERN ART IN COALITION

/2.3.1 ALIGNING TRADITIONAL AND MODERN ART

In both France and Spain, the attempted coexistence of traditional and modern art on a shared political platform was intended to affirm the democratic pluralism of artistic culture as part of a broad political coalition. While in France this coexistence was a mere ideological end in itself, in Spain it served the political purpose of strengthening democracy against the nationalist insurgence. The mass exhibitions held under the auspices of the AEAR at the Maison de la Culture and the Billiet-Vorms gallery in Paris, just as the union-sponsored exhibitions at Barcelona and Madrid, paired 'realist' and 'abstract' art, as they were called, more as a parallel display of common allegiance to a political cause than as a clarification of their relationship within a program. In the end, such efforts at reconciliation could not prevent the antagonism between traditional and modern art from resurfacing as an issue of the popular accessibility, and hence political efficacy, of art in the public sphere. It was this issue more than any other which kept the long-term competition between the two alive in the artistic debate culture of the Popular Front.

The cultural policy of Communist parties in both France and Spain favored traditional art, not so much because of its ascendancy in the Soviet Union since the start of the Depression, but because the art of socialist movements in Western Europe had long been conceived to address a mass public, and hence to stress social veracity, ideological clarity, and political persuasiveness. Cassou and Renau, policy-formulating spokesmen of their respective governments, as well as Aragon, arts director of the Maison de la Culture, transfigured this long-term socialist preference into a class-transcending ideal of popular art reaching back into the past, from the Le Nain brothers and Velázquez in the 17th and Courbet and Goya in the 19th centuries all the way to Heartfield's photomontages of the day. Such revalidations of traditional but non-academic art were aimed at avoiding the codified academic traditionalism that had served

the art policies of conservative governments. The populist credentials ascribed to this alternative traditionalism were to posit national heritage as the springboard for an activist art rooted in history but without institutional constraints.

It was this updated traditional orientation of socialist or communist art that Popular Front coalition policies strove to reassert vis-à-vis left-leaning modern artists, who had long opposed state-sponsored traditional art because they deemed it intrinsically conservative but had counted the art of Goya and Courbet amongst their own paradigms of independence. In France, a growing opposition of modern artists against what they deemed an undue state preference for traditional art of academic pedigree, as in the Palais de Chaillot and the Musée d'Art Moderne, found a political platform in the Popular Front's election campaign. Now these artists were duly rewarded by an increased if still limited share of state commissions. By contrast, there was no express antagonism between government art and modern art in Spain's politicized artistic culture. Since most Spanish modern artists of some standing had moved to Paris for lack of opportunities at home, they missed the chance to join the Popular Front electoral campaign. Still, for the Paris Expo, the new government could count on them as quasi-exiles.

/2.3.2 DEMOCRATIC COEXISTENCE

In both states, cultural politicians of the Popular Front continued to harbor their doubts as to whether modern artists who were rallying to the movement out of their sympathy for the Left would be able to deliver valid contributions to a populist artistic culture intended for the promotion of social progress and anti-fascist resolve. It was their prestige that made them politically desirable. In France, it was the growing popularity of modern art with a liberal-minded, upper-middle-class public, a constituency of the Radical Party, that made its inclusion relevant for broadening the movement's electoral appeal beyond communist and socialist working-class voters. Minister of Education Jean Zay, who was steering art policy towards the modern, was a member of that Party. In Spain, on the other hand, there were neither outstanding modern artists to rally nor significant interest groups of the modern art scene to attract. Nor was there an upper middle-class public of any consequence whose tastes for modern art could translate into support for the Republic. As a result, modern participation in art policy was contested or minimized.

Between Zay and Cassou at the Education Ministry and Huisman at the Fine Art Administration, no policy addressing the relationship between traditional and modern art was ever reasoned out. It was left to Aragon at the Maison de la Culture, a Communist party ideologue without political standing, to set the terms for the pertinent debates, where he for his part kept a distance from modern art. In Spain, by contrast, Education Minister Hernández gave Renau, in his capacity as Fine Arts Director,

authority to stage debates between traditional and modern artists in the public sphere, and in his capacity as Under Secretary, to shape government art policy accordingly. The urgency of a wartime artistic culture prompted Renau to draw modern artists into co-operation with traditional ones. Never during the tenure of both Popular Front governments did any one of their officials clarify the political reasons for modern art as such to be espoused. That they should have nonetheless embraced it to a limited degree was mainly due to its generic cachet of freedom and its anti-fascist posture by default. To that extent, they ignored objections from dogmatic Communists.

That the Popular Front should have admitted modern art to official artistic culture, though not to an equal extent with traditional art, was also a democratic response to its suppression in Germany, in line with its anti-fascist posture. It pertained to the Popular Front's principled rejection of enforced conformity, which also prompted it to draw the line against the Soviet rejection of modern art. Within these transnational relationships, modern art was still far from being made into a paragon of democracy, as it was after the Second World War. Its coexistence with 'realistic' art—itself intended to be innovative rather than traditional—suited a pluralist culture composed of diverse constituencies, fundamental for the democratic legitimacy of the Popular Front. The two comprehensive modern art exhibitions mounted at the Petit Palais and the Musée du Jeu de Paume during the Paris Expo in the summer of 1937—with Cassou sitting on both organizing committees—certified the official acceptance of modern art in France, albeit at the price of a thematic vacuity in the choice of the exhibits, which obviated any controversy.

/2.3.3 MODERN FIGUREHEAD ARTISTS

Already in 1934, Henri Matisse had participated in an exhibition organized by the AEAR. In 1936, he was co-opted into an honorary committee of AEAR painters, along with three others, including social realist Marcel Gromaire. Yet neither through any of his works nor by any of his pronouncements did he ever substantially confirm his prominence in the culture of the Popular Front. To oblige, Aragon extolled Matisse's work in a programmatic lecture delivered in the summer of 1937, as well as in many other statements collected in a book of his about Matisse the following year. Without a word about the artist's politics, he celebrated his work as a humanist achievement embodying the essence of French art, part of a perennial national heritage. Aragon's transfiguration of Matisse, in disregard for both his pioneering early break with traditional art and his categorical abstinence from any political expression, is the most flagrant example of how a modern artist, as long he harbored some political sympathies, could be co-opted by a Popular Front politician because of his popularity with an upper-middle-class public.

Quite different was Aragon's treatment of Fernand Léger, since 1934 an activist member of the AEAR, and since 1935 a Communist Party member. Along with architect

Le Corbusier, Léger became a vociferous advocate of a socially progressive message of modern art in its capacity as the epitome of modern technology, a visual confirmation of the workers' world. What is more, Léger's participation in the activities of the Maison de la Culture, where he invited workers of a Renault automobile plant to attend his art classes, suited the populist outreach of its programs. His commitment promised to redeem some modern artists' long-standing ambition of having their leftist convictions validated by working-class acceptance. Despite all this, Aragon rejected Léger's machine aesthetics with the argument that it transfigured capitalist production but still fell short on the class-transcending mission he ascribed to a seemingly non-political art such as Matisse's. Unflinchingly, Léger retorted that modern art would be accessible to the working-class upon the abolishment of educational privilege.

Most salient of all were Picasso's contributions to key political projects of both the French and the Spanish Popular Front governments, although, unlike Matisse, he had never engaged himself in any artistic ventures of Popular Front organizations. It was because he counted for the leading modern artist of his time that both governments were eager to enlist him. When Cassou, the incoming education ministry official, got Picasso to design the curtain for a performance of Paul Claudel's play about the French Revolution, to be staged at the inauguration of the Blum government on Bastille Day (see Chapter 2.2 / 1.3.1), he had already published a book about him. Government press releases touted Picasso's consent as a major coup. In an even more spectacular measure of co-optation, Education Minister Hernández in September 1936 appointed Picasso honorary director of the Prado in Madrid, and in January 1937 Prime Minister Largo Caballero's office, through the Spanish ambassador in Paris, commissioned him to paint a mural in the Spanish Pavilion at the Paris Expo, which turned out to be *Guernica*.

/ 3 THE PARIS WORLD EXPOSITION OF 1937

/ 3.1 A DEMOCRATIC ENTERPRISE

/ 3.1.1 PLANNING, CANCELLATION, RE-LAUNCH

The Paris World Exposition of 1937 was the outstanding art-historical event of the Depression. It was here that the fast-changing governments of France, the foremost democratic state of continental Europe, embarked on a long-term attempt at reconfiguring the arts within the totality of economic and technological relations on an international scale, and, eventually, on a peace platform in the face of the approaching war. Working with the International Bureau of Expositions, a sequence of French politicians and officials exerted themselves to showcase a political coexistence of economic and technological interests capable of overcoming the world-wide slump. A dazzling

convergence of art and technology within a public spectacle was to extol the peaceful international competition required for such a task. For this purpose, the various agencies of the Third Republic in charge of organizing the event had to accommodate rather than confront the self-displays of the three totalitarian states, whose regimes claimed to have already remedied the failure of a free market economy by policies opposed to theirs, that is, by curtailing free enterprise and abolishing democracy.

On November 19, 1929, less than two months after the New York stock market crash, a World Exposition in Paris was first proposed in the National Assembly. During the subsequent four years, alternating conservative and radical governments kept revising its program, scope, and title, without ever clearly defining, much less consistently applying, any coherent cultural policy fitting the fluent historic situation. Cultural policy, in fact, took a back seat to the staunchly deflationary finance policy maintained by those governments until the accession of the Popular Front in July 1936. When, on October 25, 1932, Commerce and Industry Minister Julien Durand officially committed Paris as a site to the International Bureau, it was in disregard of Prime Minister Edouard Herriot's budget planning. As a result, the numerous adjustments which the Exposition program underwent over a period of four years were made on an uncertain, if not hypothetical, financial calculation. In January 1934, two years after the Depression had started to affect the French economy, the incoming conservative government of Prime Minister Gaston Doumergue finally opted out of the project altogether.

However, the French business community, in particular the building trades, lobbied to have the Exposition re-launched by the Paris City Council. On May 15, 1934, the City signed an agreement with the national government declaring the Expo an autonomous 'Public Establishment,' exempt from inclusion in the state budget, which by this time had slipped into the red. The City underwrote the lion's share of a combined budget of public support, private investment, lotteries, and loans taken out on the anticipated revenue. The Expo became a belated instance of the government-sponsored public works programs launched throughout Europe two years earlier, when governments turned from austerity to deficit spending. These unstable political and financial arrangements fell short of accommodating both the building trades, under duress from the Depression, and a strike-prone labor force, fighting underemployment. Recurrent political conflicts, financial impasses, and technical delays prevented a timely completion. On the day of the opening, May 25, 1937, the Expo was still under construction.

/ 3.1.2 LABBÉ'S VISION

Edmond Labbé, the commissioner newly appointed in 1934 for the re-launch of the Expo, was a 'Director of Technical Education' in the Ministry of Culture. His adjunct commissioner in charge of the arts was Paul Léon, the conservative former Fine Arts Director, whom radical Education Minister Anatole de Monzie had forced from

office two years earlier, and who was now allowed to reassert his traditionalist views. Changing the Expo's title to "Arts and Techniques in Modern Life," Labbé envisioned the show as a composite display of investment and commodity production on the one hand and the fine and decorative arts on the other. It was to span handicraft and machinery, traditional or advanced, with an aesthetic appeal untrammeled by the technological aesthetics of self-modernizing industry. Although Labbé derived his ideas of a comprehensive artistic culture rooted in the crafts from earlier socialist schemes of cultural change, he had to rely on an intricate web of existing organizations and corporations, all keen on holding on to their established entitlements. The city government's ambition was to reinvigorate them in defiance of the current market slump.

In consultation with the International Exhibitions Bureau, Labbé's office drew up a comprehensive classification of the arts and crafts to be showcased at the Expo. The new Commissioner brought his familiarity with the bureaucratic organization of the arts in French cultural policy to bear on the task. His adjunct Léon's experience as a former Fine Arts Director helped to implement his strategy. In an appendix to its convention of 1928, which regulated the scope of world exhibitions, and which was modified as late as October 1936, the International Bureau had listed no less than 162 artistic activities, subsumed under 42 overarching classes. Labbé's General Commissariat condensed the list, pooling 75 activities into 14 major groups. In this wide-ranging panorama of technical practices, architecture, painting, and sculpture seemed to take an unproblematic preeminence among the multifarious productive endeavors to which they were related. They promised to dissolve the competition between traditional and modern art, and the ideological confrontations it entailed, in the ideal of a non-antagonistic, economically viable artistic culture.

Labbé and Léon relied on professional organizations and institutional networks of traditional artists and artisans with claims to proportional recognition in their bureaucratic regulation of state patronage. These were first in line to benefit from the Expo's declared purpose of providing work for as many artists as possible. Long-established networks of recognized experts and critics sat on the selection committees. The long lists of French painters, sculptors, and artisans commissioned with a plethora of works for the Palais de Chaillot and other French buildings are awash with names not well-known even at the time and forgotten today, because most commissions were based on their standing in accredited institutions and associations, not on any proven market success. Since most 'independent' artists had flourished outside those institutional networks, Labbé's ideal system of the arts marginalized them, and their supporting critics often contested the ensuing traditionalist preferences. For all his inclusive aspirations, Labbé had failed to address the social and cultural reality of the enduring split between traditional and modern art, which now resounded in the public response to his project.

/ 3.1.3 CLASSICAL ARCHITECTURE AND SOCIAL POLICY

Following the trend toward an incremental modernization of traditional art, Jacques Gréber, since 1934 chief architect of the Exposition site, devised a set of guidelines for a monumental scenery in the central area that would harmonize it in appearance with the centuries-old monumental topography of the capital, while still bearing the distinctive look of 'modern times.' Gréber defined what he called the "new tendency of architecture" as a balance between classical appearance and sober form, of traditional ornateness and 'modern' simplification. Still, shying away from what he called "the excess of absolute stripping" in some buildings from the previous decade, he insisted on a "sculptural or pictorial décor," which was applied in abundance everywhere.(39) Thus, the "simple and classical grand volumes,"(40) covered with hard stone, of the Trocadéro [i.e. the Palais de Chaillot] and the Museums of Modern Art, key buildings of the area, were not built with academic techniques of classical origin. Their shells of steel and concrete were merely sheathed with classical surfaces as a backdrop for a floating imagery of statues and reliefs.

The Paris city government, which dominated the steering committee, was mindful of making the core of the Exposition site a lasting component of the capital's monumental architecture. Its landmark buildings were expected to coalesce in a historic topography shaped by Baron Haussmann's reconfiguration of the cityscape under the Second Empire. The quest for monumental continuity preempted the design of the Expo's architectural centerpiece, the Palais de Chaillot, which was to replace the Trocadéro, a composite theater and museum building dating from 1878, on an identical ground plan. Fine Arts Director Huisman, overriding three earlier competitions, saw to it that academic architects Jacques Carlu and Léon Azéma were awarded the commission. Huisman's personal decision made the Palais de Chaillot the target of a drawn-out art-political controversy in the public sphere. An apologetic press campaign by the Expo's publicity bureau exalted the Palais de Chaillot as the first representative building of the Third Republic undertaken in many years. Modern artists, on the other hand, led by Picasso and Matisse, signed a letter of protest against it.

Gréber aimed for make-work styles. His preference for traditional architecture tied in with the resistance of construction workers' unions to labor-saving techniques of modernized building, just as the profusion of sculptures and paintings was due to the social policy of maximizing artists' employment, administered by Fine Arts Director Huisman's large selection committee. Commissioner Labbé might well boast of the "850,000 workers' days and 150,000 days for architects, engineers, designers, artists, painters or sculptors"(41) expended on the Palais de Chaillot, and compare the enterprise to the state-supported construction of the giant ocean liner *Normandie*. Yet eventually a rash of strikes defied his timetable and pushed him to the brink of

resignation. This classical building in the service of social policy became subject to so much public controversy between hesitating authorities, uncooperative business, and recalcitrant labor that its daily progress was filmed from the top of the Eiffel Tower for public accounting. On the Expo's opening day, it stood unfinished, only to be completed a year later, after the Expo had long closed.

/3.2 THE TOTALITARIAN CHALLENGE

/3.2.1 FROM COMPETITION TO CONFRONTATION

Less than a year after the London conference of June 12, 1933, had failed to restore the gold standard (or any other stable rate of exchange), abolish currency controls, and foster free trade by reducing customs tariffs, the Paris World Exposition was launched for an international community of states to display their products as if it were a world-wide marketplace of free trade. Predictably, therefore, exports and imports negotiated at the Expo lagged far behind expectations. Most if not all governments represented held on to their customs barriers, currency regulations, and other trade restrictions to shield their national economies, some of which were already overburdened by rearmament efforts aimed at their prospective trading partners. Falling short of stimulating trade, the Paris Expo turned into a competitive demonstration of each state's ostensible resurgence of economic productivity and social well-being, credited to each government's political measures of dealing with the Depression on their own. Intervention by strong governments for the recovery of national economies was to guarantee their reliability as trade partners.

Nowhere was the preeminence of government proclaimed more blatantly than in the pavilions of the three totalitarian states, each of which claimed to have overcome the pitfalls of a free market economy by a thorough political restructuring of their economies and societies. The didactic displays of their political systems distinguished them from their democratic counterparts. Their pavilions appeared to demonstrate that totalitarian states were capable of building temporary exhibition structures with lavish techniques of steel and stone, which endowed them with the look of being meant to last. They were designed by the architects of their capital reconstruction projects, triumphant stand-ins for those projects' eventual completion. Observers were amazed to notice that on opening day the three pavilions stood complete in all their splendor, while the crisis-ridden Palais de Chaillot, partially hidden behind scaffolds, was still under construction. It seems as if such epitomes of economic resourcefulness, organized planning, and technical efficiency were only within reach of the strong governance they put on show.

Some commentators were sensitive to the challenge these three pavilions presented to the political culture of French democracy, which, it seemed to them, fell

short of matching their underlying political will of pooling economic resources, popular support, and artistic achievement under the banner of assertive ideologies, even more so since no French pavilion was there to meet their challenge. The author of an article about them in the Catholic journal *Étude*, entitled "Images of Totalitarian Civilizations," professed to be overawed by the political self-assurance they exuded, and, by contrast, anguished by the lack of political cohesion he perceived in France. Stopping short of putting forth a term for France's own political system, be it democratic or republican, the author credited the perceived superiority of the three totalitarian pavilions to their regimes' mobilization of what he called "the masses," whose energy and enthusiasm on display he took at face value, ignoring their underlying oppressiveness. A similar resolve of mass support in France would be needed to overcome its current "restless hostility" and "uncertainty," he thought.(42)

/3.2.2 TOTALITARIAN PAVILIONS

The propaganda publications flanking the three totalitarian pavilions explained how they had been fashioned according to the art policies of their respective regimes, often at great length and with much technical detail. Spelling out those working processes was meant to account for their claims to high accomplishment, which in turn was meant to prove the viability of their government systems. The Soviet pavilion was featured as the result of a collective process of competitions and consultations, with several outstanding artists responsible for its component programs of imagery and decoration. The Italian pavilion was presented as the outcome of a covenant between two coequal architects leading rivaling professional factions, and now presiding over a corporative cooperation of diverse artists. The German pavilion, by contrast, was credited to one architect alone, Albert Speer, who in turn professed to have merely carried out Hitler's ideas, and who directed a small team of artists of his choice according to the National Socialist 'leadership principle.' As an exception to the Expo's rule that only French labor was to be employed, Speer was permitted to bring his own skilled workers from Germany on a special train.

The Soviet pavilion's propaganda scheme was a didactic display of the USSR's political order according to the new constitution of December 1936. Ubiquitous quotes from that document in French translation, backdrops for equally ubiquitous Lenin and Stalin portraits, amounted to a literal self-description of the Soviet state as a tightly regulated working society. The German pavilion, by contrast, lacked any texts or images explaining its underlying government system, since the National Socialists, for all their disavowal of the Weimar 'system,' had never found it necessary to frame a constitution of their own. Although the 'Führer State' was legitimized by Hitler's personal authority, it featured not a single portrait of him. In the Italian pavilion, finally, explicit propaganda displays were altogether absent, in contrast to the grand political exhibitions

being mounted at the time in Italy itself. Its symbolic imagery, derived from Roman imperial art, defiantly maintained Italy's imperial status, proclaimed after its conquest of Ethiopia in 1936, an action which had almost cost Italy its Expo participation.

Only the German and Italian pavilions, but not the Soviet one, took the form of classical architecture—the German pavilion in a most straightforward emulation, the Italian one in a calibrated inflection, 'modernized' by plain geometry. The Italian pavilion's monumental appeal was further reduced by tucking it away at the opposite bank of the Seine, out of sight from the central plaza. Speer's towering façade with its stretched piers followed the Hitler-sanctioned paradigm of Paul Ludwig Troost's 'House of German Art,' of which a plaster model was on view inside. But since Speer had adapted its overall shape from the war memorial tower at Montauban, it could also be perceived as a German response to the sobered-up classicism of the Palais de Chaillot. The Soviet pavilion, lacking piers or pediments, merely incorporated some classical elements as components of 'Socialist Realism in Architecture,' a self-avowedly eclectic synthesis of various historic styles. The meshing of architecture and sculpture that this synthesis required, evident here in the upward sweep of the tower into the steel figures above, contradicted the classical tradition.

/ 3.2.3 THE MONUMENTAL SCENARIO

Whatever their differences, the three totalitarian pavilions shared with the Palais de Chaillot the preference for traditionalist architectural form resurgent everywhere during the Depression. International juries of art competitions, awarding medals to items from all four states, certified the aesthetic compatibility of democratic and totalitarian art and architecture. Chief architect Gréber managed to coordinate the Palais de Chaillot with the Soviet and German pavilions on a vertical slope in horizontal symmetry. While the Palais de Chaillot closed the central plaza off against the hill, the unequal pair of pavilions screened it off against the river bank, forming a gateway to the central avenue which led southward across the Iéna bridge to the Eiffel Tower and beyond. Their monumental configuration was brought to life by the sculpted figures atop and before all three buildings, pictorial components of an *architecture parlante* according to academic tradition. Free of any encasing architectural structures, they appeared to move forward from their settings, proclaiming their ideological messages with performative aplomb.

Iosif Chaikov's steel relief surrounding the plinth of the Soviet Pavilion placed the people's leisure under military protection. Josef Thorak's bronze groups flanking the staircase of the German pavilion paraded the family and the military as basic social bonds. On the rooftop of the Italian Pavilion, a row of statues personified the corporations, pillars of working society. Vera Mukhina's steel figures atop the Soviet pavilion embodied the "Workers' and Peasants' State" of the new Soviet constitution.

Kurt Schmidt-Ehmen's bronze eagle and swastika atop the German pavilion made the state emblem a forbidding protective avatar. George Gori's gilt rider before the Italian pavilion, titled *Genius of Fascism*, endowed the fascist state with a nameless emperor's statue. Thus, all three totalitarian pavilions used a statuary-laden 'talking architecture' for pictorial scenarios, each one proclaiming its own version of the convergence between state and society. They made their countries' representations at the Expo into triumphant political self-proclamations, most blatantly in the Soviet pavilion's textbook rehearsal of the Stalin Constitution for visitors to study.

The two bronze statues before the wings of the Palais de Chaillot, which never came to be gilt as had been intended, were mythological personifications of *Arts et Techniques*, the Expo's title terms. Henri Bouchard's *Apollo* on the right, holding up the harp and accompanied by smaller figures of the muses, was the god of the arts. Albert Pommier's *Hercules* on the left, subduing the bull with just one hand, was the hero of work. Since the Palais de Chaillot was no national pavilion, but the crowning building of the Expo as a whole, it would have been inappropriate for it to match the totalitarian pavilions in extolling the host country's political system. Thus, when it came to representing democracy, the political self-projections of the three totalitarian states were facing a pictorial void that was compensated nowhere else. A last-minute substitute for political iconography, after a projected bronze statue of Apollo by Charles Despiau had not materialized, was the bronze-colored plaster cast of Antoine Bourdelle's *La France*—an armed Athena figure—facing the center court of the Museum of Modern Art. Here it seemed to check Gori's *Genius of Fascism* across the Seine, albeit far from the center of pictorial confrontations.

/3.3 THE POPULAR FRONT CONTRIBUTION

/3.3.1 THE NEW POLITICAL AGENDA

No sooner had the Popular Front governments of France and Spain been elected in the summer of 1936 than they made the Paris World Exposition a project of top priority. At the last minute, they undertook to match, or even confront, the totalitarian pavilions by adding buildings of political propaganda, focused, respectively, on social reform and the defense of Democracy. Prime ministers Léon Blum of France and Francisco Largo Caballero, and later, Juan Negrín of Spain oversaw construction of the new buildings, either in person or through high-ranking officials directly reporting to them. They turned these buildings into political showpieces, every bit as explicit as the pavilions of the three totalitarian states which both governments were now confronting militarily. In order to draw the line against totalitarian politics, their art programs observed the Popular Front coalition policy of featuring traditional and modern art side by side, assigning different propaganda missions to each one. Still, controversies

about the inclusion of modern art could not be avoided, not only because its provocative form, but also because of its thematic license

To animate the Expo with its activist policies of public works, social welfare, and cultural mobilization, the French Popular Front government drew up a new agreement with the Paris city administration which substantially augmented state funding, increased the number of state employees, and installed a standing parliamentary control commission for the show. The interventions enlarged the Expo area by a third. Besides encouraging additional private exhibitors, the government, in league with the major trade unions that had supported its election, added no less than six official pavilions, which so profusely showcased its policies that guided itineraries were offered to sympathizing visitors' groups for popularizing their message. Over and above deficit investment for the benefit of industry and trade, to which the Expo's domestic funding had been limited before, the new government made it into a public works program exempt from inclusion in the final balance sheet. It would even have prolonged its support through 1938 had the Senate not rejected the entire budget. As a result, the Expo closed by the end of 1937 with a deficit of 495 million francs.

Compared to the French re-casting of the whole Expo, the Spanish pavilion was a minuscule undertaking, but it was promoted with a similar political urgency by a panoply of high officials from the prime minister on down. It was driven by the mission to transfigure the makeshift building into the lighthouse of a socially progressive democracy under military siege but poised to win. Although the Spanish tourist office in Paris was amongst the participating agencies, the Pavilion was devoid of any commercial export pitch. Personally overseen on site by General Director of Fine Arts Josep Renau, it presented itself as a combined art exhibition and didactic propaganda show about key themes of Republican governance and warfare. It was the Expo's most overtly political pavilion. Large letter panels over the entrance spelled out pronouncements by President Manuel Azaña asserting the Republic's military resolve and the non-communist inclusiveness of its democracy. In his opening speech of July 12, 1937, ambassador Angel Ossorio y Gallardo foregrounded the Civil War's potential danger for the prospects of peace in Europe.

/ 3.3.2 PROPAGANDA BY TRADITIONAL ART

The preponderance of traditional artists in the commissions of the Popular Front governments in both France and Spain for their buildings at the Expo jibed with the insistence on mass appeal in both the traditionalist artistic culture of the labor movement and the communist-inspired advocacy of realism in current art-political debates. Inclusion of modern art was only due to occasional interventions. Only in France did numerous well-trained academic artists—often tested in previous state commissions—stand ready to be enlisted for the new political tasks. The Spanish art

administration, on the other hand, had to fall back on assembling a heterogeneous group of little-known artists and poster designers—some of them of scant accomplishment—to work on pre-set themes. Only a few modern artists were enlisted, provided they abided by thematic prescriptions and did not let their lack of realism compromise the public message of their works. Their presence testified to the flexibility of Popular Front artistic coalition politics, whose tolerance the preceding realism debates had widened because of modern artists' political allegiance.

In two of the three buildings added to the Expo under the auspices of the French Popular Front government—the Pavilion of Solidarity and the House of Labor—cycles of mural-size paintings extolled the accomplishments of organized labor, now confirmed as government policy. Six over-life-sized portrait busts lining the walls of the House of Labor heroized historic labor leaders. Both academic painting cycles—in the Pavilion of Solidarity twelve panels by different painters, in the House of Labor six panels all by André Herviault—gave democratic answers to the exaltation of totalitarian social policy in the pavilions of Italy, Germany, and the USSR. When it came to meeting their challenge, academic clarity prevailed over incremental modernization. The third building of the Popular Front, the Pavilion of Peace, was overseen by Air Minister Pierre Cot, a proponent of military support for the Spanish Republic but unable to sway Blum's government. Two foreign graphic artists, Max Lingner, a German, and Frans Masereel, a Belgian—both active in the Maison de la Culture and regularly featured in communist journals—filled it with their agitational imagery.

The art administration of the Spanish Republic could not draw on a similarly diversified array of accomplished professional artists for the imagery of its pavilion. It had to set up special workshops, first in Madrid and later in Valencia, to have a disparate group of little-known artists make small-scale works for an art show at the top floor rather than a coherent pictorial decoration of the building. These art works mostly dwelt on war imagery, either in an anecdotal fashion or according to propaganda stereotypes, often reminiscent of pictorial reportages, posters, or caricatures. They fell short of making good on the programmatic claims to a topical realism advanced by France and the three totalitarian states, and aspired to in Spanish artists' debates. In a clear-cut separation of media on Soviet precedent, the propaganda show of the government's social and political achievements was kept apart from the realm of painting as an art form. It was installed on the ground floor according to a modern exhibition design, featuring press photographs, didactic photomontages, and pictorial graphs, all making the case for the Republic.

/ 3.3.3 SHOWCASING MODERN ART

Neither one of the Popular Front governments was able to sponsor for the Expo a solid, representative building in the CIAM-promoted style of modern architecture

in the short term. Still, each one supported one pavilion which—regardless of their rough and ready makeup—stood out as a testimony to the ideology of modern architecture as a progressive social agent. Three years earlier, Le Corbusier had altogether rejected the concept of the planned Expo, opposing his radically functionalist urbanism to commissioner Labbé's inclusive arts and crafts philosophy. Now, at the last minute, he was granted a location on the outskirts of the Expo for a makeshift, multi-colored 'Pavilion of New Times,' with only half the cost underwritten by the government, where he demonstrated his dissent. Josep Luis Sert's Spanish Pavilion was also designed as a low-cost exhibition structure, this one in a black, white and grey color scheme, a backdrop for the flashy modern art works at key points outside and inside. In 1931 Sert had collaborated with Le Corbusier. Now he showed his principles of design by the exhibit of a 'Ville fonctionnelle' in the 'Pavilion of New Times'.

An Air Ministry engineer designed the Pavilion of Aviation to look like a "a big airship, in aerodynamic forms."[43] Prime Minister Blum in person saw to it that modern painter Robert Delaunay got the opportunity to apply his abstract machine aesthetics to the décor of its interior, the multicolored semblance of an air space, with a real plane suspended within cut-out circular orbits from the ceiling. Fernand Léger, politically well placed because of his ties to the Maison de la Culture, was commissioned to deploy his stripped-down, quasi-emblematic fusion of technological and natural forms in no less than five pavilions, most conspicuously in his wall painting *Power Transmission* for Le Corbusier's 'Pavilion of New Times,' where he blended abstract shapes with realistic photo clips. Yet such works were but a small contingent compared to the abundance of traditional commissions issued by the Popular Front government in many places. Extolling machine technology at the expense of labor, the primary issue of the Depression, they appeared at odds with the muscle-packed personifications of human strength and toil predominating at the Expo, including the totalitarian pavilions.

When the Popular Front governments of both France and Spain enlisted famous modern artists for programmatic commissions with set themes of anti-fascist propaganda, they banked on these artists' high profile for the sake of their own publicity. Ensuing controversies, however, quickly reminded them that modern art still represented a contested minority within public culture. Cubist sculptor Jacques Lipchitz was charged to fit a plaster blow-up of his anti-fascist *Prometheus* group as an emblem for technological progress over the entrance of the Grand Palais. After a rabidly anti-Semitic press campaign against it, the sculpture, meant to be cast in bronze and sited on the Champs-Èlysées, was destroyed after the Expo closed. Even more spectacular was the enlistment for the Spanish Pavilion of three Spanish and Catalan leading modern masters, Pablo Picasso, Joan Miró, and Juli González. The far more prominent positioning of their work than that of the bulk of traditional works from Spain distorted the

balance of coalition art politics. Predictably, Picasso's *Guernica* was quickly taken to task for its lack of popular appeal.