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2.2 / Revolutionary Art

/1 APOGEE TO ECLIPSE

/1.1 THE FIRST WAVE OF REVOLUTIONARY ART

/1.1.1 MODERN ART OF REVOLUTIONARY REGIMES

In the time between the two world wars, the ideology of a revolutionary art in the political sense of the term—neither in its metaphorical sense of breaking with tradition, nor as a medium to convey revolutionary themes—became widespread and culminated in the Great Depression, until it was overshadowed by the ideology of an art of the people. Long before, an ambivalent understanding of revolution in either political or artistic terms had been commonplace in the tradition of modern art on the part of both its advocates and its adversaries. Aggressive attempts to discard prevailing conventions in the name of intellectual or creative freedom were styled as 'revolutionary,' even if they lacked any political intent. In the long run, however, the ideological potential of the term could not be restricted to its metaphorical significance as an innovation breaking with a norm. Modern artists took to linking professional issues to political dissent, and their critics branded their work as politically subversive. In this way, modern art could serve as a stand-in for political opposition, real or perceived.

This development had its roots in the association of art and social dissent dating back to the late 18th century in France. Within the expert culture of exhibitions and art criticism fostered by the upper middle-class, social conflicts were underscored with an ideological rhetoric that resonated with the social and political movements leading up to the French Revolution. Professional challenges to artistic conventions began to sound like political interventions in the general culture. Shy of organized political activity, they did not reach beyond a self-assertive freedom discourse. Throughout the 19th century, revolutionary movements sought expression in traditional art, no matter how assiduously modern artists sympathized with them. Thus, before the First World War, the revolutionary penchant of modern art was limited to an opposition against the social order without taking roots in any political constituency. Since modern art never challenged any political institutions except for opportunity or censorship, it was spared oppression, quite differently from the oppression endured by literature.

It was only after the First World War that the revolutionary posture of modern art came to be politically acknowledged by the Bolshevik and Fascist regimes. Both legitimized the coups-d'état that had brought them to power over parliamentary governments as 'revolutions' on account of their populist backing, and both valued modern artists for their revolutionary aspirations, at least in the beginning. The institutional ascendancy of modern art in Bolshevik cultural policy appeared to validate those aspirations, and in return exposed modern art in capitalist states to ideological attacks. Even after modern artists' initial predominance had been curtailed, they stuck to the government as closely as it allowed them and continued to profess their revolutionary credentials. The Fascist regime, on the other hand, conceded modern artists no political clout. Although in 1919 Futurist leader Marinetti and his group had participated in the foundation of the party, they were shut out of cultural policy when Mussolini formed his first government two years later. Their hyperbolic calls for an upset of the social order did not jibe with Mussolini's wooing of big business.

/ 1.1.2 RETREAT TO THE USSR

Emulating the uncompromising leadership claims of the Bolshevik Party, with which they shared the avant-garde ideal of a trail-blazing minority, modern artists were the only segment of their profession to support the Bolshevik overthrow of the parliamentary government emerging from the February Revolution. As a reward, they instantly received official dominance. These modern artists now declared the challenge to traditional art they had advanced before the First World War and styled as revolutionary in the commonplace non-political sense of the term, as a move now ratified by the October Revolution. In the words of their leader, Vladimir Tatlin: "What happened in '17 in a social sense had been carried out in our fine craft in 1914."(74) Within three or four years, however, political leaders steered them away from their utopian social schemes of life and labor toward serving their own drive for a propagandistic culture of state consolidation. Yet, even after they had sidelined, and eventually dislodged, modern artists from institutional authority, Soviet art policy continued to be styled as 'revolutionary.'

At first, Russian modern artists even engaged themselves in the Third International's promotion of a Communist world revolution in Western Europe. As early as January 1919, three months before the founding of that agency, a group of them, attached to the Arts Section of the Commissariat of Public Enlightenment, launched an 'International of Art,' with Tatlin as their spokesman.(75) At the Comintern's Second Congress, held in the summer of 1920, Tatlin re-dedicated his model of a 'Monument to the Soviet Revolution,' built in December 1919, to the Third International. He grafted the ideology of the 'International of Art' onto the expansive political agenda of the Comintern, currently pursued by the military invasion of Poland which was soon to fail. Thus was the generic internationalism of modern art made to serve the Comintern's political design of a world revolution spreading from Russia to the industrialized states of the

West, a reversal of the direction Karl Marx had envisaged it to take. This turnabout was based on Lenin's and Rosa Luxemburg's projections of a transition from imperialist to class wars.

During the last two years of the First World War, the political radicalism of numerous German modern artists and art critics had sharpened to the point of embracing the November Revolution of 1918, and after that even the Communist-led revolutions of January and March 1919 in Berlin and of May 1919 in Munich, as political fulfillments of their cultural aspirations. By 1923, however, the Comintern had to resign itself to the successful defense of a post-war capitalist order against a string of Communist uprisings not just in Germany, but in other states of Central and Western Europe as well. Withdrawing its support for an 'International of Modern Art,' it started to back the promotion of traditional art by workers' cultural organizations under Communist control. It was in reaction to this retreat that surrealist writers and artists in France forged and sustained the most dogmatic revolutionary posture devised for modern art during the post-war decade anywhere in Europe. Independent of the Comintern, and with no ties to Soviet artists' groups, they nonetheless professed their allegiance to the Soviet regime. Some of them even joined the Communist Party.

/1.1.3 FROM REVOLUTION TO MODERNIZATION

Emboldened by their political empowerment, 'Futurist' artists in Russia sought to altogether replace traditional with modern art in institutions of teaching and research, and even in museums. In a poem of 1918, Vladimir Mayakovsky wrote: "You find a White Guard/And put him to the wall./But have you forgotten Raphael?/[...]/It's time/For bullets/To rattle the Museum walls."(76) Four years later, the same artists followed the turn to Constructivism as an imaginary corollary to the reconstruction ideal of the New Economic Policy. "The destructive revolutionary activity which laid bare art's fundamentals, brought about a change in artists' consciousness and faced them with the problem of construction as a purposeful task," declared Warwara Stepanova in 1921.(77) In 1923, finally, War Commissar Lev Trotsky presented a reasoned rebuke to the Futurists' revolutionary claims. "There is no revolutionary art as yet," he wrote in his book *Literature and Revolution*. In a reversal of positions, the traditionalist 'Association of Revolutionary Artists' (AKhRR), founded in the same year, defined its own ideal of revolutionary art in opposition to modern art.

Still, long after modern artists' domestic ascendancy had been curbed, Soviet foreign cultural policy, capitalizing on the leftist ideological tendencies inherent in modern artistic culture, continued to enlist some of them—El Lissitsky first and foremost—for its schemes of promoting Communism in the arts abroad. Now they were to champion Soviet culture as an ideal environment for modern design. In his *Literature and Revolution*, Trotsky singled out Tatlin's *Monument of the Third International* as a case for his rejection of any revolutionary claims by modern artists. He chided it for the specious projection of a building that would never function and therefore made no political sense.(78) Henceforth, the famous work served Soviet propaganda with a different message. One year later, when translations of Trotsky's book into Western languages began to spread his political put-down of the *Monument* throughout Western states, Tatlin was commissioned to build a smaller, streamlined, and vertically straigntened version, to be placed in the center of the Soviet Pavilion at the Paris World Exposition of 1925 as a paragon of Soviet design.

Before the First World War, Italian Futurism had been the only European art movement to mount an all-out 'anti-bourgeois' challenge to the social order. Short-circuiting the concepts of revolution and artistic avant-garde, Marinetti, in his book *Beyond Communism* of 1920, advanced a seeming paradox: "Power to revolutionary art and artists [...] The vast proletariat of geniuses will rule."(79) However, at the Second Fascist Party Congress, held the same year, Mussolini, rejecting Marinetti's demand for an exclusive support of such a paradoxical artists' proletariat, pursued the opposite policy: an agreement with the upper middle-class under the catchword 'restoration.' In defiance, Marinetti and his Futurists publicly split off from the Party. Thus, the Futurists ware unable to profit from Mussolini's successful coup d'état, which was promoted as a political revolution without class antagonism. They were kept at arm's length when it came to fashioning the revolutionary culture of Fascism. When they returned to the fascist fold in 1924, they were restricted to embellishing technological modernization.

/ 1.2 THE SECOND WAVE OF REVOLUTIONARY ART

/ 1.2.1 REVOLUTION FROM ABOVE

During the first four years of the Depression, all three totalitarian regimes re-fashioned the term revolution for cultural programs intended to promote a coercive restructuring of society from above. Aggressive drives for social change, aimed at enhancing the political control of their populations and the authority of their leaders, were labeled revolutionary in order to mask their illegitimacy. That this rebound of revolutionary ideology should have accompanied a consolidation of personal dictatorship makes it appear cynical. It propagated a short-circuit between populist and dictatorial politics. The dynamic quest for system change and the challenge to power inherent in the term made rule from above appear as a popular movement from below. The resurgent appropriation of the term 'revolutionary' for the new cultural policies of all three totalitarian regimes drained it of any oppositional significance. Modern artists espousing revolution as a hypothetical extreme of cultural dissent found that it had been converted into its opposite—official enforcement of uniform assent.

The intervention of the Soviet government in all aspects of social life, as it pursued its new policy of a planned state economy with the stated goal of achieving 'socialism in one country,' was expressly featured as yet another revolution, one even more radical than that of October 1917. It coincided with the start of the Stalin cult, which steadily grew in tandem with the terrorization of the populace. In Italy, the exhibition to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the Fascist Revolution, staged in Rome in 1932, coincided with Mussolini's reshuffling of his government, which secured him personal oversight of the most important ministries and direct command of the armed forces. The mass base of these policies, intended to strengthen the dictatorship, was to be monumentalized in a new party headquarters, the Palazzo del Littorio. Unlike the other two regimes, the National Socialist regime had no revolutionary ascendancy to celebrate, only a regional coup-d'état squashed in Munich in 1923. Yet, after its parliamentary ascendancy of 1933, it briefly fashioned a revolutionary ideology to flank its breakneck abolition of democratic governance, only to discard it just as quickly upon accomplishing that task.

Only the Soviet regime promoted the second wave of revolutionary art with permanent consistency. The art of the First Five-Year Plan, announced as 'cultural revolution,' sought to shape the entire visual culture into a propagandistic environment to mobilize the working population. No artists' or architects' group failed to imbue their aspirations with a revolutionary cachet. In Italy, on the other hand, the 10th-anniversary show was a one-time event that gave a new lease on life to the ideological ambitions of modern architects and artists, most prominently in the addition of commemorative features to Giuseppe Terragni's 'Casa del Fascio' at Como. Yet the exhibition inspired no long-term effort to develop a revolutionary art of Fascism. The National Socialist short-lived invocation of a cultural revolution including the arts appeared the most trenchant but turned out to be most superficial. Modern artists claiming to join it were instantly rebuffed. On November 15, 1933, in a speech to the newly founded Reich Chamber of Art, Propaganda Minister Josef Goebbels defined revolution in the arts as subordination to Party guidance.

/1.2.2 REVOLUTIONARY MOBILIZATION OF THE ARTS

Of the two totalitarian regimes in existence before 1933, only the Soviet infused its organized artistic culture with the ideology of revolution. It used the destructive potential of the term to justify its violent abolition of lingering class divisions as a precondition of implementing the First Five-Year Plan, although the visual focus of the Plan was on an accelerated growth of industry and agriculture. Competing for work, artists' organizations rushed to include the label 'revolutionary' in their names. At issue was the contest between old-style realism, as championed by the 'Artists of the Revolution' (AKhR), so renamed in 1928, and the techno-stylization promoted by the

‘Revolutionary Front of the Arts’ (REF), re-founded in 1929 to succeed the ‘Left Front of the Arts (LEF). Pursuant to efforts at destabilizing foreign capitalist states now viewed as hostile, the long-discarded program of an International of Art was revived in 1930 by the foundation of an ‘International Bureau of Revolutionary Artists.’ In 1929, El Lissitzky, the preeminent artistic emissary abroad, adjusted his mission of promoting Soviet design by publishing his book *Architecture for a World Revolution*.

In the Weimar Republic, the resurgence of the term revolution since the end of the twenties by artists affiliated with the Communist Party retained its original significance of extra-constitutional opposition, which the Party had actively pursued after the First World War. Its cultural policy expected the Depression to inaugurate an imminent demise of capitalist democracy. In March 1928, prodded by the Party, an ‘Association of Revolutionary Pictorial Artists’ (ARBKD) was formed from the Communist faction of the All-German Economic Artists’ Association. It claimed affiliation with the Soviet AKhR. When in 1930 an ‘International Bureau of Revolutionary Artists’ was founded in Moscow, the ARBKD became its German section. Subordinated to the Party’s ‘Interest Community for Workers’ Culture,’ the ARBKD launched numerous educational programs of lay drawing, poster making, and design of agitation materials. Its wide range of activities matched that of Soviet artists under the Five-Year Plan, but in a subversive rather than constructive understanding of its revolutionary aspirations.

Before 1932, the French Communist Party had no art policy in place with which it might have attracted sympathizing artists in the way of its German counterpart. It fell to the un-affiliated surrealists to restate the long-term revolutionary claims of modern art in Communist terms to the point of professing allegiance to the Soviet Union, but stayed immune against emulating Soviet art. As transpires from the change in title of their journal from *La Révolution Surréaliste* of 1924 to *Le Surréalisme au Service de la Révolution* of 1930, the surrealists’ self-styling as revolutionaries preceded their commitment to Communism. Even though in 1927 their leaders André Breton, Louis Aragon and Paul Éluard signed on as Party members, the Party kept the group at arm’s length. As their telegram to the International Bureau of Revolutionary Literature in Moscow of July 1930 insists, the surrealists refused to heed the cultural policy of the Comintern. They did join the ‘Association of Revolutionary Writers and Artists’ when it was founded in January 1932 under Communist auspices, only to be excluded two years later.

/1.2.3 CONSTRUCTION OR SUBVERSION

At the end of 1929, the Comintern, under its new chairman Vyacheslav Molotov, diagnosed the Great Depression as the start of a ‘Third Period’ in the world-historical development of capitalism, which was bound to end with its collapse. Now a recasting of revolutionary art from communist subversion to socialist construction became relevant for Soviet cultural propaganda abroad. The large-sized, multi-language photo-journal *USSR in Construction* advertised a Soviet alternative to the economic decline and social misery now rampant in capitalist states. It served the destabilizing policies of national Communist parties as a counter-paradigm. Hence modern Soviet artists of international renown were asked to contribute. Eventually El Lissitsky was appointed editor. This political reorientation in the international promotion of Soviet modern image techniques from a model for design—as in El Lissitsky's 'Pressa' Pavilion of 1928 at Cologne—to a triumphalist proclamation of Soviet economic and social superiority was to inspire a 'revolutionary' challenge to capitalist democracy, now being compromised by its failures.

Instead of exalting Soviet productivity, the ARBKD and other artists working for the German Communist Party, dwelt on working-class hardship under capitalist exploitation. Their protracted celebration of the failed post-war communist revolutions against democratic government was now aimed against the social order of the Weimar Republic. ARBKD artists, intent on foregrounding the precarious life and the fierce resistance of the working-class, used realism as a mode of subversive exposure. On this point, the association's founding statutes expressly followed the Soviet 'Association of Revolutionary Artists (AKhR), whose realistic depiction of workers' life was criticized in the USSR itself for lack of uplifting expression. The two most prominent members of the ARBKD, George Grosz and John Heartfield, both Communists, had been rabidly hostile to Weimar democracy since their Dadaists beginnings. While Grosz incurred objections from the Party because his social critique of the upper middle-class fell short of firing up the fighting spirit of the workers, Heartfield balanced both concerns well enough to become the leading artist of the Communist press.

No matter how stridently French surrealists professed revolutionary Communism, they kept a proud distance from both Soviet art and the cultural policies of the French Communist Party. Their political partisanship showed in their tracts and manifestoes, but not in their art work, which they refused to bend to the political interests and the aesthetic preferences of the working-class. In 1931, Salvador Dalí produced the only surrealist works whose subject-matter openly related to Communism, when he started to paint pictures featuring the face of Lenin as part of his customary pictorial mystifications. They almost netted him exclusion from the group, but no other surrealist artist came up with a more acceptable portrait of their Soviet hero. With their literary acumen, the leading surrealists—Breton, Aragon, and Éluard, writers all—could debate the ideological alternatives of a revolutionary culture in their incisive controversies, untrammeled by the need for any recommendations for the pictorial arts. Their revolutionary reasoning touched upon neither political activity nor artistic practice.

/1.3 ECLIPSE OF REVOLUTIONARY ART

/1.3.1 RECOIL TO RHETORIC IN FRANCE

When in 1934 Andrei Zhdanov defined the newly-installed paradigm of Socialist Realism as a "true and historically concrete depiction of reality in its revolutionary development (see Chapter 2.3 /1.2.1) he short-circuited the alternative between revolution and evolution. He turned the term 'revolutionary' into a non-controversial epithet to be invoked for any cultural change directed from above. One year later, in May 1935, the Comintern's change of strategy from fostering world revolution to supporting center-left electoral politics in Western European states prompted their Communist Parties to desist from destabilizing parliamentary democracy, but it did not restrain their cultural agencies and sympathizing artists from indulging in even more unbridled revolutionary rhetoric. In the ensuing culture of the Popular Front, the idea of revolutionary art was converted into a mantra just as vacuous as it had become in the USSR. It merely conveyed a militant resolve to press for radical changes by democratic means. Once both Popular Front governments were formed in France and Spain, it served to defend their policies against an equally militant conservative opposition.

As late as July 1933, the Party journal *Commune* was inaugurated under the premise of a conflict between "bourgeois" and "revolutionary" cultures, the latter serving "the action of the proletariat."(80) In his article "Culture and Revolution" for the journal *Vigilance* of 1934, art critic Jean Cassou argued in the same direction, although during the right-wing riots of February 1934 Communists rallied to the defense of the Republic. Two years later, as an art official in the Education Ministry of the incoming Popular Front government, Cassou held on to the same rhetoric. Speaking in his official capacity during the 'realism debates' of 1936, he urged the assembled artists to "make revolution."(81) As late as 1939, no longer in government, he extolled Henri Matisse as a leader of French revolutionary art in the 20th century. It was Cassou who reportedly approached Pablo Picasso to design the curtain for the festive inauguration of the first Popular Front government on July 14, 1936 (see below, 2.2.2), which the artist completed on May 28. In a later variant, dated June 13, Picasso depicted the people celebrating the fall of the Bastille in 1789, brandishing hammer and sickle emblems. This all-too blatant Communist update of the revolutionary tradition may have prevented the sketch from being used.

Taken up by modern artists and their promoters, the idea of revolutionary art lost all political specificity. In the 1936-1937 issue of the *Cahiers d'Art*, editor Christian Zervos called on modern artists to "constantly fire up the masses, ceaselessly imbue them with the idea of the revolution," but only "on the path towards the unknown." He was just paying lip service to the catchword of the day.(82) In 1936, abstract painter Otto Freundlich assumed the chairmanship of the newly founded association of German artists in French exile (see Chapter 3.2/3.2.3) with a lengthy address entitled "Testament of a Revolutionary Painter." His anachronistic apology of abstract art's revolutionary potential against Communist objections cost him the support of his fellow members, so that he soon resigned. A lecture series organized by the leftist Artists International Association in London, published in November 1935 under the title *Five on Revolutionary Art,* is characteristic of the ideological disorientation of the term. Except for editor Herbert Read's "What is Revolutionary Art?"(83), all contributors addressed the subject tangentially at best, and if they did, fell back on the term's non-political significance.

/1.3.2 CLASS STRUGGLE OR DEFENSE OF THE REPUBLIC IN SPAIN

From the start, the Spanish Republic, newly-founded in 1931, was torn by bitter class conflicts between capital owners and workers in agriculture and industry. These conflicts were fought out beyond parliamentary venues not just by a communist but also by an anarchist opposition. The bloodiest of its numerous confrontations was the miners' uprising of October 1934 in Asturias. It is in this political environment of violent civil strife that Catalan graphic artist Josep Renau took the initiative of founding first in Valencia in 1932 the 'Union of Proletarian Writers and Artists' (*Unión de Escritores y Artistas Proletarios*)—the government had required the term 'revolutionary' to be dropped from the original name—and in Madrid in May 1933, the 'Union of Revolutionary Writers and Artist' (*Unión de Escritores y Artistas Revolucionarios*, UEAR). Although Renau prefaced his founding call for the UEAR with a sweeping comparison of the class struggle in Spain with the German resistance to Hitler's ascendancy, the defense of the Soviet Union, and the threat to modern culture by unified 'bourgeois' and fascist forces,(84) its program merely coupled the defense of modern art with a call for political engagement.

The two 'Exhibitions of Revolutionary Art' of December 1933 in Madrid and early 1934 in Valencia were intended as direct responses to the center-right election victory of October 1933, in the wake of violent street protests against the new government. They imbued the issue of revolutionary art with a confrontational urgency that it never attained in France. Less than a year before the miners' uprising in Asturias, the organizers' revolutionary posture was still in accord with the Comintern's strategy of upsetting democratic governments and aggressively promoting Soviet culture. Several artists in the show featured working-class themes in a realist style reminiscent of Soviet art from the period of the First Five-Year Plan. Still, a discrepancy persisted between the propaganda realism of social imagery demanded by the program and the variety of styles adhered to by the participating artists, many still abstract or surrealist-inspired. In his contributions to the debates surrounding the show, surrealist painter Antonio Rodríguez Luna openly acknowledged the strains in the political matchup.

It fell to Renau, the most activist artist of the Left in republican Spain, who had turned from anarchism to Communism in 1932, to create a forum for the attendant debates by founding the journal *Nueva Cultura* in 1935. It was here that artists and critics attempted to decide the conflict between traditional and modern under the common premise of revolutionary art. No matter how aggressively *Nueva Cultura* promoted an anti-fascist, anti-'bourgeois' art for engagement in the class struggle on the side of the proletariat and against the conservative majority of Spanish artistic culture, it left the question in abeyance. It could not afford to alienate the modern artists who formed the core of its supporters and of the UEAR's membership. It was not until the special election issue of February 1936 that Renau laid down the terms of a propagandistic realism he was to promote when he became General Director of Fine Arts in the summer of that year. In his new capacity, he turned art policy away from class struggle toward a defense of the Republic, which claimed to safeguard its social achievements in the name of revolution.

/1.3.3 SURREALIST INTRANSIGENCE

By 1930, when the Surrealists promulgated their Second Manifesto and retitled their journal from 'The Surrealist Revolution' (*La Révolution Surréaliste*) to 'Surrealism in the Service of Revolution' (*Le Surréalisme au Service de la Révolution*), they seemed to have achieved a tenuous equilibrium between their insistence on the absolute freedom of art, a call for the violent overthrow of the government, and their independence from Communist Party control. Breton construed a revolutionary pedigree of modern art that linked Lautréamont's and Rimbaud's poetry to the historic moment after the Franco-Prussian War and the Paris Commune when both those authors wrote. He took the historic coincidence for an ideological validation of the revolutionary ambitions which drove the surrealists from a literary niche into the public sphere. With his flashy alliteration "Lautréamont and Lenin" he short-circuited modern art and Communism. In 1930, a list of essential books he drew up in a hypothetical catalog of Surrealist publications included, among key works of poetry and political literature, the Comintern's technical manual *Armed Insurrection*, published under the name of Neuberg in a French translation.(85)

After Breton had broken with the Communist Party, confronting Louis Aragon who had broken with surrealism for the sake of Party conformity, he and the remainder of his followers insisted even more defiantly on the disruptive significance of the term revolution, while the Party, heeding the Comintern strategy of Popular Front democracy, emptied the term of any such connotation. The break came to a head at the 1935 Congress for the Defense of Culture in Paris, which abandoned the equation between artistic nonconformity and political revolution. Breton's dissenting speech, however, dealt not with art but with world politics. With Leninist orthodoxy, he predicted that another revolution would follow from an imminent war, but was silent about what was left for art to achieve. The short-lived opposition group of intellectuals and artists named ‘Contre-Attaque’, to which Breton briefly adhered in October 1935, defined itself as a “fighting union of revolutionary intellectuals” without allegiance to the working-class. The group advocated an overthrow of the capitalist social order by armed struggle but failed to say what the arts could contribute to this task.

All these setbacks did not deter Breton from writing, in May 1938, yet another manifesto, now jointly with Lev Trotsky (see Chapter 4.2) entitled ‘For an Independent Revolutionary Art,’ his only manifesto dealing with the arts alone. Here he advanced the revolutionary claims of modern art in their most uncompromising and hence most self-contradictory form, at odds with the historic moment. “True art, which [...] insists on expressing the inner needs of man and of mankind in its time—true art is unable *not* to be revolutionary, *not* to aspire to a complete and radical reconstruction of society,” Breton wrote. Even a “socialist regime with centralized control” he expected a revolution to achieve was to grant the arts an exempt status as an “anarchist regime of individual liberty” (see Chapter 4.2 / 2.1.3). Trotsky and Breton directed their notion of revolutionary art against all three ideologies currently confronting one another—‘Fascism,’ Bolshevism, and Popular Front Democracy—all of which had claimed to be revolutionary at one time or another. Detaching the term from any engagement with real politics, they fell back on a self-averred anarchist stance.

/ 2 FROM REVOLUTIONARY TO ANTI-FASCIST ART

/ 2.1 ANACHRONISTIC DEBATE

/ 2.1.1 INCOMMENSURATE CONFRONTATION

The escalating conflict between Germany and the Soviet Union, underway since 1935, entailed an ideological change in how modern art was associated with a revolutionary understanding of modern art. While the National Socialist regime held it to the leftist revolutionary posture it had adopted in the aftermath of World War I, the Comintern, in pursuit of its new Popular Front strategy, gave an anti-fascist turn to its revolutionary acconotations. German art authorities did not focus their accusations of ‘cultural bolshevism’ on the current art policy of the Popular Front, which likewise favored traditional realism for its popular appeal, but supported modern art as well. Rather, they invoked the Soviet government’s bygone espousal of modern art at its most radical during the first four years of its tenure as if it were still current. Both the National Socialists and the Popular Front ignored the new significance of what revolutionary art had come to mean in the USSR since the First Five-Year Plan had reassigned revolutionary credentials to agitational realism, and later sanctioned Socialist Realism as the expression of a revolutionary development.

Therefore, the National Socialist accusation that modern art was a tool of Bolshevik foreign subversion was out of date. By the end of 1922 the Comintern had given up on any such intentions, not only because its policy of fomenting revolutions in Western Europe had failed, but also because modern art had long been disabused of its revolutionary claims in the Soviet Union itself. Fifteen years later, the Comintern's Popular Front policy fashioned electoral politics as revolutionary, not only because its previous efforts at destabilizing the Third Republic had come to nothing, but, even more cynically, because it had come to conclude that the National Socialist regime had been stabilized to the point of immunity against subversion, let alone revolution, from within. The Comintern's reorientation of policy made the anti-fascist struggle on an international scale the new political priority for its restored support of modern art, although it was reduced to tolerance. Whereas the ever more severe National Socialist suppression of modern art was touted as proof of its anti-fascist meaning in reverse, its less draconian, but equally consistent abolition in the Soviet Union was kept under wraps.

In his lost painting *Revolution* of 1937, Marc Chagall, who had been a local Bolshevik art commissar before he left the USSR in 1922, advanced the most blatant denunciation of the new ideological twist. The growing Soviet repression of both modern art and Jewish culture prompted him to picture the Bolshevik Revolution as an armed mob's assault on both a Jewish village and an artists' community. This pictorial pamphlet amounted to a bitter turnabout. In a 1919 article entitled "Revolution in Art," Chagall had still postured as a "proletarian painter," whose talent was devoted to serving the collective.(86) As late as 1933, responding to an inquiry by André Breton and Paul Éluard in *Minotaure*, he had called the Bolshevik revolution his life's most inspiring event. Four years later, after having been granted French citizenship, he construed art and revolution as incompatible with one another. The title of his painting designated revolution as a negative. Perhaps he had already reacted against Iosip Chaikov's socle relief on the Soviet pavilion at the Paris Expo, which featured the happy coexistence of family life and popular arts protected by the military.

/ 2.1.2 **HITLER'S TARGET**

In the first volume of *My Struggle* (1924), Hitler derives his charge against modern art as a subversive tool of international Bolshevism from witnessing the participation of modern artists in the two short-lived Bavarian Council Republics of March and April, 1919, which he had helped to quell as a non-commissioned officer in a political surveillance and agitation unit of the Army. Those artists and their associated writers and critics had joined or supported the Communist government of Bavaria and heeded the tenet, shared by their colleagues in Russia, Hungary, and elsewhere, that modern art was revolutionary in and of itself. Already before World War I, they believed, it had heralded or even prepared the political revolution now in progress, just as Tatlin had maintained for Russia. When Hitler wrote that in modern art movements before the war, “the political collapse, which, however, became better visible only later, already started to culturally announce itself,”(87) he took such claims at face value, no matter how hollow they were when first advanced. They confirmed him in his counter-revolutionary militancy against modern art during the first years of his political career.

At first, the anti-Semitic component of the subversion charge against modern art dominated National-Socialist agitation so much that joint invocations of the terms ‘Bolshevik’ and ‘Jewish’ could do without historical references to the revolutionary postures adopted by some modern artists in the aftermath of World War I, first in Russia and later in Western Europe. But when in 1928 Hitler, after four years of silence on the issue, resumed his attacks on modern art in his campaign speeches (see Chapter 1.1 / 3.1.2), his polemics were directed at the Weimar Republic’s cultural policies and their economic repercussions on artists’ welfare, not against the political destabilization of the state, in which his party vied with the Communists. By that time the Communist Party, although it lent occasional political support to modern art, was far from investing it with a revolutionary power any longer. Now its cultural policy was committed to a class-based agitational art in realistic styles, opposed to the ‘bourgeois’ clientele of modern art on grounds of class. As a result, Hitler’s attacks on modern art were devoid of anti-communist rhetoric.

Although the charge of ‘cultural bolshevism’ continued to be raised during the clampdown on modern art Hitler unleashed in 1933 upon taking office, it was not until 1935, when the Comintern launched its cultural policy of the Popular Front, that he returned to the specter of modern art as a Communist device for undermining German national culture. In his speech about the theme of art to the culture meeting of the Nuremberg Party Rally on September 11, 1935, he recalled that the Reichstag fire of February 27, 1933, which he branded as the last attempt at a Communist revolution in Germany, had been answered by the National Socialist leadership’s resolve “to give German art the first impulses towards revival and resurrection.”(88) One year later, in his speech to the same forum on September 9, 1936, Hitler declared that “political and cultural bolshevism go hand in hand.”(89) Again, he evoked the Reichstag fire as the latest link in a chain of events that had started with the Paris Commune of 1871, continued in the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, and was still lurking in what was left of modern art in Germany.

/ 2.1.3 THE ‘DEGENERATE ART’ EXHIBITIONS

Hitler’s speech of 1936 precedes the Anti-Comintern pact he was to conclude with Italy and Japan in November 1936, followed by another pact concluded with Italy alone in November 1937. It is during this time span that the defamatory shows of modern art, first launched in 1933, were revived on a national scale, culminating in the 'Degenerate Art' exhibition held in Munich in the summer of 1937. Already in March 1936, the anti-modern exhibition of September 1933 in Dresden was reassembled for display at the Munich police headquarters under the banner 'Anti-Comintern Exhibition' with several venues to follow, until it was absorbed into the 'Degenerate Art' exhibition. This expansion had a propaganda purpose exceeding art policy alone. The new, nationwide anti-modern exhibition program coincided with, or was even flanked by, several anti-Comintern propaganda shows. It was the German response to the equally deliberate anti-fascist propaganda thrust of the Comintern's own art policy. That the exhibition should have been targeted not on this art policy but on the Comintern's long discarded support of modern art was anachronistic.

On November 23, 1937, the Reich Propaganda Directorate of the NSDAP took over the Degenerate Art Show for a four-year-long tour through other German cities, synchronized with a 'Great Anti-Bolshevik Exhibition' and another exhibition titled 'The Eternal Jew.' The underlying policy had shifted from a defense against the Comintern to an active threat against the Soviet state. Now all three long-standing ideological components of the attack on modern art—degeneracy, Jewishness, and Bolshevism—were coordinated in a nationwide propaganda drive. The Exhibition Guide, which bundled them in this direction and summarized the pertinent propaganda slogans, was probably issued for the first simultaneous venue of all three shows in Berlin. Hitler and his officials would have been unable to pin the revolutionary charge on the current art of the Soviet Union or of the Popular Front, both of which had long reneged on the revolutionary connotations of modern art. But in the censored culture of the regime, where those arts were all but unknown, they could dispense from engaging them. They presented modern art as a tool of domestic subversion.

No single work could have better illustrated the fictitious charge of a combined Jewish-Bolshevik threat than Otto Freundlich's huge plaster head *New Man* of 1912. Freundlich was the only artist in the show who was both a Jew and a life-long, self-avowed Communist. In Paris, where he lived, he was a leading member of the 'Association of Revolutionary Writers and Artists'. In the entrance hall of the Munich show, Freundlich's sculpture was prominently displayed standing on the floor and facing up to a crucifix by Ludwig Gies, suspended from a corner of the ceiling. It looked as if the *New Man* was lurking from below, ready to rise against the Christian dispensation. A photograph taken from above was printed on the cover of the Exhibition Guide, highlighting its seditious appearance. In 1933, the sculpture had been quickly removed from the exhibition floor of the Museum of Arts and Crafts at Hamburg, to which the artist had donated it in 1930. Four years later, Reich Chamber of Art President Ziegler's raiding party "ferreted it out," in Hitler's words, from its basement storage and paraded it to viewers like a convict in the pillory.

/2.2 THE ANTI-FASCIST TURN

/2.2.1 OVERVIEW

In response to the European ascendancy of National Socialist Germany, the Soviet government's new foreign policy of seeking alliances with capitalist states in Western Europe made the 'revolutionary' destabilization of Germany's political adversaries an untimely objective. Hence the Comintern replaced revolution with anti-fascism as a unifying ideology of the Left. The premise was that 'fascism'—a catch-all term applied to both the Italian and the German regimes—was the political system of last resort to prop-up of the capitalist economy, and that consequently the anti-fascist struggle was a timely version of the revolutionary challenge to the capitalist economy, even if it required tolerating 'bourgeois' democracy as a venue for the struggle. As a result, the ideology of revolutionary art was redirected against 'fascism' as an elusive target. In this opaque inflection by the Popular Front governments of France and Spain pursued it all the more stridently. To conceive of an anti-fascist art under these conditions proved to be a contradiction-ridden tour de force.

International outrage about the widely publicized 'Degenerate Art' exhibition in Munich, no matter how limited, made modern art per se, regardless of any manifest ideology, appear as an anti-fascist proposition by default. The ideological vacuity of this proposition was a mirror reversal of its indiscriminate denigration as subversive by the National Socialist regime. This anti-fascist turn shielded the concurrent suppression of modern art in the Soviet Union from ideological comparison, let alone from political critique. Similarities with Soviet cultural policy could be overlooked all the more easily since it was being handled as a domestic affair, flanked by some public pronouncements, to be sure, but without any publicity for propaganda purposes. Such a one-sided misperception suited the general line of Popular Front policy with its axiomatic defense of the Soviet Union, a military ally of both the French and Spanish governments. Only since 1936 were the similarities observed by leftist critics of the Stalinist regime abroad, first and foremost by Lev Trotsky in his book *The Betrayed Revolution* of 1936.

As the artistic culture of all three totalitarian states was swiftly or slowly stripped of its initial revolutionary trappings, artists with leftist sympathies in democratic France and Spain replaced their revolutionary aspirations with an anti-fascist belligerence as the driving force of their political self-mobilization, but tenaciously held on to the hollowed term. When on July 17, 1936, the Popular Front government of the Spanish Republic was challenged by a right-wing military coup-d'état, which quickly became a full-scale Civil War, artists and intellectuals in Spain and abroad flocked to the defense of the Republic as an anti-fascist cause. As a result, the notion of revolutionary art became mired in unending debates about the priority of warfare over social change. Now artists of heterogeneous tendencies were ready to unite on a common platform of resistance against 'fascism,' which suited their political convictions as citizens and intellectuals rather than the art they practiced. Since Popular Front art policy strove to bridge the alternative between traditional and modern art, the latter lost its exclusive claim on revolutionary credentials.

/ 2.2.2 **FRANCE**

No matter how ardently the propositions of revolutionary and anti-fascist art were promulgated in the debate-intensive culture of the Popular Front, neither one offered artists any clear thematic, let alone formal, concepts to adopt. A recurrent apology was that the arts were not yet ready to engage in the political mission called for by the historic situation. While art exhibitions held in the Maison de la Culture under the catchword "Revolutionary Artists" lacked any thematic reference to their title, the "International Exposition About Fascism," held in the Galérie de la Boëtie in the spring of 1935, featured charts, graphs, photographs, and press displays rather than paintings or sculptures, at variance with its venue. In September 1936, Aragon published a programmatic article that effectively put a stop to the realism debate or any other effort at defining artistic criteria for the political task at hand. The urgency of the times—"the tears and blood of Spain"—he asserted, "place reality on the order of the day,"(90) which would require personal engagement rather than doctrinaire consistency.

John Heartfield's photomontage *Liberty Herself is fighting within their Ranks*, produced shortly after the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, invokes the top icon of the bourgeois revolution of 1830 in France for the defense of the Spanish Republic. It illustrates the inclusion of the middle-class in the revolutionary ideology, as it was turning anti-fascist under the Popular Front. A segment of Delacroix' painting forms the background for a line of civilians behind a Madrid barricade in the middle ground and two helmeted heads of marching Republican troops in the foreground. Under the slogan *Madrid 1936: No pasarán! Pasaremos!*, the capital's military defense against the nationalist insurgency is staged as a revolutionary struggle. The segment Heartfield adapted from Delacroix's painting shows working-class people on the barricade but stops short of including the prominent bourgeois with his top hat and rifle to the right. This selective invocation, at variance with the inclusive ideology of the Popular Front in general, may have to do with the class conflict persisting in the conduct of the Spanish Civil War.

In France, the public inauguration of Léon Blum's first government, which was postponed so as to coincide with the customary festivities of July 14, included a performance of Romain Rolland's 'revolutionary drama' *14 juillet* of 1902. The play presents the storming of the Bastille, which started the French Revolution of 1789, as a spontaneous upheaval, accomplished by the common people on the streets. However, Picasso designed the curtain for the performance as an image of the anti-fascist struggle. A basilisk-headed monster, personifying fascism, carries the vanquished artist-Minotaur, a limp puppet costumed as the crafty Harlequin from the *Commedia dell'Arte*. A bearded man, breaking free from inside the shell of a Trojan horse and attacking the monster from behind, is about to hurl a cobblestone, the proletariat's emblematic weapon. Two weeks after completing the curtain design, Picasso drew a huge illustration of Rolland's drama (see above, 1.3.1). In the concluding scene, the revolutionary throng rejoices after having demolished the Bastille. Three participants are brandishing the Communist symbol of hammer and sickle, a reassertion of what revolution meant for him.

/ 2.2.3 **SPAIN**

Because the military insurgency in Spain of July 19, 1936, which provoked the Civil War, was a prompt reaction to the Popular Front government's legitimate ascendancy, the ideologies of revolution and anti-fascism came to overlap throughout the culture of the Republic. The government's internal conflicts regarding the conduct of the war were due to these inherent contradictions. The mass organization of artistic culture, whereby the government sought to focus the political will of the populace on sustaining the defense of the Republic made the term 'anti-fascist' quasi-mandatory. The 'Sindicat de Dibuixants Professionals' of Barcelona and the 'Sindicato de Professionales de las Bellas Artes' of Madrid were subordinated to a 'Comité de Milicias Antifascistas.' The *Ponencia colectiva,* presented by a group of writers and artists to the Second International Congress of Anti-Fascist Writers at Valencia in August 1937, confirmed the convergence of both terms. Claiming to rise above any specifics of function, theme, and form, it explicitly linked the idea of revolution to "the current struggle of the Spanish people against international fascism."(91)

In 1938, immediately after the Republic's defeat, surrealist painter Antonio Rodríguez Luna recalled how the Asturian miners' uprising of 1934 had induced him to move from what he termed "an artistic and anti-bourgeois 'revolutionarism'" to "a social and revolutionary painting, not in its outside form, but in its profound life's content, which is the same as the struggle of the working-class."(92) Rodríguez Luna pointed out that he had included several drawings about that earlier uprising in his album *Sixteen Drawings of War*, published in 1937, because he understood the Civil War as a continuation of the revolutionary struggle rather than only a defense of the Republic. The series presents a panorama of gruesome caricatures which deploy standard foe images of social revolution. Figures of landholders, priests, and Falangists in uniform appear in scenes of hollow triumph or abject debauchery. They trample on the tortured bodies of the common people, but their own physical decay spreads over the environment. The only subject corresponding to the title of the album is a winged monster in decomposition, flying over a desolate battlefield filled with dead or dying soldiers.

With his statement of 1938, Rodríguez Luna responded to a critical review of his album in the leftist journal *Hora de España*, which had taken exception to his all-too gloomy renderings of the historic situation. “Historically,” the reviewer had written, “the horror of war, if you grant me the paradox, is a positive horror, since it leads [...] to the assurance of the people’s triumph [...] over fascism.”(93) As a foil for his critique, the reviewer had acclaimed Rodríguez Luna’s drawings of the crushed Asturian miners’ rebellion three years earlier. By pointing out that he had included some of these in his new album, the artist construed a continuity of both events as stages of the unfolding revolutionary struggle, although the reviewer had not dwelt on the term revolution. Nevertheless, Rodríguez Luna appears to have heeded the critique when, in his painting of a nationalist bombardment of civilians at Colmenar Viejo—probably earmarked for the exhibition in the Spanish Pavilion at the Paris World Exposition of 1937—he foregrounded a woman defiantly raising her fist to the sky in the revolutionary salute, a sign of the unbroken will to win.

/ 2.3 ANARCHIST RELAPSE

/ 2.3.1 REVOLUTION WITHOUT POLITICS

When totalitarian governments had discarded the ideal of revolutionary art for the sake of a monumental art of state stabilization, and when the Popular Front governments of France and Spain had reduced it to a propaganda slogan of populist democracy, artists who held on to the ideal for its promise of political change were left without a political venue. André Breton’s emphatic change of position from allegiance to hostility toward the Soviet Union after the 1935 Paris Congress for the Defense of Culture deprived the surrealists who clung to him of any politically viable alternative to ‘fascism.’ In the two group shows of 1936 in London and 1937 in Paris, they shrunk to histrionic spectacles of provocation. Mere artistic self-display as a revolutionary gesture was a regression onto the convergence of modern art and anarchism during the last two decades of the 19th century. It reversed the move from anarchism to Communism as a political organization aimed at winning power, led by the Soviet Union, which leftist artists had made after the October Revolution of 1917 (see Chapter 1.1 / 1.3.3).

Keen as ever on political shifts, Hitler used his annual ‘culture speech’ at the 1936 Nuremberg Party Rally to brand both democracy and bolshevism—the two political systems which had joined in the Popular Front for the purpose of resisting his ascendancy—with the term ‘anarchism’ in order to denounce what he deemed their lack of constructive politics, their merely destructive intentions. “The intellectual precondition for bringing about *anarchy*,” Hitler declared, “or even the intellectual basis of every kind of anarchy, is *democracy*.”(94) And he added for good measure: “Therefore the period of Bolshevik art craze in Germany has now been terminated, because this Bolshevik and futurist art is an anarchist regression.”(95) What he missed was that “anarchist regression” stepped back from Bolshevism. Hitler’s immediate target was the remnants of modern art he saw still standing in the way of a compelling National Socialist artistic culture in his own country. His argument, however, had a timely political edge. Hitler reacted to the ongoing rapprochement between France and the Soviet Union, between democracy and bolshevism, to form a bulwark against his aggressive intentions.

Anarchism as a venue of freedom for the political radicalism professed by artists unbeholden to Communist discipline had been under recurrent debate. In 1933, Otto Freundlich, always wary of Party control, nonetheless declared his choice in his oil painting *My Sky is Red*. It shows the red flag of socialism flapping leftward on top of the rightward-bending black flag of anarchism prone below. Four years later, Georges Braque, in his painting *Duo*, construed the issue as wide open. He converted a music session into a conversation between a piano player and a listener holding the journal *Débats* opened in her lap. From a painting hanging on the wall behind, one red and two black triangles spill over the frame, suggesting the alternative between socialism and anarchism as the theme of their debate. It seems Braque was referring not only to El Lissitsky’s famous poster *Beat the Whites with the Red Wedge* of 1919, but more specifically to its adaptation by Robert Vierthaler in a poster for a 1936 defamatory show of modern art in the Munich police headquarters. Here the wedge is colored black to visualize the charge of anarchism which Hitler had raised against modern art in his culture speech of that year.

/ 2.3.2 ANARCHISM IN SPAIN

It was in Spain that anarchism maintained itself as a viable political movement throughout the Depression. During the Civil War, its conflict with Communism was centered on the question of whether social revolution could be pursued concurrently with the defense of the Republic. After the government had subdued the anarchists in Barcelona by force of arms in May 1937, Communists gained the upper hand. Fine Arts Director Josep Renau, an erstwhile anarchist who had turned Communist already in 1931, accommodated artists of both persuasions in his exhibitions and commissions. The vigorous debate culture within and between artists’ groups and journals he encouraged maintained a balance among contending factions without interference by the security apparatus. In these debates, the term revolution was as ubiquitous as it was vague. They dealt with the established issue of modern versus traditional art, or with the revolutionary potential of the national art tradition, but never with the question of whether support for strong government in times of war should preempt the anarchist pursuit of instant social change.

Renau's most remarkable feat of compromise politics was his enlistment of Joán Miró to paint a mural in the staircase of the Spanish Pavilion at the Paris World Exposition of 1937. He gave the artist a free hand to choose *The Catalan Reaper in Revolution* as an expression of his adherence to the ideals of an anarchist peasant revolution in Catalonia, now adopted by government propaganda. In an interview the year before, Miró had still proclaimed his rejection of Popular Front politics: "Our present-day leaders, bastard offspring of politics and the arts, claim to regenerate the world, but actually they're on the way to poisoning our last sources of refreshment. Whether they talk of tradition and high ideals, or of revolution and a workers' paradise," for him they were discredited.(96) Now, in a lengthy inscription below his staircase mural, Miró defiantly proclaimed the creed of the Catalan peasant revolution of anarchist observance, which in Barcelona had been crushed the month before. Conceiving the sickle as both harvest tool and weapon, he paralleled the social revolution against big landholders with the military defense of the land.

In 1935, French painter André Masson broke with the surrealist group over its adherence to Communism and left Paris for Spain to work there in seclusion. It was here that he turned into a self-avowed anarchist, as he made it clear in scornful letters to his friends back home. At the outbreak of the Civil War, he even joined an anarchist union in Barcelona, but refused to take up arms. Masson vainly tried to have the first in his ongoing series of caricatures about the Civil War published in Spanish journals. Different from Rodríguez Luna's *Sixteen Drawings About War*, which depicted a similar array of foe images as targets in an upbeat struggle, Masson presented the enemy as victorious in a bleak scenery of terminal decay. Upon his return to Paris in the fall of 1936, he recovered his sympathy for Communism, albeit with lingering reservations. He even taught well-attended courses on decorative painting at the communist-directed Maison de la Culture. Eventually, however, he followed Breton in joining the Trotskyist FIARI, for which Breton hailed him as a paramount revolutionary artist in the last issue of *Minotaure* (see Chapter 4.3 / 3.3.3).

/ 2.3.3 THE MANIFESTO OF ANARCHIST ART

Breton's and Trotsky's Manifesto "For an Independent Revolutionary Art" of July 25, 1938, (see Chapter 4.2) bestowed a world-wide ideological validation on the final, anarchist turn of revolutionary art. That Breton should have been able to persuade Trotsky to embrace it as a tenet for the artists' organization of his Fourth International appeared to endow it with a political credibility that anarchism had thus far been lacking. Revising Breton's draft of the Manifesto, Trotsky inserted the following words: "If, for the better development of the forces of material production, the revolution must build a socialist regime with centralized control, to develop intellectual creation an anarchist regime of individual liberty should from the first be established. No authority, no dictation, not the least trace of orders from above!" It had been anarchists in Spain who attempted to pursue a policy of what Trotsky called "permanent revolution." Some of their leaders had even been in touch with him. For Breton, their bloody suppression by the central government in May 1937 had triggered his final condemnation of Communist policies in the Spanish Civil War. The Manifesto turned their defeated stance into an ideal for the arts.

Breton, for his part, returned full circle to the ideological alignment of modern art and anarchism, which had started in the latter part of the 19th century and resurfaced intermittently, even in the absence of anarchist politics. He abrogated the practice of subordinating anarchist ideals to the vicissitudes of socialist or communist policies for which modern artists had fallen in the past. A lapse into anarchism, with its concomitant utopian disregard for political institutions, had often been the way for modern artists or writers to obviate a choice between Communism and democracy. Their insistence on aesthetic and expressive independence excluded any adjustment to political requirements. The Manifesto was an attempt to recover anarchism for political exemption. Thus, the ideological privileging of modern art as a reservation of anarchism, untrammeled by an activist engagement with responsible political activity, amounted to a reassertion of what Trotsky, in his articles on art and literature from the years before the First World War, had diagnosed as the 'bourgeois' accommodation of modern art's oppositional posture.

It was the ideological impasse of contemporary politics which prompted Breton to reclaim the term anarchism from a past when the leftist aspirations of modern art had not yet been embraced by the cultural policies of any party, let alone of any state. It compelled him to steer clear of any choice between Communism and democracy which he equally opposed. Since the term 'revolutionary' had been co-opted by all three totalitarian governments that the authors of the Manifesto denounced for their oppression of the arts, they revived the anarchist version of the term, to the point of dropping the requirement that the arts should carry any express revolutionary message. To say that independent art "could not be but revolutionary" was a default position. However, contrary to its authors' opposition to democracy, the Manifesto reaffirmed the long-standing democratic ideal of modern art as the medium of free expression, first cultivated in the middle-class milieus of its origins. It inadvertently converged with the tentative alignment of modern art and democracy that started at that time, most clearly in the United States.

/ 3 FROM REVOLUTIONARY ART TO WAR ART

/ 3.1 MILITARISM VERSUS PACIFISM

/ 3.1.1 SOLDIERS’ REVOLUTIONS

By contrast to the failed revolutions of the 19th century, where the military had stood by the forces of order, all three totalitarian regimes relied on soldiers in their ‘revolutionary’ grab for power. Participation of soldiers in the Bolshevik revolution of 1917 was so decisive they came to be styled, along with workers and peasants, as one of three components of the proletariat. Based on Lenin’s doctrine of the essential continuity of war and revolution, and on the defense of the Bolshevik revolution in a Civil War involving foreign states, the military component of revolutionary ideology was by far the strongest in the USSR. It imbued the conduct and strategy of the Red Army, newly organized by Lev Trotsky, a revolutionary civilian. The successful Fascist coup d’état of 1922 and the failed National Socialist insurrection of 1923, both also styled as revolutions, were led by junior combat officers and soldiers from the First World War, including Hitler. Their military connotations, however, paled next to the historic fusion of war and revolution Lenin and Trotsky promoted in their policies and pronouncements.

As a result, all three regimes stressed military combat ethics in their revolutionary ideologies and enacted them in their organization of state and society by command and discipline. Only in Russia was this emphasis tempered by the political subordination of the military to a party with long-entrenched civilian power mechanisms, embodied in the party commissars assigned to guide Red Army officers. Soviet military doctrine linked the revolutionary buildup of a socialist society to a concurrent armament drive, intended to shield it against a military aggression on the part of capitalist states, and deemed inevitable after the experience of the allied intervention in the Civil War. This linkage prompted the penetration of the social fabric by military-style command structures. The military framing of revolutionary ideology in Fascist Italy rested on a similar foundational doctrine, rooted in the rise of fascism from a political movement aimed at making Italy join the First World War. And when Hitler in 1935 embarked on his military build-up for an eventual war of conquest, he made the memory of his party’s revolutionary ‘struggle’ part of the flanking propaganda drive.

Because the political structures of the three totalitarian states were fundamentally different, their alignment of revolutionary and war ideology also varied. At issue was the relationship between the distinct organizations of the party and the military, and the ability of political leaders to impose their belligerent designs on professional army commanders reluctant to embrace them. The decisive support of army units and their commanders for the Bolshevik revolution had enabled Lenin and Trotsky to newly fashion a 'Red Army' along Communist organizational principles. The integration of political commissars into every level of the new command structure was to imbue soldiers, over and beyond obedience, with the political will to fight for a revolutionary cause. The Fascist and National Socialist regimes had accomplished no such fusion, and their control of their military was tenuous at first. As a result, their alignment of revolutionary and war ideologies took the form of construing a commemorative analogy between party activists killed in the street violence of the early twenties and the fallen soldiers of the First World War.

/ 3.1.2 REVOLUTIONARY MILITARISM

Soon after the Civil War, the Red Army began to sponsor an artistic culture of its own, complete with a new museum and with ongoing commission and exhibition programs. The Moscow art exhibition commemorating its tenth anniversary, held in February 1928, juxtaposed Civil War battle pictures with scenes from the Red Army's current integration in social life. One of the two prominent paintings in the show was Kusma Petrov-Vodkin's *Death of the Commissar*, especially commissioned by the 'Revolutionary Military Council'. It shows soldiers moving on after their commissar has been killed, now driven by their own political will, a reminder of the abolishment in 1924 of the Red Army's double structure of military and political command. The other prominent painting was Aleksandr Deineka's *Defense of Petrograd*. Based on Ferdinand Hodler's picture of German students volunteering for the 'War of Liberation,' it shows the replacement of wounded soldiers returning from the front by armed workers marching forward in the opposite direction, a quasi-didactic illustration of their proletarian unity.

From the start, Mussolini, once a fervent advocate of Italy's entry into World War I, had styled the casualties from that war as an inspiration for the fascist thugs whose street violence had enforced the Fascist government takeover of 1922. It was in this spirit that the annual anniversary celebrations of the 'March on Rome' fused the memories of war and revolution. Marcello Piacentini's triumphal arch at Bolzano, completed in 1928, was conceived as a joint memorial to the Italian troops who had secured Italy's annexation of the Alto Adige from Austria in 1919 and the 'martyrs' of the 1922 Fascist insurrections at Bolzano, Trento, and Trieste, whose busts were fitted into the surface of the fasces-shaped sculptured pillars. In 1932, the propaganda exhibition marking the 10th anniversary of the March on Rome was centered on a circular 'sanctuary' for the commemoration of 'revolutionary' militants killed during the Fascist takeover. Here the sound system played the army ritual of an imaginary roll call on an endless loop, where soldiers answered "Present!" on behalf their comrades killed in action.

The National Socialist counterpart of the equation between party thugs and World War I soldiers was fraught with a political problem. One year after his accession, Hitler put a violent stop to the SA's bid to become an armed force separate from the army, culminating in the murder, on June 30, 1934, of SA Chief of Staff Ernst Röhm and most of the SA command at the hands of the SS. One year later, a pair of open 'Temples of Honor' for the reburial of sixteen Party members shot dead by police during Hitler's failed Bavarian coup attempt of 1923 were built on the occasion of its twelfth anniversary at the Munich Party Forum for mass rituals of commemoration. Here, any reference to the fallen soldiers of the First World War was avoided. Another year later, however, when the draft was reinstated, the Wehrmacht started to be drawn into Party ceremonials. At a congress of the 'National Socialist Cultural Community' in June 1936, Party and Army delegations performed an elaborate ritual before Wilhelm Sauter's *Heroes Shrine*, a triptych featuring SA and SS street fighters in the center panel, flanked by World War I soldiers in the wings.

/ 3.1.3 FROM REVOLUTION TO CIVIL WAR

Because in the 19th century, the military had loyally backed the oppression of any uprising, the revolutionary tradition invoked by the Popular Front movements in France and Spain considered it a counter-revolutionary force. Their revolutionary ideologies were strictly pacifist. Socialist parties regretted their support of the war effort in 1914 as a lapse. Therefore, the Comintern's ideological shift from revolution to anti-fascism hardened the pacifist stance of leftist artists in their opposition to the militarism of the Fascist and National Socialist regimes. At the Paris World Exposition of 1937, the French Popular Front government enlisted two of them—Max Lingner and Frans Masereel—for the decoration of its Peace Pavilion. At the same time, however, the Spanish Civil War made most sympathizers of Popular Front culture regard the defense of the Republic as a people's war against oppression. In its foreign propaganda, the Republic publicized its war effort both as a revolutionary and an anti-fascist struggle. It attracted civilian volunteers from abroad to its militia units.

When the Spanish Popular Front government reacted to general Franco's Nationalist army by sponsoring an art intended to whip up popular support, it had to reconcile the revolutionary spontaneity of a people's war with the military discipline needed to match the professionalism of the insurgents and their German and Italian allies. The 19th-century polarity of people versus army would no longer do. Until the end of the Civil War, the government never quite accomplished the task of detaching diverse militias from the political control of trade unions or leftist parties and subordinating them to the command of its general staff. The anarchist convictions that had prompted those volunteers to take up arms made it hard for them to follow orders. Profuse poster campaigns by the government and its sympathizing unions advertising 'militarization' and 'discipline' showed civilian fighters and uniformed soldiers side by side to stress their common strategy. Shirking the obedience issue at the heart of the debate, they extolled military discipline over anarchist fervor as the appropriate morale.

José Luis Bardasano, Spain's foremost Communist propaganda artist, and author of many posters advertising 'militarization,' contributed a watercolor to the art show in the Spanish Pavilion at the Paris World Exposition of 1937. It shows a steel-helmeted regular soldier, armed to the teeth, implacably shielding a terrified mother cowering behind him. In the same art show, Victor José Archila Hita's *Wounded Militiaman* presented the alternative to this ideal image of the regular army. It shows an upright civilian fighter suddenly stopped in his advance by a shot into the heart, a blood stain spreading over his emblematic white shirt. His hand, in dropping the rifle, is nonetheless clenched to form a fist in the republican salute. In the progressive elaboration of his wall painting *Guernica* for the Spanish Pavilion, Picasso proved sensitive to the looming contradictions inherent in the 'militarization' policy. Rather than subscribing to Bardasano's upbeat imagery of professional warfare, he sided with the tragic ideal of a militia fighter perishing in the midst of his defenseless community.

/ 3.2 MODERN ART, REVOLUTIONARY NO LONGER

/ 3.2.1 FROM FUTURISM TO *AEROPITTURA*

In Italy, the disparate ideological interrelation between revolution, war, and technology proved crucial for the ups and downs of Futurism's Fascist credentials. After their initial equation of artistic and social revolution had proved so untenable that Marinetti and his followers broke with the Fascist Party, they had to let go of their revolutionary posture when they wanted to rejoin. Between 1914-1916, leading Futurist painters had verbally overstated first their interventionist politics and then their acclamation of military service as an enactment of modernity. Marinetti and several others even volunteered for service as a group. However, they failed to redeem their public enthusiasm with a significant body of art work, a few exceptions notwithstanding. At the start of the Depression the Futurist group, its membership enlarged, turned to exalting the technology of aviation. The Ethiopian conquest in 1935 and the military intervention in the Spanish Civil War in 1936 gave them opportunities to imbue this subject with their old belligerence. Never again were they able to transcend this narrow specialization.

The defiant manifesto Marinetti issued in 1929 to spell out the new orientation of Futurism stays clear of both the terms revolution and war. It waxes on the aesthetic transfiguration of the experience of flying as a fulfillment of futurist synesthesia. Marinetti categorized the various styles derived from that experience as fulfillments of the quest for overcoming static vision. With their new enthusiasm for the airplane theme, he and his artists latched on to the official propaganda flanking the development of aviation as a prominent accomplishment of Italian industry. Tato's photomontage *Futurist Portrait of Marinetti* of c. 1930 blends three portraits of the writer at the commands of an airplane. In 1932, Marinetti adopted *Aeropittura* as an alternative group name. However, the newly branded group's attraction for aviation agencies to reward them with purchases or commissions only briefly peaked in 1932 and subsided in 1934. After a state-sponsored *Aeropittura* show held in March 1934 in Berlin had backfired, provoking attacks on modern Italian art in Germany. The Ministry of Communications withdrew its patronage.

Still, the Ethiopian War of 1935, for which Marinetti volunteered, and the Spanish Civil War of 1936 gave the Futurist painters new themes for unleashing the appeal of their style to the visual imagination of mechanized warfare, far beyond what they had aspired to in World War I. By 1938, they even advertised themselves as 'Futurist aeropainters of Africa and Spain.' This timely adjustment allowed them to forego the first of their three original ideological tenets—revolution—and to correlate the other two—technology and war—more closely than they had twenty years before. They styled the rapid changes of views in flight, sliced by machine gun bursts, as a validation of the interdependence of breakup and buildup in modern abstraction. When Futurist painters narrowed the theme of multidirectional vision during flight to downward circling dogfights and nosedive bombings, they trivialized the modern ideal of destruction and construction to an illustrative enhancement. Their small success with government or party agencies proved that this topical adjustment fell short of providing an adequate propaganda tool for the newly-fashioned fascist 'Empire'.

/ 3.2.2 SURREALIST INTROVERSION

For André Breton and the surrealist artists who were still loyal to him, the defeat of Spanish anarchism by the Communist-steered Popular Front government precluded any understanding of the Spanish Civil War as a continuance of revolutionary politics, particularly after Lev Trotsky had disqualified it as an instance of his theory that 20th-century revolutions had their origins in wars. Benjamin Péret's reports from Barcelona, the writings of Georges Bataille and Michel Leiris, and the books by British art critic Herbert Read, *The Heart Conscripted* and *Philosophie de l'anarchisme*, all set a tone of disgust for real politics and of melodramatic despair—the opposite of the revolutionary fervor to which the surrealists had still clung two years before. Until now surrealist artists had not put forth works to match, much less to express, their revolutionary beliefs, be it of orthodox Communist, be it of Trotskyist observance. Now the new, disillusioned mindset transpiring from those writings prompted them to visualize some of their long-standing artistic concerns, first and foremost their aspiration for what they called a 'new myth.'

In the spring of 1937, a Paris stage production of Cervantes' tragedy *Numancia*, whose subject is the collective suicide of an Iberian city's populace to avoid being enslaved by Roman colonizers, inspired a histrionic bewailing of the losing Civil War in

Spain. Surrealist artists wallowed in gloomy fantasies about bullfights, menacing monsters, and the Minotaur. It was a fitting assignment for Masson, the self-proclaimed anarchist and adversary of the Popular Front who had just returned from Spain, to design the stage set and costumes for the performance. In a review of the show, Georges Bataille hailed his work as a breakthrough toward a "mythical" and "tragic" art in the spirit of Nietzsche.(97) Such timeless terms preempted any historical or political reckoning. The transfiguration of the Spanish Civil War into a quasi-mythic spectacle severed any ideological relations between revolution and warfare and introverted the Civil War into a conflictive self-experience. It spared the surrealists any further involvement with the rising war scare of 1937-1939, no matter how assiduously Paul Éluard acclaimed Picasso's *Guernica* for just that.

In the exhibition 'L'Art Cruel,' running from December 17, 1937, to January 6, 1938, and organized by Jean Cassou, assistant of education minister Jean Zay, surrealist artists were cast in some supporting roles. Their tragic view of the Spanish Civil War, along with that of others, was sanctioned by an official of the government whose lack of political assistance contributed to the looming defeat of the Republic. In his preface to the catalog, Cassou credited all exhibiting artists with having "connected certain subliminal hopes with the Spanish cause, in fact exactly at the moment when this Spain began its death agony."(98) In fact, the surrealists—Picasso included—had bitterly protested his government's stand-off policy, and their disappointment added to their sense of tragedy. Since Breton and Masson had broken with the Communist Party, no surrealist artist was included in the defiant show 'Espagne 1930–1937. No pasarán!,' which former surrealist Louis Aragon had mounted earlier that year for the Maison de la Culture with an interventionist message. It featured no modern artist, only realists such as Frans Masereel, along with photographs from the front.

/ 3.2.3 **BROKEN EQUATION**

At the end of the decade, the two most prominent movements of modern art that had started out with express revolutionary claims, each one with a vociferous literary leader—Marinetti and Breton—, found themselves at their wit's end. They were unable to adjust their work to the ideological refashioning of revolution by the two totalitarian regimes to which they had adhered. In the fascist culture flanking the winning war in Ethiopia, the Futurists were quick to altogether forego their revolutionary aspirations in lockstep with the new imperial triumphalism. In the democratic culture faced with the losing Civil War in Spain, on the other hand, the Surrealists saw through the revolutionary rhetoric of the Popular Front and retreated to an art of introverted despondency. The timeliness of their responses did not shield either movement from being marginalized in an artistic culture they had set out to provoke with the stridency of their revolutionary aspirations. Neither futurist airplanes nor surrealist monsters were a match for the emerging art of World War II with its traditional monumentality now being fostered by both Italy and France.

As early as 1934-1935, Max Ernst produced a series of four paintings with the analogous titles *Barbarians Marching West* or *Horde of Barbarians*, avatars of the German invasion of France in 1914, foreboding the repetition in the offing. The term 'barbarian'—outsiders menacing culture—jibed with the Paris Congress for the Defense of Culture held in June 1935. One year later, however, in a lecture he contributed on June 24, 1936, to ongoing discussions about revolutionary art held at the 'Maison de la Culture,' Ernst insisted on the independence of the artistic imagination from any ideological message. It was an historic art gone underground, as it were, by introversion into the unconscious which made for its revolutionary authenticity. Henceforth, Ernst abandoned any overt ideological allusions in his work and turned to regressive scenarios of natural history, a wildly proliferating growth of plants and insects which simulated the life of humans. In this biological transfiguration, neither revolution nor war had any place. Ernst's pragmatic leadership in the politics of German artists in French exile steered clear of ideology.

Sometime in June 1937, Breton had his photograph taken in front of Picasso's *Guernica* in the works, soon to be featured in the Spanish Pavilion at the Paris Expo as a forecast of war all over Europe. The ongoing defeat of the Republic in the Spanish Civil War appeared to confirm Picasso's transfiguration of a losing people's war into the specter of a general war to come. One year later, the sole reference to war in Breton's and Lev Trotsky's *Manifesto for an Independent Revolutionary Art* was the sentence "We are by no means thinking only of the world war that draws near" in the opening paragraph. But the underlying expectation was that another revolution, like that of 1917, could only follow from another war. Finally, in his pamphlet *Neither Your War nor Your Peace* of September 27, 1938, Breton confirmed the Surrealists' refusal to align themselves with any one of the ideological positions fueling the political confrontation of the arts in Europe. Altogether omitting the term revolution, he recognized that none of them offered a viable response to the inevitability of war.

/ 3.3 THE END OF REVOLUTIONARY ART

/ 3.3.1 MILITARY ASCENDANCY

Mario Sironi's fresco panel in front of the press pavilion at the *Mostra Nazionale del Dopolavoro*, held in Rome in 1938, evokes the daily *Populo d'Italia*, whose editor Mussolini had called for Italy's entry into World War I back in 1915. Its title was *Stele del Giornale della Rivoluzione*, but it showed a column of steel-helmeted soldiers marching in lockstep, led from above by a fasces-wielding victory. The fresco recalls François Rude's famous relief inside the Arc de Triomphe in Paris, which commemorates the defense of the revolution in 1792. But the enthusiasm of Rude's volunteers, inspired by the call of the victory goddess flying above them, contrasts with the tight marching order of the soldiers in their dull obedience to the fascist version of the goddess who leads them into a nondescript war. The emphasis on war rather than revolution in this monumental commemoration of Mussolini's proto-fascist journal grates on its revolutionary title. It congeals the military transfiguration of the fascist revolution, inaugurated by the so-called 'sanctuary' within the Tenth-Anniversary Exhibition of 1932, into a vision of command and obedience without apparent cause.

Arno Breker's pair of nude male bronze figures before the portal of Speer's New Reich Chancellery in Berlin, entitled 'Party' and 'Army' (*Partei und Wehrmacht*), also created in 1938, confirmed the subordination of the armed forces under Hitler's personal command, after War Minister Werner von Blomberg and Army Commander Werner von Fritsch had been dismissed. The sculptures were echoed by pairs of steel-helmeted SS elite guards in black and white uniforms flanking the doorway and other decorated passageways at various points inside the building. Despite their military garb, these were not soldiers but paramilitary party units, who during the Röhm affair of June 30, 1934, had murdered most of the SA command in order to foil their schemes of encroaching on the military. The configuration celebrated the political alignment of the military that Hitler had accomplished since that year—actually with the assiduous help of Generals von Blomberg and von Fritsch—thereby preventing the SA from transmuting into a 'revolutionary' fighting force rivalling the regular Army. The guiding attitude of the *Party* figure feigned a leadership over the army which the Party never exercised.

Although in 1937 the Soviet government, after the purge of the Red Army command, restored the double leadership system of commissars and officers, its military doctrine, keyed to a prospective German attack, was defensive rather than revolutionary. Domestically, revolution was considered accomplished after the First Five-Year Plan. Thus, the art exhibition held in 1938 on the Red Army's 20th anniversary foregrounded peaceful interaction between soldiers and the populace. The military's protective mission had already been the theme of Josip Chaikov's steel relief surrounding the entrance of the Soviet Pavilion at the Paris Expo. Gone was the Leninist link between revolution and military conquest. It was the ongoing pursuit of aggressive war policies on the part of both the Italian and the German regimes—the conquest of Ethiopia as the stepping-stone to building a Fascist empire, and the military occupation of Austria and Czechoslovakia as a stepping-stone to the conquest of the Soviet Union—that prompted the peculiar transition from revolutionary to war art in those both states.

/ 3.3.2 NO VENUE LEFT

The year 1938, when the Munich conference imposed a brief delay on a looming war, marks the point when throughout Europe no more self-styled revolutionary art was forthcoming. After the demise of the Popular Front governments in France and Spain, no regime or political movement was left to propagate revolution. And without such backing, it could no longer be substantially conceived. It seems pathetic that in that same year, Trotsky and Breton, in the 'Manifesto for an Independent Revolutionary Art' they jointly wrote in faraway Mexico, should have attempted to revive the idea now stripped of any substance. Their call for revolutionary art without political purpose turned the historic lack of venue into a utopia for a scattered handful of artists and writers. Only when governments or mass parties, totalitarian or democratic, sought to bolster their authority by styling the trenchant social changes they sought as revolutionary did they highlight the idea in their artistic cultures. As soon as their underlying societies were fully under control and gearing up for war, they discarded revolution in favor of social unity.

In 1938, Vera Mukhina sketched a monumental sculpture titled *October Revolution* to adorn the Moskvoretsky Bridge in Moscow. It personified the revolution as a half-nude victory figure overrunning a vanquished enemy. Placed before the projected Palace of Soviets with its towering Lenin figure, the group was to be paired off with another, titled *Socialist Construction*, featuring a blacksmith with hammer and anvil. In the same year in Paris, Marc Chagall continued working on his canvas *Revolution* (see Chapter 2.2 / 2.1.1). Here he pictured Lenin standing on one hand like a circus acrobat, clutching the imperial Russian tricolor between his feet and throwing the red flag away. He adapted the figure from Gert Arntz' linocut *Circus Europe* (see Chapter 3.3 / 2.2.1), a caricature of the ideological make-believe perpetrated by European leaders. Both Russian artists—one conformist, the other dissident—stripped the revolutionary ideal of any promise of liberation and reduced it to a display of belligerent violence—one as a panegyric, the other as an indictment. Neither one was in a position to uphold its connotation with the liberation of the people. Both hailed or denounced it as an exercise of power.

In 1937 Paul Klee—an artist who throughout his career had tried hard to keep his art aloof from politics—painted what amounts to be an epitaph of revolutionary art. In his *Revolution of the Viaduct*, the viaduct has broken apart into arched segments that are marching forward, at a right angle to the pre-ordained pathway, like in a workers' demonstration, but without lining up with each other, each one at its own pace. The painting recalls, perhaps deliberately, Mario Sironi's architectural arrangement of the plaza at the 5th Triennal held in 1933 in Milan, ominously titled *Six Free Arches*. Here a spaced-out row of six solitary arches is interspersed with the letters *DUCE*, centered upon sculptured *Fasces*. A photograph shows throngs of women in uniform standing at a right angle to the arched pathway. In *Revolution of the Viaduct*, Klee has carefully distinguished each one of the moving arches in size, proportion, perspective, and position, dissolving the underlying totalitarian scheme. He has thus restored the destructive, liberating significance of the term revolution against its ubiquitous conversion into a slogan of conformity.

/ 3.3.3 REVOLUTIONARY ART OR ART OF THE PEOPLE?

That toward the end of the decade the ideology of revolutionary art should have paled before the ideology of an art for the people, was due to the advancing consolidation of political control in the three totalitarian states and to the Communist's turn to democratic politics in France and Spain. Only during passing periods of enforced or radical political changes had it been drawn upon for a deceitful rhetoric. Such periods occurred in the USSR between 1928 and 1932, in Italy between 1932 and 1933, in Germany between 1933 and 1934, and in France and Spain between 1936 and 1938. They correspond to the enforcement of the First Five-Year Plan, to Mussolini's personal takeover of the government, to the breakneck political 'coordination' after Hitler's ascendancy, and to the uneasy governance of the Popular Front. In the USSR, Socialist Realism, preempting the term 'revolutionary,' reoriented the arts to deceptively extol success. In Germany, Hitler's penchant for classical order excluded any art dwelling on upheaval. In Italy, the revived triumphalism of the Roman Empire did away with futurism's revolutionary aspirations. In France and Spain, the term was bestowed on any art that suited the regimes of the Popular Front.

To some extent, the relationship between the two ideologies of revolutionary art and art of the people pertained to the alternative between traditional and modern art. After all, it was modern art which, in its uphill challenge to traditional art, had been incessantly promoted under the catchword of a revolution that signified no more than an upset of convention. It was in the first three or four years after the First World War that those revolutionary claims on behalf of modern art were politically validated in those very states where eventually democracy succumbed to totalitarianism. In the Third Republic, which held on to democracy, they were never politically validated, not even under the Popular Front, where the ideology of revolutionary art was so profusely voiced. Wherever the idea of revolutionary art was re-launched during the decade, it was no longer suited for a political validation of modern art. Since all four governments were keen on an art of mass acceptance, modern art lost out to traditional art, the tested tool for consolidating power. It recoiled to an evasive imagination of the middle-class.

When in March 1939 Mussolini called the 'Axis' between Italy and Germany a "meeting of two Revolutions which declare themselves in direct antithesis to all other conceptions of contemporary civilization," he was recalling the distant revolutionary origins of two consolidated totalitarian states, whose military alliance was certified two months later in the 'Pact of Steel.' Such a pact no longer needed any revolutionary art, if it ever did. Instead, an art extolling the streamlined political will of the people to back up the government with no questions asked, was the order of the day. As all four states moved into position for the imminent war, an art for the people blended into a political culture of national unity. Modern art had never been driven by any ambition to be an art of the people, that is, to address the common people's social concerns, or at least to vie for their aesthetic appreciation. At the end of the Depression, any ideological aspirations it may still have harbored were reduced to a recoil from, or resistance against, political reality, now out of grasp for revolutionary intervention.