2 / Ideologies

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2.3/ Ideologies and Policies

/1 CONFRONTATION AND COEXISTENCE

/1.1 UNCERTAIN ANTAGONISMS

/1.1.1 THREE-WAY CONFLICT

In the shared economic emergency of the Depression, political systems strove to prove themselves against one another. Democracy had to validate its correlation of political liberty and free enterprise. Fascists and National Socialists denounced democracy as unable to deal with social strife. Communists asserted that 'fascist' oppression was required to protect capitalism from succumbing to a terminal crisis. Communism opposed 'bourgeois' democracy and 'fascist' authoritarianism in equal measure, since it construed a structural continuity between the two. It asserted that the latter was the outcome of the former, because the 'bourgeoisie' would adopt 'fascism' once it could no longer hold on to political power by democratic means to protect the capitalist economy from social unrest. Fascism and National Socialism opposed democracy and communism in equal measure because in their view, those systems unduly empowered the masses over political authority, precipitating society into anarchy. Democracy, finally, opposed communism and 'fascism' in equal measure for the obvious reason that both had been and were still targeting it for overthrow.

As the Depression unfolded, oppressive regimes in communist and 'fascist' states could claim political superiority over democracy in dealing with the economic and social crisis it entailed. Moreover, since their economic recovery was partly due to mounting rearmament, they projected their strength on the international scene with military self-assurance. However, the ensuing three-way ideological antagonism between communism, fascism (the common term used at the time for both the Italian and the German regimes by their opponents, their protestations notwithstanding) and democracy failed to yield any certain orientation on the trajectory from the Depression to the Second World War, no matter how ominous it seemed. Similarly, although the Soviet, Italian, and German regimes did their best to fashion an art to suit and represent their distinct political systems—culminating in their pavilions at the Paris World Exposition of 1937—it gave contemporary beholders no clues as to their political relationship with one another. The Third Republic, for its part, never tried to fashion such an art on behalf of its democracy.

Fraught with obfuscations, misunderstandings, and plain ignorance, the three-way political conflict between Soviet, German, and French art policy invalidated the vague, intangible opposition between Right and Left which had underpinned the ideological antagonism between traditional and modern art before. Each one of the three totalitarian regimes calibrated their relation in a different way. Just as the historical trajectory inherent in the confrontation between all four political systems in Europe remained obscure for most contemporary beholders, even beyond the outbreak of the Second World War, so the disparities or similarities between their artistic cultures remained opaque, since hardly anyone took the trouble of comparing their relationship to one another. While Hitler railed against 'cultural bolshevism,' he ignored the current art of the Soviet Union. While officials of the Popular Front in France denounced National Socialist suppression of modern art, they turned a blind eye to its Bolshevik equivalent. For the sake of a fleeting peace, Paris Expo organizers worked hard to make the arts of adversarial states appear compatible with one another.

/1.1.2 TWO-WAY CONFLICT

Cutting across the three-way conflict of state-based political systems—'fascism,' communism, and democracy—was an unspoken, but more fundamental conflict between democracy and totalitarianism, the latter an ideologically neutral term coined around 1936 to characterize the structural similarities first of the Fascist and National Socialist, and later also of the Soviet, regimes. Despite incessant ideological debates within each one of the four artistic cultures, with their occasional, superficial references to one another, it was not a three-way ideological but a two-way political confrontation that shaped the history of art during the latter part of the Depression, as governments and parties adapted the arts to updated policy concerns, transcending ideological constancy. This is because the fundamental two-way conflict underlying the political confrontation of the arts—the conflict between totalitarianism and democracy—had not yet been spelled out in more than the most cursory terms, and only by a few observers. Comprehensive definitions of totalitarianism were long in coming, and so was an assessment of what a genuine art of democracy might be.

The structural independence of totalitarian art politics from any specific ideology, be it 'fascist' or communist, accounts for the ideological opacity of artistic culture during the later years of the Depression. Time and again, it overrode the deceptive stridency of the three-way ideological conflict, and exposed democracy's inability to formulate a substantive art ideology of its own. Much of French artistic culture, not limited to that of conservative bent, appreciated Fascist art in Italy, partly because of its own adherence to the 'monumental order,' and partly because the Fascist promotion of that style admitted modern art as one of its components, provided modern artists adapted themselves to its requirements. Fascist art never anticipated that Italy would

eventually declare war on France. Although Soviet and German art by now shared the oppressive preference of traditional over modern art, an ideological equation between them appeared impossible in view of their reciprocal political hostility. But hardly anyone faced up to this contradiction. To solve it by applying the totalitarian equation proposed by Lev Trotsky would have put France's ally and adversary in the same boat.

On the surface, the confrontation of the arts was fought out on the terms of traditional versus modern rather than dictatorship versus democracy. It ran through all four political systems in their efforts at redefining the relationship between economic modernization and political order. The Fascist regime alone could claim to have attained a synthesis of sorts between the two. Now modern art stood deprived of ideological consistency. While it was branded as 'bourgeois' in the Soviet Union and as 'Bolshevik' in National Socialist Germany, its spurious acceptance by the Popular Front in France and Spain was never defined as an achievement of democracy. In Italy, finally, it ended up as an attenuated, contested ingredient of Fascist style. Long-winded debates about what constituted Socialist Realism or how classical and modern paradigms might coalesce in Fascist art were germane for Soviet and Italian artistic culture. In Germany, such debates were curtailed within less than two years into the National Socialist regime, and the absence of professionally applicable ideological guidelines led to the showdown of 1937.

/1.1.3 FROM REVOLUTIONARY ART TO ART OF THE PEOPLE

What totalitarian regimes had in common was their ascendancy from failing democracies by the forcible replacement of parliamentary government with an ostensibly more efficient form of autocratic rule that nonetheless claimed popular support. They derived their surface legitimacy from mobilizing masses for pseudo-plebiscitary demonstrations of assent. The latter of the two was more relevant for their long-term hold on power than their short-term origins, which they kept celebrating as revolutions to various degrees and at various points in time, no matter how differently those anti-parliamentary beginnings had come about. Depending on such variants, the revolutionary designations of their cultures were either foregrounded or de-emphasized. The Bolshevik revolution, preceded by military defeat and extended into a civil war, had been by far the bloodiest of the three. The violent conduct of the Fascist parliamentary takeover in 1922 did not destabilize the country to a similar degree. The National Socialists, finally, enjoyed a parliamentary ascendancy in 1933, and only briefly called their violent start of governance a revolution.

During the decade of the Depression, art of the people overtook revolutionary art as a guiding ideology of public art production. While the former became a crucial tenet for fashioning an art of mass conformity, the latter was maintained as a formula for any kind of radical change, either state-ordained or postulated by individual artists, against the status quo of politics. True to the political differences summarized above,

it was in the USSR that both ideologies were cultivated side by side, the first in order to back up official preference for traditional art, the second to define its ideological content. They converged in Andrei Zhdanov's 1934 prescription of "reality in its revolutionary development" (see Chapter 2.1/3.1.2) for the substance of Socialist Realism. During the last years of the Weimar Republic, and throughout the Third Republic, Communist parties encouraged artists to proclaim the ideology of revolutionary art in opposition to democratic government. In the Spanish Republic, it flourished during the ascendancy of the Popular Front, but eventually became submerged in the populist culture of anti-fascist militancy.

The most articulate, and most protracted, switch of ideologies occurred in Fascist Italy, where revolutionary art was still being foregrounded in the tenth anniversary exhibition of 1932. Its replacement in 1936 by the ideology of imperial art was not argued so much in populist terms as in terms of an expansionist autocracy with nationalist backing. It was in National Socialist Germany that the ideology of art for the people was not argued against that of revolutionary art but became instantly predominant with Hitler's accession. The NSDAP had never cultivated a revolutionary art before, although it conceived of its ascendancy as a revolution. When modern artists invoked it to ingratiate themselves with the new regime, they were rebuked. It was in the two most oppressive totalitarian states that the ideology of art for the people was most profusely proclaimed. On the assumption of popular preference for the art they sponsored, their populations were to be persuaded to appreciate government policy as a response to their own aspirations, not as a fulfillment of revolutionary demands, but through enforced conformity.

/1.2 CHANGES OF ART POLICY

/1.2.1 USSR I: FROM ACTIVISM TO CONTENTMENT

During the decade of the Depression, the USSR underwent by far the most trenchant changes in art policy of all four states concerned. It led from the art of the First Five-Year Plan, launched in 1928, to Socialist Realism, which replaced it since 1933. Uniquely, both art policies managed to invoke the ideologies of art for the people and revolutionary art at the same time. Domestically, the Party canvased the policy change, with its state appropriation of industry and collectivization of agriculture, as a second revolution, even more searing than the first. Internationally, on the other hand, Soviet propaganda, hiding the attendant administrative violence, celebrated it as a successful effort to invigorate the Soviet people for enthusiastic cooperation. By 1933, however, when the Second Five-Year Plan began to fall short of its expected achievements, Socialist Realism was launched as a triumphant propaganda style to assert the contrary. It replaced effort with success, exertion with contentment, as if

the 'revolutionary development' with which Andrei Zhdanov credited reality itself could dispense of harder labor as a revolutionary struggle.

The visual culture of the First Five-Year Plan engaged the arts for a propagandistic enforcement of the social engineering deemed necessary for precipitated industrialization. It promised to redeem long-standing aspirations on the part of avant-garde artists of transcending aesthetic confinement toward social activism—this time, however, not into reality, but into pictorial propaganda. The new expressive stylization of modernized technology in the hands of an enthusiastic workforce was shared by traditional and modern artists, but it was due to a limited rebound of the latter against the former, who had reclaimed realism on merely populist grounds. It could be valued as a convergence between revolutionary art and art for the people. For such a purpose, trite realism was judged to be inadequate. Stereotypical images of self-confident effort and proud achievement, often based on pseudo-documentary photomontage, were to represent a social reality under a benevolent leadership, which was omnipresent gesticulating in exhortation and congratulation. They misrepresented ruthless policy enforcement as the political will of labor.

Abroad, the First Five-Year Plan style of Soviet modernization, first displayed in El Lissitsky's Soviet pavilion at the Cologne Pressa exhibition of 1928, and later popularized in the illustrated monthly *USSR in Construction*, was designed to appeal to the technological aesthetics of modern art in capitalist states. It could build on the renown that modern Soviet design had already attained. This international outreach flanked the Plan's reliance on large-scale imports of foreign technology for its breakneck industrialization, which however was largely financed with exports of primary materials, mainly agricultural. When the Depression made grain prices fall worldwide, the ruthless boosting of these exports prompted the catastrophic famine that befell the newly-collectivized peasantry. The imagery of enthusiastic farm workers applying their mechanized equipment to an abundant food production, which fills the pages of *USSR in Construction*, conveys the ideological fiction of a harmony between industry and agriculture, a foundational Communist belied by its administrative violence and scant results.

/1.2.2 USSR II: SOCIALIST REALISM

A quick, conspicuous change of styles, as it occurred in the Soviet Union in 1933-1934, leading from the art of the First Five-Year Plan to Socialist Realism, remained unmatched in any other of the four states concerned. While at home it was profusely commented upon as a political decision flowing from an accomplished economic policy, abroad it was never recognized as such. The new style entailed the most fundamental discrepancy between artistic ideology and political reality anywhere in Europe. Its distinctive feature was a uniform exaggerated look of joy and contentment

in Soviet life and work. It illustrated Stalin's well-publicized dictum of 1934 that, as the result of the Five-Year Plan, the USSR had achieved socialism, the precondition of a joyful lifestyle. The ideological mendacity of the style consisted in its one-sided exaltation of this lifestyle at the expense of the large-scale, murderous repression sustaining the political order, starting with the Party purge of 1933, tightened by the revisions of the penal code in 1935, and culminating in the show trials of 1936-1938. Only the former, never the latter, was the subject of Socialist Realism.

For the Soviet Union's artistic self-display abroad, the new style served an expressive change from technological productivity to economic autarchy, social contentment and military resolve. In the two World Expositions of 1937 and 1939, it attained a hypertrophic triumphalism which boosted its position of strength in the increasingly saber-rattling political confrontation. The new style disconnected Soviet art from its previous international compatibility as an exemplary way of balancing modern and traditional art for the purpose of representing modernization—as it had been acclaimed in the Decorative Arts exhibition of 1925 in Paris and the 'Pressa' exhibition of 1928 in Cologne—particularly since leading Soviet artists of erstwhile modern persuasion came around to espousing it. Yet the impact of the earlier style outlasted the switch to Socialist Realism, whose critical significance was largely ignored. Conservative milieus could acquiesce in the new style's lack of revolutionary features. Left-leaning milieus clung to their anachronistic view of the earlier style's message that Soviet modernization was the antidote to capitalist Depression.

It would have taken an adversarial regime to call Socialist Realism on its service as a smokescreen for the murderous oppression now being conducted by the Bolshevik government. But its only open adversary, National Socialist Germany, was anachronistically fixated on modern art as the expression of what it denounced in Bolshevism. Perhaps the new style was too close to home for confrontation. In its new anti-fascist coalition policy launched in 1935, the Comintern, for all its praise of current Soviet culture, never canvased Socialist Realism as a style to emulate. And the Socialist Realism propagated by French Communists like Aragon was focused on the exposure of capitalist injustice and fascist wrongdoing, the opposite of the cheerful essence of its Soviet namesake. The criticisms of current Soviet art, as part of the broadsides Trotsky, Breton, and others had been hurling against the Stalinist regime since 1936, were limited to its state-controlled conformity, which it shared with German art per the totalitarian equation. They stopped short of exposing its ideological function as a camouflage of the calamities that the regime had wrought on Soviet society.

/1.2.3 GERMANY, ITALY, FRANCE

From the start, an ideological self-contradiction was built into National Socialist art policy. On the one side, Hitler had programmed it to follow the ideal of classical

antiquity as an expression of state power. On the other hand, Goebbels' Reich Chamber of Art encouraged a trivial, deliberately populist art without political content for the sake of professional recovery. Both variants seemed to share the ideology of an art for the people, but only the latter could derive some credibility because of the rising success of populist art on the market. No art work of this kind would ever have made it into a project of official art, whose popular acceptance consisted of totalitarian admiration. Here, the idea of art of the people was abstracted into the racial commonality of Greeks and Germans. The contradiction surfaced when the House of German art, the programmatic paradigm of the first variant, was to open with a bulk show of the second, and Hitler rejected numerous submissions, so that future shows in that ostensibly perfect building were usually accompanied with caveats to the effect that populist art was not fully accomplished but improving.

In Fascist Italy, modern had prevailed over traditional architecture in the name of the Fascist ideology of revolutionary renewal, linked to Fascist tenets of functional transparency in politics. A decisive ideological change came in 1936, when, because of its North African conquests, Italy claimed the status of an empire. Now, in emulation of Roman imperial building, modern architecture was blown up to symmetrical grandeur. It seemed that the art policy of synthesizing corporate diversity had yielded an ideological balance between the classical heritage of imperial Rome and the modernization drive of the Fascist state. However, the transition was anything but smooth. Paramount projects of state architecture such as the Palazzo de Littorio and the Foro Mussolini were endlessly changed, relocated, and never finished according to plan. The most egregious example of ideological self-contradiction was the drawn-out work on the site for the projected World Exposition of 1942. It pitted Marcello Piacentini and Giuseppe Pagano, the erstwhile protagonists of corporate synthesis, against one another on the question of imperial style. And Mussolini's belligerence belied its ostensibly peaceful message. Nonetheless, it was pursued two years into the war.

France's limited effort at a representative style was the overall design of the Paris World Exposition of 1937, where a modernized version of classical French architecture was meant to be reconciled with an aesthetic representation of technology. The three totalitarian states were able to insert the styles of their pavilions into the parameter of the first but not of the second proposition. The republican consensus regarding diversity in the arts presented no substantive ideological options for defining a particular style of the French Republic. Current ideological connotations of such styles, be it the social topicality of realism, classicism as a facade of political order, or the social nonconformity of modern art, were never debated with an eye on national self-representation. The sole attempt to fill this political vacuum was the exaltation of a supposed French artistic supremacy, which collapsed traditional and modern art together under the nationalist cachet of 'Frenchness.' It failed to net French democracy

a distinct artistic profile expressing its fundamental political distinction from the three totalitarian states.

/1.3 DECEPTIVE ALIGNMENTS

/1.3.1 GENERAL

The four-way confrontation of political systems that led from the Depression to the Second World War was never matched by any overt clash of art policies—neither in the representation of their arts abroad, where all four regimes vied for diplomatic recognition, nor in their domestic art scenes, whose enduring conflicts played out on the alternative between traditional and modern art. Public discourse on the arts was largely devoid of comparative references to other political systems. Never were Bolshevik or National Socialist art defined in opposition to one another, never was any commonality between 'fascist' art in Italy and Germany recognized, and, most importantly, never was an art of democracy upheld against totalitarian dictatorships in any other terms than those of freedom. Only the Soviet Union and Fascist Italy embarked on international propaganda campaigns by means of cultural policies: that of the Popular Front, inaugurated at the Paris Congress for the Defense of Culture in 1935, and that of an internationalization of fascism, inaugurated at the Covegno Volta in 1936. In this respect, the ideological antagonism between 'fascism' and 'anti-fascism' held true as a political divide.

The ideologies underlying foreign art policy often differed from those promoted at home. The most blatant example of such a discrepancy was the German denigration of modern art as Bolshevik, long after it was banished in the Soviet Union. Both states ignored their common preference for traditional art for the sake of upholding their ideological antagonism. A similar discrepancy between ideology and politics appears in the artistic fraternization between France and Germany in the name of peace, at a time when Germany was gearing up for war on France. Their cultural cooperation in shaping a public architecture in traditional style was at odds with France's military alliance with the USSR, which was never matched by any appreciation of Soviet art. Yet another discrepancy appears between Italy's propaganda effort aimed at an international expansion of Fascist culture—epitomized in the plans for the World Exposition of 1942—and its quickly forgiven North African colonial war of conquering an 'Empire,' followed by its tightening military alliance with Germany in preparation for the incoming World War.

The Paris World Exposition of 1937 championed a "Monumental Order," as it has been called,[99] which embraced not only a modernized classicism that democratic states with conservative governments and totalitarian states with capitalist economies could share, but also the non-classical monumentalism of the Soviet Union, and did not exclude modern-style pavilions of other states. Gold medals and other awards were

showered upon the pavilions and their art works contributed by totalitarian and democratic states alike. The German share was proudly listed in successive instalments of the membership monthly published by the Reich Chamber of Arts as proof of the international acclaim for the achievements of National Socialist art policy. The Paris Expo paraded a peaceful cooperation between states that were gearing up for war, their arms industries working at full tilt. It was bitterly ironical that at the opening of the German pavilion, Economics Minister Hjalmar Schacht extolled this very ideal six months before the Hossbach Conference of November 5 fixed a timetable for the start of war.

/1.3.2 USSR AND GERMANY

As long as the Soviet government pursued a foreign policy on the expectation that the Depression spelled the demise of capitalism and opened the opportunity for a Communist world revolution to succeed at last, Western democracies tended to perceive National Socialism as a bulwark against Bolshevism, since Hitler's government had left the capitalist economy essentially intact. However, when the German government, starting in 1935, gave evidence of an accelerated move toward military expansion, democratic states turned to cooperation with the Soviet Union. The Soviet government, for its part, attempted to oppose German power by launching its international peace diplomacy and inserting its new Popular Front policy into the domestic politics of democratic states. A stunning upset occurred on August 23, 1939, when the Soviet Union passed over the opportunity of consolidating its alliance with the West in the face of Germany's accelerating threat to Central Europe and switched sides at the last moment to conclude the Hitler-Stalin Pact so it could share in the conquest of Poland, the first campaign of the Second World War, which started one week later.

After Hitler's accession, German-Soviet art-diplomatic relations, which had been vigorously pursued during the Weimar Republic—mainly on behalf of modern art—were suspended. Henceforth, there was little or no public knowledge about each other's art in either country. While German art policy cultivated a foe image of 'art Bolshevism,' Soviet anti-German propaganda spared National Socialist art. Until the Trotsky-inspired totalitarian equation between both regimes started to address the similarities between their state-directed art production, foreign observers turned a blind eye to them, just as they did to the similarities between both regimes' suppression of modern art. It seems that the alliance with the Soviet Union against the German war threat preempted any ideological perspicuity. The Hitler-Stalin Pact would have validated the totalitarian equation, but it came too late to affect the art policies of either state. Perhaps its short-term expediency was too blatant for the new alliance to develop any persuasive ideology to justify it. In any event, the less-than two-year interlude until the German attack brought no artistic rapprochement.

The artistic affinity between both states, despite their ideological confrontation, emerged for all to see in the symmetrical pairing of their pavilions at the Paris Expo, which could be alternatively perceived as antagonism or analogy. Even though their styles were altogether different (see Chapter 1.3 / 3.2.3), their common adherence to the 'monumental order' became the yardstick for their propagandistic confrontation. In the German official photographic survey of the Expo, edited by Heinrich Hoffmann, Hitler's confidant in artistic matters, the Soviet pavilion received top marks. Staff writer E. P. Frank applauded its exhibits for their matching of "very high artistic merit and a clearly marked propagandistic tendency,"[100] just what German art policy was aiming for as well. "From a purely aesthetic viewpoint," wrote Frank, "one might well receive here the most profound impression. The magnificent reliefs at the entrance, but above all the giant group 'Worker and Kolkhoz Farmer' on top,—these are art works in the best sense of the word. No matter whether you deal with Bolsheviks—you cannot deny that the Russians have a sense for art."[101]

/ 1.3.3 GERMANY AND FRANCE

Unlike the USSR and Italy, neither National Socialist Germany nor the French Republic undertook cultural initiatives abroad aimed at promoting their political systems as paradigms for other states to follow. The fiercely nationalist, or even racist, self-definition of German art forestalled foreign emulation. France altogether lacked a substantive ideology of democratic art to propagate. Even more disconcerting than the German admiration for Soviet art was the French admiration for German architecture because of its shared adherence to the classical tradition at a time when both states were rearming for an expected German attack on France. Since their political antagonism was never spelled out in any overt propaganda, their artistic convergence served as a smokescreen of peaceful relations. At the opening of the German pavilion at the Paris Expo, Jacques Viénot, president of its planning commission, called for France to match the architectural energy of the totalitarian states. "Since the war," he said, "we in France have been left behind by other foreign nations: Rome, Moscow, Berlin [...]. All know how to perfectly organize gigantic human maneuvers with an imposing sense of decoration, staging, and propaganda."[102]

The official flyer of a concurrent nationwide competition to revive the *fêtes françaises* cited both the Nuremberg rallies and the parades in Rome as models for France.[103] Expo architect Gaston Bardet even called for monumental rallying grounds like Speer's at Nuremberg, the only ones anywhere, he said, where mass movements had been channeled into an aesthetically dignified environment.[104] Thus, when Expo architect Eugène Beaudin was commissioned to design such spectacles for Bastille Day, he deplored the lack of suitable spaces in Paris, due to what he termed excessive building during the century after the Revolution. In a position paper, he juxtaposed a picture

from the Nuremberg Party rallies to one of the 1792 *Fête de la Fédération* on the Champ de Mars.[105] For Waldemar George, the leading anti-modern art critic of nationalist convictions, the emulation of National Socialist pageantry meant no political rapprochement but meeting the German threat with an equally self-confident popular glorification of the military.[106] His call for a mimicry of totalitarian mass enthusiasm, echoed in the right-wing press, was intended to fill a void of the democratic public sphere.

Two years later, Expo head architect Carlu dressed up the Palais de Chaillot for the festivities on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the French Revolution, to be held on July 14, 1939, less than three weeks before the outbreak of the war. It was to serve as a backdrop for mass parades of civic organizations, partly in uniform, on the model of similar events in the three totalitarian states. Most conspicuous was the screen of towering *fasces* closing off the plaza between the two head structures, in disregard for the appropriation of this ancient revolutionary emblem as a ubiquitous sign of Fascist rule in Italy. Despite its historic legitimacy, it diminished the visual distinctions between democratic and totalitarian symbols. Democracy appeared to lack an unequivocal symbol of its own. However, the festivities confirmed the Third Republic's inability to match the populist appeal of totalitarian mass architecture, no matter how hard it tried. Already less numerous than expected, the crowd dispersed because of a steady rain. It was a striking contrast to Bastille day 1936, when the mass constituency of the Popular Front celebrated its election victory in front of Picasso's anti-fascist curtain.

/ 2 DISORIENTED ARTISTS

/ 2.1 PAVEL FILONOV AND OSKAR SCHLEMMER

/ 2.1.1 REJECTED BY THE REGIME

The increasing impact of state art policy on the economic viability of artistic culture went hand in hand with ideological anxiety on the part of artists about how it was to be understood and how strictly it was to be heeded. This did not help those modern artists who—disingenuously or not—strove to prove their ideological alignment without gauging the underlying economic and social fundamentals. During the preceding decade, the two totalitarian regimes already in existence abound with incidents where modern artists, led, respectively, by writers Mayakovsky and Marinetti, offered their ideological conformity, only to be rebuffed by the political authorities. By the start of the thirties, these artists were forced into a tightly circumscribed accommodation which allowed for a minimum of professional leeway. After 1932, this state of affairs persisted only in Italy. In the USSR, it was abrogated by the April Decree of 1932. In Germany, in January 1933, the newly ascendant National Socialist regime did not even allow it to arise. Whereas in the USSR until 1936, modern artists were given the chance to argue

their cases, albeit in vain, in Germany they met with implacable rejection from the start.

Pavel Filonov and Oskar Schlemmer were outstanding painters of modern observance who had made their national reputations during the decade of 1919-1929. In 1932 and 1933 respectively, both were disabused of their assiduous efforts to prove the ideological conformity of their work and its theoretical foundation to the Soviet and German art authorities, because they misjudged the political significance of their ideological pronpuncements. Filonov, before World War I a prominent member on the modern art scene of St. Petersburg, and during the Revolution a political activist, nonetheless received no post in the first Bolshevik government, and henceforth declared himself an independent Communist artist. After 1932, his self-claimed outsider status came to haunt him. No longer painting for sale, he eked out his livelihood as a mural restorer in St. Isaac's cathedral. Schlemmer, in 1918-1919 a sympathizer with the German revolution, had quickly risen to a prominent professorship at the Bauhaus in Weimar and Dessau. The National Socialist art policy measures of 1933 deprived him of the teaching post at the Berlin art school he held at the time. By 1937, his opportunities on the art market were curtailed so much he had to make a living as a technician in a lacquer factory.

Filonov's official repudiation started in 1932 with the cancellation of his huge retrospective show in the Russian Museum at Leningrad, to which he had been invited in early 1929, and which was, after several delays, installed but never opened. The public controversy over the show, which was protracted for almost three years, is the most vociferous event in the history of the institutional suppression of modern art in the Soviet Union. In 1930, Schlemmer had been commissioned to do a cycle of wall paintings for the Folkwang Museum at Essen, which the conservative director made him revise four times. In 1933 the new director, a National Socialist, had them scraped off the walls. Schlemmer's defense of his figures as "unequivocally German in posture and expression"[107] was of no avail. Professing allegiance to their respective regimes in lectures, debates, press articles, and letters to the authorities did not help the Soviet or the German painter, because their protestations were confined to asserting the ideological conformity of their modern styles. Their arguments fell on deaf ears because art policy aimed to reduce, if not eliminate, artists' ideological self-determination.

/ 2.1.2 PAINTING AND TEACHING

It was not so much their paintings that landed Filonov and Schlemmer into particularly bitter conflicts with their respective regimes, as their teaching in state-directed art schools, which gave their foundational theories a wider public resonance. Depending on their different institutional status in those schools, their public exposure varied, and their political repression took a different course. At the Leningrad Academy, Filonov never occupied a regular teaching post, but was merely authorized to conduct an unpaid master class on its premises, which allowed him to stage his teaching as an

alternative to the mounting traditionalism around him. When in 1932 a conservative curriculum was restored at the Academy, he reorganized his painting class as a private 'collective.' Schlemmer, on the other hand, taught as a senior professor at official institutions in the framework of regular curricula. His influence peaked in 1928 at the Bauhaus in Dessau, where his basic course 'The Human Being' became mandatory for all students. In his subsequent appointments at the academies of Breslau and Berlin, however, his competency was reduced, first to stage design and later to perspective.

Filonov sought to legitimize his precepts, no matter how idiosyncratic and hermetic, in the name of a dictatorship of the proletariat, which he claimed to represent as an artist. He held on to the leadership claim of outstanding individuals over like-minded groups which avant-gardes of modern art shared with Communist party elites. As a Bauhaus professor, Schlemmer also transfigured his metaphysically grounded art principles into the aesthetics of a world view and a life ethos, but he never claimed the art-political status of a leading master. Thus in 1933 he stood ready to subordinate his art to an ideologically congenial politics, provided it was allowed to unfold along its own professional logic. Whereas Filonov's teaching followed from his claim to group leadership, he did not submit to institutionalization, and hence provoked political ostracism. Schlemmer derived his teaching from the academic certification of modern art achieved in the Weimar Republic, which he developed into a far-flung educational mission remote from political entanglement.

In the second half of 1931, the year his show was in abeyance, Filonov worked on two paintings of a tractor factory and a textile workshop commissioned by the political administrators of these plants and intended to be mass-distributed as color prints. Although he swerved from his customary splintered abstraction and even altered both paintings at his patrons' requests, they were turned down. Similarly, in April 1934, Schlemmer took part in the Propaganda Ministry's competition for murals in the main lecture hall of the German Museum at Munich. Although he later saw himself as "the only one who had attempted to represent the national community,"[108] his composition sketches of closely packed, animated throngs of acclaiming people, some even raising their arms in the Hitler salute, were rejected, Thus, both artists, when they found themselves at odds with their respective regimes, were under the illusion that their ideological conformity would suffice to offer their works with minimal stylistic adjustments for use as propaganda. But mere adjustments were not enough. Unable to forego their long-developed personal styles, both fell afoul of the surface appearance required as the hallmark of political control.

/ 2.1.3 REJECTION OF CONFORMITY

Filonov might have let himself be sidelined in compliant resignation, as did Leonidov, Melnikov, or Rodchenko, but his prominence, coupled with his fearless public

self-assertion, made him, more than anyone else, into the personification of the independent artist that the new Soviet art policy was out to curb. In 1936, the press coined the vituperative term "Filonovitis," as if his uncompromisingly subjective art were the symptom of a disease. Schlemmer, on the other hand, never suffered any specific objections to his art. Since in 1933-1934, debates about the acceptability of modern art were focused on expressionism, to which he did not belong, he faced a summary rejection without reasoning. His subsequent attempts at ideological self-ingratiation were ignored, leading him to believe that he was a victim of a misunderstanding. Both artists thought they would be able to compaginate their anthropological concepts of the human being at the center of the cosmos with the political orders of Communism and National Socialism respectively. From their political allegiance they erroneously derived a license to insist on their artistic self-determinaton.

Filonov never wavered in his professions of Communism, even of subservience to Stalin's personal authority. He was able to move within the Bolshevik regime's parameters of cultural policy and ideological discourse. His self-defense abounded with catchwords such as revolutionary or classless art, proletarian dictatorship and creativity, all advanced with the utmost self-assurance. Schlemmer, on the other hand, had before 1933 maintained a non-political posture. It was only in June 1933 that he suddenly wrote in a private letter: "I feel pure and my art to strictly suit National Socialist principles [...] but *who* sees it?"[109] "Folk community" (*Volksgemeinschaft*) and "state composition" (*Staatskomposition*) were the catchwords of his ideological self-defense.[110] It never dawned on him that both these terms entailed a political control of his professional practice. In their ideological self-defense, both artists ignored the all-embracing organization both totalitarian regimes had set up in 1932-1933 for the political management of artistic culture. While Filonov's ideological conformity with the Bolshevik regime could not override his refusal of its art-political authority, Schlemmer even lacked an ideological understanding of his professional disgrace.

The built-in tendency of modern art from deviation to codification, from dissent to authority, led both artists to opposite conclusions from their self-understanding as teachers. While it seduced Filonov into cultivating an ideological self-righteousness the regime could not admit, it facilitated Schlemmer's attempt to offer his non-political aesthetics of a cosmic as well as social order to a regime it did not fit. "Marx, Lenin, Stalin, Copernicus, Galilei"—these were the authors Filonov on February 19, 1940, recommended to a young painter who still wished to study with him.[111] With his categorical alternative to the party-approved curriculum of the Leningrad Academy, he held on to the hypothetical ideal of an artist both Communist and free, which in 1918 had attracted Russian modern artists to the Bolshevik revolution. Schlemmer, on the other hand, deprived of any pedagogical expression, sank into depressing doubts. It was only in the summer of 1939, after a secret reading of Thomas Mann's political pronouncements

from exile, that he raised moral self-incriminations about his failed attempt to work in Nazi Germany.[112] In December 1940, finally, he condemned his efforts at regime conformity as a "desertion."[113]

/ 2.2 GERT ARNTZ

/ 2.2.1 SCHEMES OF DECEPTION

Circus Europe, a linocut by German graphic artist Gert Arntz, a committed leftist exile in the Netherlands since 1934, illustrates the ideological opacity of the international public sphere in May 1936, at the high point of political uncertainty. In caricaturing international politics as a circus performance, Arntz discredits any political manifestation of the day as a deceptive sham. The linocut personifies each one of the four regimes interacting in European politics, lined up on the platform of a circus entrance to advertise their illusory acts. A French Popular Front worker is bearing a fat-cat capitalist on his shoulders. Mussolini, arm in arm with a female dancer labeled 'democracy,' is crushing skulls under his boots. Hitler is juggling a peace palm, ammunition pieces, and a dollar sign. The most scathing caricature is aimed at the Soviet Union. Stalin, in uniform, is didactically pointing to a life-size picture of Lenin turned upside down. As a result, Lenin's trademark raised arm is pointing to the bottom, a poignant reversal at a time when this stereotypical posture was to be monumentalized in the giant statue crowning the Palace of Soviets, publicized all over Europe.

Already in his woodcut *Election Dial* of 1932, Arntz had positioned representatives of the principal parties in the two decisive German elections of July and November of that year, making their public appearance within the sectors of a circular percentage graph materialized into a spinning turntable. Other figures personifying covert interests stand half-concealed behind their backs, steering them at variance with their postures. Remarkably, the sizes of the sectors allocated to the main parties on the dial do not match the vote tallies of either one of the two 1932 elections, nor of the previous one of 1930. Instead, Arntz has symmetrically applied the commonplace pictorial scheme of a front figure and a steering figure, with big industry behind the Social Democrat as well as the Nazi, but with a Soviet soldier manipulating the Communist. The print denounces parliamentary democracy as a sham performance, where casting the ballot is supervised, and presumably coerced, by the police. Below, by contrast, a group of workers is turning away from the election and assembling in 'Councils,' the elected bodies of the November 1918 revolution, abolished less than a year later by the parliamentary democracy of the Weimar Constitution.

These two images of political deception spanning the first five years of the Depression were created by an activist artist of strong leftist convictions, but without party affiliation. During the earlier part of the twenties Arntz had used his pictographs,

a blend of social statistics and constructivist abstraction, as agitational images of capitalist injustice and social revolution. Still in 1928, he had made the woodcut titled *Crisis*, an ideologically unequivocal, partisan broadsheet for the class struggle. Even before the onset of the Depression, the print presents his stereotypical polarization between the rich on top, flush with merchandise and money, and the poor at the bottom, forcibly prevented from looting a store that is empty anyway. Several others woodcuts of that year dwell on themes of revolutionary violence harking back to the years 1919–1922, complete with stand-offs between workers and capitalists, workers' sabotage, armed factory takeovers, Nazi crimes, and debauchery of the rich. Here Arntz still professed his long-held belief in revolution, years before the workers' uprisings of 1934 in Asturias and Vienna had been quashed.

/2.2.2 FROM STATISTICS TO CARTOON

As a member of the radically leftist, if not outright Communist, 'Group of Progressive Artists' active at Cologne since 1921, Arntz had put out social-critical woodcuts in the highly schematized stylization he shared with other members. In 1926, the famous social scientist and publicist Otto Neurath enlisted him to head a studio of pictorial statistics in his 'Museum of Society and Economics' in Vienna. Neurath's Museum was founded and supported by the socialist administration of the city of Vienna with the mission to publicize its housing program and to promote its policies of socialist urbanism abroad. He charged Arntz with developing pictorial statistic as a tool for visualizing the fundamental processes of social and economic life, based on an expanding inventory of standard pictograms for multiple use. During the first four years of the Depression, Neurath successfully propagated this system of pictorial statistics as a means of simplified instruction that would allow an uneducated public to understand the historic and political parameters of their existence. Arntz, for his part, used the pictorial inventory he created for Neurath for his own ends: to endow his caricaturist woodcuts with the satirical look of objectivity.

In 1931, Neurath's method reached the high point of international acceptance when the Soviet government invited him to found a new institute of pictorial statistic (ISOSTAT) in Moscow for the express purpose of propagating the goals and achievements of the First Five-Year Plan. Arntz headed the Institute's team of graphic designers and was authorized to make them adhere to the style he had devised for his pictograms. Initially, both the socialist sympathizer Neurath and the Communist sympathizer Arntz were impressed by the Soviet political economy of the moment, with its apparent scientific foundation on planning, touted as an alternative to the failing laissez-faire capitalism of Western Europe and the USA. Their pictorial statistics were to become part of the propaganda for the First Five-Year Plan. It is during his tenure at the Moscow Institute that Arntz, incensed by the bloody suppression of the workers' uprising in Vienna in

1934, created his most militant anti-capitalist woodcuts. By the end of that year, however, ISOSTAT's pictorial typology had come to be questioned for lacking national characteristics, and the Institute stopped working.

Neurath's withdrawal from the USSR, and his later emigration from Austria to Holland in 1938, did not impede but boost his international success, albeit at the price of shedding the leftist origins and aspirations of his enterprise. He was enabled to accomplish ever more ambitious projects, culminating in his books *International Picture Language* of 1936 and *Modern Man in the Making* of 1939. Meanwhile, Arntz, still Neurath's head designer, stubbornly pursued his agitational printmaking, drawing on the intended universality of the sign systems he concurrently designed for Neurath's projects. The didactic functionalism of the Isotype system served him to dress up his political judgments as if they were statistical statements of fact, but his work was now shot through with propaganda concepts. The woodcut *War* of 1935, intended as a memorial of the First World War, shows British and German troops symmetrically pitted against one another as common victims of profit-making capitalists. One year later, a similarly symmetrical grouping, extended across two linocuts titled *Spain Left* and *Spain Right*, extolled the righteousness of the Republican side over the viciousness of the insurgent one.

/ 2.2.3 UNCERTAIN CONFRONTATIONS

It was in 1934, while still in Moscow, that Arntz created the two linocuts *The Third Reich* and *Russia 1934*, which, though not meant as pendants, can nonetheless be understood as parallel critiques of both regimes. One was an all-out denunciation of the Hitler State, often reprinted in Western European leftist publications. The other, a comparatively mild lampoon of Soviet collectivization, remained unpublished at the time. The first linocut is a steep pileup of figure types representing German society, topped by Hitler, whose raised arm is echoed by a cannon sticking out of the picture. Below, in an arms factory, a Communist worker is handing out leaflets denouncing the regime. The vertical composition slightly tilts to express its wobbly stance, foreboding the toppling of the Hitler state by the revolutionary resistance of the Left. The second linocut is a packed, horizontal composition depicting the delivery of a new tractor to a grateful kolkhoz community protected by soldiers in their midst. A hierarchical group featuring Stalin flanked by bureaucrats, including a censor brandishing a pair of scissors, towers over the encounter. Even though the image does not denounce collectivization, its repressive enactment is unmistakably criticized.

Still, in 1935 Arntz produced the linocut *Germany and Russia*, a clear-cut antithesis between German rearmament and Soviet housing construction. Below, a Soviet worker is reaching across the divide to join hands with a German factory worker bent on sabotage. The linocut presents a straightforward appeal to the international

solidarity of Communism as the paramount anti-fascist force. Arntz's embittered denunciation of Stalinism, along with all other political systems of the day, in *Circus Europe* in the following year, marks an ideological turning point. The Popular Front's particularly scathing put-down was apparently prompted by the Comintern's strategic switch from revolutionary resistance to coalition democracy. In his linocut *Factory Occupation in France* of 1936, Arntz reasserted the violent confrontation of capital and labor against the class-transcending co-operation policy of the incoming government of the Popular Front. In a reversal of capitalist lockout tactics, a throng of workers fills a plant on which their flag has been raised, as the management is forced to leave through a big black door.

All the while, Arntz remained in charge of providing an ever-more diversified typology of pictographs for Neurath's unbridled efforts at world-embracing, supra-political statistics, which culminated in his book *Modern Man in the Making* of 1939, Neurath's most successful work. However, in his own judgmental prints, he continued to diverge from his employer's supra-political optimism. *Modern Man in the Making* includes a section on war as a component of the 'modern' world economy, devoid of any political reflection. It presents four potential 'Silhouettes of War Economy' pitting a host of states against one another, regardless of their political systems. These tables would not have enabled readers to even guess what kind of war was likely to occur. Arntz, for his part, ceased to deal with overt political subject matter in 1936 and retreated to depressing images of class conflict. In 1939, when *Modern Man in the Making* was published, he took up mythological subject matter, out of a "feeling of doom" about the German invasion of Poland, as he later asserted. He shared this turn to mythology with other artists on the left.

/2.3 LE CORBUSIER

/2.3.1 THE SEARCH FOR POLITICAL BACKING

The well-publicized villas that Le Corbusier built during the twenties for wealthy clients had netted him prestige as one of the leading modern architects of his time. As if by compensation, he pursued hypertrophic projects of mass housing and urbanism, culminating in the plan for a *Ville Radieuse*, which would have required the demolition of existing urban structures, including those of Paris. Lacking any realistic economic, social or political backing, Le Corbusier's radical urbanistic precepts never stood a chance of being carried out. Witnessing the surging politicization of the arts since the start of the Depression, he attempted to link them to diverse political ideologies, ranging from Communism through fascism, and eventually to the Popular Front. None of Le Corbusier's initiatives were based on a personal allegiance to any one of the political systems to which he turned, and none of them met with acceptance. His erratic

ideological forays were enough for French government agencies and art administrations to treat him with distrust. The persistent failure of his schemes is symptomatic of the ideological disorientation of modern artists in a democratic state.

Since the end of World War I, demands for social change were part of numerous modern architects' professional postures, but Le Corbusier went the farthest in linking them to defined social and political programs. In the first year of the Depression, he turned to syndicalism, a workers' movement with roots in 19th-century French labor struggles, weary of parliamentary democracy. The Syndicalist program of radically restructuring society envisaged a system where workers, grouped into syndicates, would elect representatives, who would in turn elect a governing council. Such a scheme seems to have appealed to Le Corbusier's sense of urbanism as an egalitarian systematization of collective living, yet configured in organizational patterns apt for political management. Although the syndicalist principles underlying the first versions of Le Corbusier's *Ville Radieuse* implied a challenge to extant political authorities, its configuration around a social and political power center gave the improved living conditions provided by the *unites d'habitation* a sense of subordination, in accord with the self-acknowledged fascist leanings of part of the syndicalist movement.

Even after the dramatic failure of his activities in the Soviet Union between 1928 and 1932, Le Corbusier posited the abstract notion of a political "authority" as the condition for implementing his socially progressive plan for a 'Radiant City.' The source of its political legitimacy did not concern him, as long as it offered an opportunity for trenchant social change. In any event, it was alien to democracy. Lecturing in Italy in 1934, he spoke admiringly of Mussolini's modern architectural preferences. In 1936 he played a prominent role in the Sixth Convegno Volta, an international congress devoted to the propagation of Fascist principles throughout Europe. The foremost of those principles, the joint corporative organization of capital and labor, must have reminded him of some of his earlier syndicalist leanings. Unlike syndicalism, however, his verbal emphasis on the term 'authority' was meant to answer the question of political legitimacy for the imposition of the *Ville Radieuse* idea. It had a precarious affinity to the authoritarian self-understanding of all three totalitarian states. Only the absence of a housing program worth the name made National Socialist Germany unsuitable for Le Corbusier's schemes.

/ 2.3.2 SOVIET DISILLUSION

Le Corbusier's highest hopes for a political backing of his all-embracing schemes were raised, and disappointed, by the Soviet government during the period of the First Five-Year Plan. His eventual lack of acceptance in the USSR coincides with the change in art policy from modern to traditional in 1932, the year of the Plan's completion. Since he was unconcerned with Soviet politics, it took him by surprise. Le Corbusier had never shared the categorical enthusiasm for the Soviet Union professed

by Western European artists of leftist persuasion. It was modern-minded Soviet architects with a say in cultural policy who sought him out as a rising celebrity in the profession, at a time when the economics of the First Five-Year Plan counted on co-opting technological advances from capitalist states. However, all three ventures for which he was enlisted—starting in 1928 with the Centrosoyuz cooperative building, following in 1930 with the official request for his expertise on the reconstruction of Moscow, and culminating in 1931 with the invitation to participate in the competition for the Palace of Soviets—ended in setting him up as a prominent target for the mounting opposition against modern art unfolding during those four years.

Le Corbusier's 'Response to Moscow,' a variant of his earlier idea of demolishing much of extant city cores to make room for rebuilding social relations from the ground up, was based on his assumption that it suited the 'revolutionary' promotion of the First Five-Year Plan. However, in June 1931 the pertinent committee rejected his proposals, and the Communist press abroad denounced them. While this rejection may have been a matter of urbanistic practicality, the failure of Le Corbusier's Palace of Soviets design—an ingeniously devised compound apt to accommodate all functional requirements stipulated by the competition brief, particularly mass access—to be included among the three awards made in February 1932 was due to its deliberate lack of any monumental or pictorial appeal. The three-year suspension of the construction of the Centrosoyuz building, under mounting public pressure against its functionalist design, should have alerted Le Corbusier to the discrepancy of his ostensibly non-ideological approach to architecture with the increasingly prevalent monumentalism in Soviet architectural policy, signaled by the ever-changing stipulations of the ongoing Palace of Soviets competition.

Protesting the dismissal of his Palace of Soviets design, on March 31, 1932, Le Corbusier drafted a telegram to Stalin in person on behalf of the CIAM governing body. He argued that Boris Iofan's prize-winning design did not match the Communist ideal of socially beneficial modernization. The telegram is a dramatic document of the contradiction between ideologies and policies during the Depression. "Through the unfalsified language of architecture, the Palace of Soviets was to express the Revolution accomplished by the new civilization of modern times," Le Corbusier maintained.[114] Once again, the ideology of revolution linked to modern art had proved obsolete vis-à-vis the ceremonial self-display, and self-submission, of the masses to personalized authority. Already in a letter dated March 13, 1932, to former education commissar Anatoly Lunacharsky, Le Corbusier put his finger on the term "the people," invoked by the Party for the anti-modern turn. "Let us not delude ourselves with rhetoric: I know perfectly well that the people … greatly admire the palaces of kings," but the "thinking leaders of the Soviet republic," whom he still considered revolutionaries, should not have catered to such tastes.[115]

/2.3.3 MARGINALIZED BY THE POPULAR FRONT

When in 1935 Le Corbusier joined the 'Union of Architects,' a spin-off from the 'Association des écrivains et artistes révolutionnaires,' he re-entered the orbit of the Left, now in the attenuated guise it assumed on its way to the Popular Front. He presented his 'Radiant City' scheme in one of the evening lectures held at the Maison de la Culture as part of a socialist modernization program. The Popular Front government that took office one year later was in no position to heed his radical precepts of a new urbanism grounded on mass housing, because the priorities of its social policy for the working-class were focused on labor reform and leisure opportunities, and its construction budget was overstrained by defense projects, particularly the completion of the Maginot Line (see Chapter 4.1/3.1.1). Le Corbusier's emphasis on housing as the top priority for any architectural policy had never been aimed at political backing from the Left alone. As early as 1928-1929, he had vainly attempted to impress it on conservative labor minister Louis Loucheur, whose 'Law Loucheur,' providing for a limited quantity of low-cost housing construction, had been passed on July 13, 1928.

In 1934-1935, still under conservative governments, Le Corbusier submitted a proposal for a contribution to the planned Paris World Exposition, which once again promoted his ideas on affordable mass housing. It consisted of a set of giant buildings with 1,170 apartments for a total of 9,360 inhabitants, but the area allotted to him was whittled down, and eventually his project was altogether scrapped. However, if Le Corbusier had hoped the Popular Front government would be more receptive to a contribution from him because of his ties to the 'Maison de la Culture,' he was to be disappointed. His project of a 'Pavilion of Modern Times,' renamed 'Museum of Popular Education,' was re-oriented from modern building style to economic and social issues of architecture and urbanism, but its funding shrunk beyond feasibility. Eventually, Le Corbusier was assigned the barest minimum of space and money for a makeshift exhibit with the original name at the outskirts of the Expo. It was a tent-like canvas construction, suspended on wooden poles, containing a didactic show of text and figure panels, photographs, dioramas and big-lettered slogans, apt to be folded, shipped, and reassembled as a "Travelling Show of Popular Education," which, however, was never sent on its way.

The pavilion's dedication "to the people of France" heeded the prevailing populist ideology, although one of its fifteen sections was still titled "Architectural Revolution." Le Corbusier used this section for one of the most exasperated statements of his customary demand for a priority of social policy, now turned against arms production, even in the face of the growing German war threat. One prominent exhibit was a new multipurpose stadium in Paris, billed as "a national center for popular jubilation for 100,000 participants," to be used almost daily for "awakening the

country."[116] Le Corbusier thus responded to the current political concern for *fêtes françaises*,[117] seeking to catch up with the monumental structures for mass gatherings now being erected in the three totalitarian states.[118] Already as early as January 7, 1937, he submitted a detailed version of the stadium project to the Minister of Leisure, Léo Lagrange, as a monumental pooling of Popular Front leisure culture. It would have grouped multiple facilities for "a 'total art' where music, dance, film projections and mass movements" were to surround the sports events,[119] a democratic match for totalitarian mass architecture.

/ 3 THE LEFT AT A LOSS

/ 3.1 THE SHIFTING SOVIET PARADIGM

/ 3.1.1 THE TURNS OF SOVIET POLICY

As long as Soviet foreign policy operated on the 'Third Period' expectancy that the Depression spelt capitalism's final decline, and hence a new opportunity for the Communist world revolution that had stalled in 1923, the capitalist cultures of Italy, Germany, and France shared an express or latent distrust of modern art as a perceived instrument of Communist subversion. Modern artists—not only those of Communist persuasion, but also those who claimed to be apolitical, and even those who sought to align themselves with the Fascist and the National Socialist regimes—found themselves stigmatized as virtual Bolsheviks against their own convictions. Only in democratic France was modern art politically diversified enough to prevent such wholesale prejudice. This kind of ideological taint became obsolete as soon as Soviet art turned traditional in its entirety. The second competition for the Palace of Soviets, held in 1931, and Andrei Zhdanov's curt pronouncements on Socialist Realism in 1933 disabused left-leaning modern artists of their sympathies for the Soviet Union and exposed them to being politically miscast wherever they might turn.

In 1935, the art-political preconditions changed once more. As the German drive to armed expansion became apparent, France embraced the new international peace diplomacy of the Soviet Union. The flanking Comintern policy of expanding its influence by democratic rather than revolutionary means, intended to stabilize its new ally, stripped French culture of the Left of its revolutionary cachet. The Popular Front's revalidation of a class-transcending cultural consensus in order to consolidate the anti-fascist struggle cancelled the ideological antagonism between traditional and modern art on a Right-Left scale. Modern artists on the Left could no longer claim an ideological monopoly on their anti-fascism by branding traditional art as politically reactionary. Moreover, since the mounting conflict between Germany and the Soviet Union was inconsistent with the inadvertent similarity between the traditional look of

the arts now being promoted in both states, the 'anti-fascist' mindset of modern art could no longer compaginate political and aesthetic judgment. As a result, the artistic culture of the Popular Front ignored, if it did not shun, contemporary Soviet art.

In July 1936, the Spanish Civil War upset the pacifism of the Left, which only the year before had been energized by opposition to German rearmament. Suddenly a war enthusiasm on behalf of a just cause revived the long-standing revolutionary militancy of the avant-garde, soon to be disappointed by the Soviet Union's repressive conduct of its Spanish intervention and eventual acquiescence to the defeat of the Republic. The ensuing vacillations between commitment and despondency deprived modern artists of the last ideological certainty about the fundamentals of the revolutionary struggle to which they had clung so long. Their recognition of an overwhelming power politics beyond control, or even beyond understanding, threw them back on denunciations of a war their enemy was winning. Picasso's *Guernica* was just this kind of denunciation. The contentious commentaries that either blamed it for defeatism or squeezed it for an upbeat message are just so many attempts at keeping up hope against all hope. The Hitler-Stalin Pact of August 23, 1939, came too late to confirm the ideological disorientation of artists on the Left.

/ 3.1.2 SOVIET ART ABROAD

Since the start of the Depression, the Soviet Union was the only one of all four states to foster an art that exalted modernization—the art devised as propaganda for the First Five-Year Plan. It was an art of realism, opposed to the modern artistic culture of the other three, which was merely bent on devising aesthetic equivalents to the visual appearance of a modernized technical environment. The international prestige of Soviet art since the early twenties had rested on modern art of this bent in architecture, painting, and photography alike. It was personified in El Lissitsky's ceaseless organizational ventures abroad. The conservative segment of domestic Soviet art, averse to modern internationalism, was in and of itself immune from serving as an international paradigm. During the following decade, the art of the First Five-Year Plan, and later that of 'Socialist Realism,' brought any international impact of Soviet art to a standstill. Soviet international ventures in the arts continued to be admired, to be sure, but merely as demonstrations of a culture with a superior economic and social cohesion, whose political operation was inimitable.

The change of postures is apparent in the foremost Soviet propaganda enterprise for foreign distribution, the oversize photo journal *USSR in Construction*, which was published from 1930 to 1939, first in two and then in three Western European languages. During its first three years, it was centered on extolling Soviet advances in productivity and social policy through a seemingly documentary presentation. The journal advertised the First Five-Year Plan to promote admission of the USSR into the

network of world trade, despite its principled challenge to capitalism. It showcased a politically energized working society which its prospective trading partners could rely upon. After missing that objective, it turned to a triumphalist show of Soviet superiority over the Depression-ridden West. Since the fall of 1932, documentary photography was increasingly manipulated to extol productive achievements by means of photo-collages, decorative compositions, illustrated statistics or reportages of ceremonial events, all of which had been scarce in previous issues. It is at that time that prominent modern photographers who had gained a reputation in Western Europe were enlisted as contributors or even editors.

El Lissitsky, one of the leading modern artists from the start, who during the preceding decade had acquired a high reputation and a wide network in Western European artistic milieus of modern orientation, now rose to direct the most prominent artistic ventures of Soviet cultural policy abroad, including the interior designs of the Soviet Pavilions at the Paris and New York World Fairs. Since October 1932, he was also charged with the layout and artistic direction of fourteen issues of *USSR in Construction*, culminating in the triple issue of December 1937, devoted to the new Soviet constitution of 1936. He more than anybody implemented the journal's ever-growing change from a documentary look to the colorful pictorial hyperbole of poster design. El Lissitsky's transition from the terse but expressive photomontage techniques of his beginnings to the emotional cheerfulness and decorative symmetry of Socialist Realism made it seem as if modern art had been successfully adjusted to the illustrative appeal of advertising. His work acted as a living proof that any attacks on the 'cultural bolshevism' of modern art for its 'formalist' distortions were outdated.

/ 3.1.3 SOVIET ART BEYOND EMULATION

Yet, different from some French writers, whose admiration for the ostensibly superior accomplishments of the Soviet political economy knew no bounds, French artists never took a page from 'Socialist Realism,' either in content or style. During the 'realism debates' of 1936-1937, cultural officials of the Popular Front government took care to draw the line against a style whose political enforcement they were in no position to emulate. Just as the Soviet Pavilion at the Paris World Exposition of 1937 neither in its architecture or its imagery shared in the international style conventions of the 'monumental order,' but presented itself as an uncompromising statement of 'Socialism in one country,' so *USSR in Construction*, in its new artistic guise, boasted a patriotic triumphalism unsuitable for foreign imitation. Not even artists featured by the Communist-run Maison de la Culture could look to Soviet art for paradigms that might have matched the ideological orthodoxy of Communist politicians and writers under the guidance of the Comintern, all the less so since those responsible for art policy took care not to compromise the cultural pluralism of the Popular Front.

Although artistic exchanges between France and the USSR continued during the first three years of the thirties, they stopped when Socialist Realism became the style of the day. Despite the Soviet-French alliance of 1935, an exchange of art exhibitions between both states envisaged for 1936 was cancelled,[120] perhaps because of Soviet aversion to French modern artists who would have been included. The exhibition 'Twenty-Three Soviet Artists,' organized in 1933 by Communist art dealer Pierre Vorms, was centered on works by Aleksandr Labas, Yury Pimenev and Aleksandr Deineka, but failed to feature academic artists such as Isaac Brodsky or Aleksandr Gerasimov, who were among the driving forces behind the technical and institutional development of Socialist Realism. Two years later, Vorms proposed an exchange program that was to feature French realist painters of Communist persuasion such as Gromaire and Goerg under the label "currents close to Socialist Realism"[121], but their work lacked both the technical finish and the optimistic air that had by now become axiomatic for Soviet painting. Nothing came of Vorms's initiative.

The turn of Soviet art away from any compatibility with the art of capitalist states was played out in the three competitions for the Palace of Soviets for an international public to watch. It spelled the end for any possibility of flanking the political rapprochement between France and the Soviet Union with any artistic ties that would have transferred the influence of Soviet art in France from modern art to Socialist Realism. Even within the culture of the Communist Party of France, art institutions, including the Maison de la Culture, and individual artists shied away from turning to current Soviet paradigms, by contrast to the Party's subservience to directions from the USSR. The Comintern's new, inclusive cultural policy had no use for Socialist Realism's rigorous codes of traditional technique and joyful expression. Thus, the artistic culture of the Left in France was at a loss to coalesce around consistent standards. It failed to produce any significant body of work. The protracted debates held in the Maison de la Culture yielded nothing but irreconcilable differences. And the two outstanding, mutually hostile art organizers of Communist persuasion, Louis Aragon and André Breton, opposed each other in imaginary hyperbole.

/ 3.2 ARAGON VERSUS BRETON

/ 3.2.1 LOUIS ARAGON

Amongst the Western European artists and writers who fell for Soviet international propaganda of the First Five-Year Plan, none was more ardent than Louis Aragon, a former member of the Surrealist circle. After having been given the tour of a new factory in the Donbass after the Kharkov writers' congress in October 1930, he signed an anti-surrealist declaration of subservience to the Bolshevik line. Almost three years later, he reiterated his praise of the Plan in his poem *Red Front* (*Front Rouge*), which

netted him an indictment for sedition. After waxing about the abundance of steel and corn produced by new factories and kolkhozes, he extolled the Red Army, poised to smash the "rubbish" of the capitalist order, "France before all else."[122] True to Lenin's precepts, he clung to war as the *ultima ratio* of world revolution. With up-to-date topicality, *Red Front* heralded the stiffening Soviet antagonism vis-à-vis capitalist states, adopted after the failure of earlier efforts to connect the political economy of the First Five-Year Plan with the world trade system. The poem rehearsed the Comintern's renewed strategy of world revolution, which in 1934 supported the workers' uprisings in Vienna and Asturias under the banner of a 'United Front'.

In a lecture on John Heartfield, delivered on May 2, 1935—the day the Soviet Union signed a military assistance pact with France—Aragon recast the epithet 'revolutionary' from a violent overthrow of the capitalist order into the solidarity of the international proletariat in the anti-fascist struggle. Artistically, he short-circuited the 'realism' of photomontage with the realistic tradition of French 19th-century painting. One year later, after the Popular Front's electoral victory of 1936, Aragon intervened in the three-day-long mass debate entitled "Where is Painting Headed?" at the Maison de la Culture. Here he advanced a sweeping equation between Socialist Realism, severed from its Soviet contents and significance, and French realist painting, still using the catchword 'revolutionary' in order to relate the two. Finally, the mass meeting of a thousand artists and intellectuals that Aragon organized on June 1, 1938 at the Centre Marcelin-Berthelot in Paris overrode previous ideological distinctions tied to any style. Accompanied by artists as diverse as Léger, Gromaire, and Masereel, Communist Party Secretary Jacques Duclos pronounced anti-fascism as an all-embracing platform of "complete freedom."[123]

Whatever claims Aragon may have advanced to bridge the gap between traditional and modern art on the premises of nationalism and anti-fascism, he was unable to insert his newly-adopted, party-line opposition to modern art into any coherent art-critical argument, particularly since he kept counting the most prestigious modern artists among his friends and political allies. Already in the realism debates of 1936, he rejected Léger's and Le Corbusier's calls for a political empowerment of modern art on the basis of its appeal to contemporary media experience. And in the Party newspaper *L'Humanité* of 1937, where he served as an editor, he passed over Picasso's mural *Guernica* in silence, and published a diatribe against modern art as a bourgeois diversion. Finally, by 1938, Aragon extolled Henri Matisse, the non-political modern artist *par excellence*, in several publications beyond all measure. Soaring over ideological debates, he indulged in a fantastic invocation of Matisse's presumed 'roots' in the soil of his native France, even linking him to prehistoric cave painters. Here, any political topicality had given way to nationalist hyperbole.

/ 3.2.2 **ANDRÉ BRETON**

In his statement about "banners" of 1935 (see Chapter 1.1 / 1.2.3), André Breton declared the freedom of modern artists to include political self-determination and responsibility on a par with that of writers. Acting as the self-appointed, though not undisputed, leader of the Surrealist group, which included numerous artists, some of them with strong political convictions, he would have been in a position to organize collective ventures on that premise. Yet Breton never attempted to manifest what he called the "political position of Surrealism" in the artistic culture wherein he operated throughout the decade. The two big artistic enterprises in which he had a leading say—the lavish art journal *Minotaure*, running from 1931 through 1938, and the International Exhibition of Surrealism, staged in Paris in 1938—were devoid of political expression. One reason for this separation between art and politics was that Breton earned his livelihood as an art dealer, precariously enough, to be sure, on an art market adversely affected by the Depression. The other reason was his belief that the essential themes and postures of surrealist art were political per se, merely because of their provocation of the social order, without any controversial political topicality.

In 1928, while still successful as a dealer, Breton published his collected catalog introductions and review articles in a book entitled *Surrealism in Painting*, which, by contrast to his literary pronouncements of the time, contains no reference to politics at all. In the following decade, he never addressed the ideological positions taken by leading surrealist painters such as Ernst and Masson, except for Dalí, whom he opposed. Still, in the surrealist circle's unforgiving ideological insider culture, the subjective, if not idiosyncratic, expression of political views on the part of those painters raised perpetual cycles of discords and reconciliations—most notably with Dalí and Masson—and never converged on a common public platform to which most surrealist artists would have been willing to subscribe. It was the judgment on Lev Trotsky's expulsion from the Soviet Union, at that time the touchstone of Communist political dissent, which first flared up in a raucous meeting of March 11, 1929, at the Bar du Château in Paris. On that occasion, numerous painters, Max Ernst among them, refused to agree on any one position, be it Aragon's or Breton's. It was under Trotsky's influence that Breton later pronounced himself explicitly on art and politics.

Breton's and Trotsky's Coyoacán Manifesto of June 1938 (see Chapter 4.2). drew the consequences from those persistent ups and downs of partisanship, as it projected a politics of art in opposition to all political systems now facing one another. Unconcerned with the ideology of an art for the people, the current priority of art both on the right and on the left, it upheld the ideology of revolutionary art regardless of its waning topicality. The Manifesto's demand, "No authority, no dictation, not the least trace of orders from above!" was meant to safeguard the independence of artistic commitment, but

what it actually signified was a radical severance of ideologies from policies, the recoil of ideologies to mere expressions of conviction. Both authors could voice it with such stridency because they found all extant policies equally discredited. At this virtual summit meeting of revolutionary art, Breton did not write the Manifesto on behalf of the surrealist circle, or what remained of it. For artists in Paris, his co-signer Diego Rivera—no matter how prestigious as a 'revolutionary' artist—remained an exotic figure. Upon Breton's return, only André Masson adhered to the newly-proclaimed 'Federation of Independent Revolutionary Artists,' of which the Manifesto was to be the program.

/3.2.3 THE CLASH

In the late spring of 1938, Aragon was seated next to Jacques Duclos on the presidium tribune of the mass meeting at the Porte Berthelot, while, in far-away Coyoacán, Breton and Trotsky finished their joint manifesto in a convivial ambience. The promise of "complete freedom" for the arts in Duclos' speech was synonymous with the "complete freedom for art" Breton demanded in his text. The apparent symmetry between the conflicting proclamations is the ironic outcome of an exasperated split between the two surrealist writers, which started in 1932, when their political trajectories diverged. While Aragon, a Party member to the end, became a leading organizer of French Communist culture, Breton, expelled from the Party in that year, held on to his Communist convictions as a political outsider. As a result, Aragon was in a position and under obligation to keep abreast of the ideological tergiversations brought on by changing Comintern and Party policies. Breton, on the other hand, exploited his political marginalization to the full, not only by sticking to his original revolutionary principles, but also by pronouncing himself with a clear eye on the ideological self-contradictions of current Communism.

It was Aragon's political judgment to abandon the world-revolutionary ambitions that proved untenable by the defeat of workers' uprisings in Asturias and Vienna in 1934, and come round to the cultural alliance with the middle-class, the Party advocated in the following year. As managing secretary of the 'Maison de la Culture,' he was empowered to maximize the class-transcending mass appeal of anti-fascist culture. Breton, on the other hand, as one of the editors and later sole editor of *Minotaure*, was catering to upper-middle-class taste for modern art undiluted by concerns for any class-transcending appeal. Only here could he deploy the panoply of disruptive themes and forms that illustrated the revolutionary aspirations of modern art. The assumption was that they corresponded to his pronouncements on contemporary politics. The two major artists representing these contrary positions were John Heartfield and Pablo Picasso, Aragon's and Bretons respective heroes. One was a Party member in good standing and a successful press illustrator, who had risen to become an exhibition artist. The other was the most prestigious modern artist of his time, who expressed his

leftist partisanship with no regard for, or concession to, popular understanding, let alone a party line.

Given their acknowledged leadership and tireless activities in leftist artistic milieus inside and outside of the Communist Party, it is a sign of ideological vacillation that neither Aragon nor Breton arrived at any persistent categorical explications of their views on art and politics. In 1938, at the height of pre-war ideological uncertainty, their writings left any topicality behind. Aragon's transfiguration of Henri Matisse as an outgrowth of the timeless "soil" of France, published in 1938, as well as Breton's account of the "Most Recent Tendencies of Surrealist Painting" in the last issue of *Minotaure*, which appeared in May, 1939, were devoid of any attempt to link the arts both authors chose to praise to any political situation. The special insert of the last *Minotaure* issue, entitled "Recalling Mexico," and bound within a special cover designed by Diego Rivera, included a photograph of Breton, Trotsky, and Rivera at Coyoacán, but no word about or from the Manifesto that had been the outcome of their meeting. Instead, it presented a medley of texts and photographs celebrating Mexico as an exotic revolutionary nirvana.

/ 3.3 GEORGE GROSZ IN EXILE

/ 3.3.1 THE CONFLICT WITH THE COMMUNIST PARTY

During the Weimar Republic, George Grosz had pursued a successful career which more than once brought him into conflict with the Communist Party, of which he was a member from the start. Still, his drawings of social and political critique sold so well with private collectors that his dealers were able to market expensive luxury editions of his low-cost picture books issued by the Party press. This simultaneous success is suggestive of his precarious political posture. Grosz's caricaturist assaults on the government and the "ruling class" did not prevent his pictures and drawings from being purchased and exhibited by numerous public museums. In his blasphemy trials of 1929 and 1930 over a published drawing of the crucified Christ wearing a gas mask, no less than Reich art commissioner Edwin Redslob testified on his behalf. Grosz's social critique had become the brand of his market success. Although in 1924 he had chaired the Communist-dominated art league 'Red Group' and in 1928 joined its successor 'ASSO,' the glumness of his social critique incurred such strong objections from Communist Party writers that he felt obliged to assert his independence against them. His autobiographical essays in the mainstream art journals *Kunstblatt* of 1929 and *Kunst und Künstler* of 1930 made no mention of his politics.

Thus, after years of relentless Communist critique for his lack of uplifting expression and his business success in the German art world of dealers and museums, Grosz' relations with the Communist Party were already strained enough by the time he

chose, on January 12, 1933, not to return from the USA—where he held a teaching job—but stay there as an exile. In two letters of June 3 and 6, 1933, to Wieland Herzfelde, his friend and former editor, he refused to collaborate with Herzfelde's oppositional publication plans, launched from the latter's Prague exile. They contain a double attack against National Socialism, on the rise, and Communism, in defeat, after Hitler's ascent to power, which was coupled with a wholesale abdication from artists' political engagement. In the liberal artistic culture of the United States, Grosz was well received because of his celebrity as a leftist artist in the defunct Weimar Republic. Siding with the strong anti-Stalinist Left in its exasperated struggles with the Communist Party of the USA, he refused to join the Moscow-dominated American Artists' Congress. However, in his work for show or publication, he stayed away from politics.

It was not until 1936 that Grosz ventured to put out a survey of his political views for the public. It was a large portfolio of 64 photolithographic reproductions of his drawings, ranging from 1927 to the present. Entitled *Interregnum*, and billed as a "pictorial record of modern Germany from 1924 to 1936," it was printed as an expensive collector's edition. With only 42 copies sold, it proved a public failure. Appearing in the same year as Lev Trotsky's *Betrayed Revolution*, *Interregnum* amounted to the first comprehensive critique of the political analogy between National Socialism and Bolshevism advanced by a dissenting Communist artist, or by any artist for that matter. With three years' delay, it visualized the views Grosz had expressed as early as June 1933 in his two letters to Herzfelde. The sixty-four illustrations are evenly divided between reprints of drawings from the time of the Weimar Republic and new drawings about the murderous Hitler regime, the menace of war, and the degradation of Communism under Stalin. Two of these present symbolic images of the totalitarian equation between both regimes, the first to be devised by any artist of the decade.

/3.3.2 THE TOTALITARIAN EQUATION

The first of these two drawings, *Jigsaw Puzzle*, depicts a composite figure split down the middle into half of a Bolshevik worker with an inane grin, showing off hammer and oars in his clenched fist, and half of a Nazi storm trooper with Hitler's features, armed to the teeth and brandishing a dagger in a similar gesture. One is standing in a cornfield, the other on a cobblestone pavement. In the second drawing, entitled *Art is Eternal*, the artist, a tiny bespectacled puppet with a harp, palette, and book attached to his body, is dangling on a tightrope, loosely suspended from two chairs on which two robotic giants are seated, their foreheads cut off above their noses. One is an armed storm trooper raising his right hand to hail Hitler, the other an unarmed worker clenching his left fist in the Communist salute. The systemic analogies visualized in both symmetrical groupings are limited, however. The belligerent attitude is reserved to the armed Nazi, which squares with the unequivocal attribution of the war threat

to Hitler's regime throughout *Interregnum*. The peaceful posture of the Communist, which seems to embody no threat, may or may not denounce the current peace initgiative of Soviet foreign policy.

Grosz developed *Art is Eternal* from a sketch of 1935 entitled *Between the Chairs*, which shows the German exiled writer Ernst Toller, awkwardly squatting on the floor between Hitler and Stalin who are seated back to back. The inscription "humanitarian radical" lampoons Toller as one of those leftist intellectuals whose belief in Communism as a position to take against National Socialism Grosz deemed a self-delusion. In the final drawing, the tiny figure of the artist is swinging at a right angle to the alignment of the hostile robots, as if he could perform his art in blissful ignorance of their antithetical configuration. Whenever the two superpowers of the day might arise to turn against one another, his weight would make their chairs flip over backwards, and he would crash while they would stand. Unlike the personalized caricature of Toller, which merely pictures a commonplace figure of speech, the emblematic configuration of *Art is Eternal* is visually reasoned out to ridicule what Grosz regards as the would-be independent artist who indulges in his self-centered craft. Beset by the illusion that art is exempt from historical contingency, he is swinging at an angle to the political dynamics of his time.

Two more drawings of *Interregnum* make it clear that Grosz allows the artist no way out of this quandary. In one, he denounces artists who cater to totalitarian power, a charge that Trotsky had also raised in *Betrayed Revolution* the same year. In the other, he is putting down the artist who is moving into opposition against overwhelming power. Taken together, they illustrate the futility of artist's engagement in politics. It is telling that the first drawing, depicting tiny artists with ape-like tails cowering before the boots of a headless Nazi giant, is titled *Singing their Way into the Hearts of the People*. In substituting a solitary power figure for 'the people,' it denounces the ascendant artistic ideology of the time, while throughout *Interregnum* the issue of revolution is nowhere addressed. Two interrelated drawings titled *Progress* and *The Voice of Reason* show the boots of an SA man walking through the mud. In the first, he has just murdered a demonstrator for "Freedom and Peace," as the fallen placard reads. In the second, he simply ignores a minute artist, dressed in a flowing smock, who is riding an attack on his hobbyhorse, brandishing a sword stump. For the artist, even resistance is futile.

/ 3.3.3 THE TROTSKYIST QUANDARY

The bulk of the new drawings, however, denounce the Hitler state, its atrocities and its war threat. With the title *Interregnum*, Grosz defiantly labels what had been billed as a thousand-year reign as simply a transitory period without a legitimate ruler, a historical interlude bound to pass. He omits the Soviet counterweight from

the ideology of the anti-fascist struggle. On this point, Grosz differs from Trotsky, who projected a newly-fashioned Fourth Communist International as a hypothetical spearhead to confront Hitler. He opens no ideological, let alone political, perspective on what might end the 'Interregnum'. For him, the outcome of the coming war prepared by the German regime is merely a catastrophe with neither winners nor losers. Grosz' double critique of artistic conformity and artistic opposition betrays a resigned self-reflection on the political irrelevancy of art in the face of a world-historical confrontation, whose fronts appeared obscure until the last minute before the war broke out. Several drawings of *Interregnum* show solitary figures of Grosz himself, raking mud or stalking through bad weather, in a mix of defiance and despair.

Already on March 15, 1933, Grosz wrote to his benefactor Felix Weil: "What is now going on in Germany is [...] bitter. What is bitter, and for many who care here incomprehensible, is: why have these millions of communists so miserably failed??? [...] I believe with Trotsky (without being his unconditional adherent), that the élan of the revolutionary movement has been paralyzed for many years."[124] Kay Flavell, in her paraphrase of the letter, apparently based on the unpublished original, adds: "His own position he describes as 'between the stools'."[125] That Grosz should have used the same figure of speech in *Art is Eternal* confirms the Trotskyist origin of the totalitarian equation presented in *Interregnum*. In the USA, it would have appealed to the anti-Stalinist Left, where Trotsky had a strong following. Unlike Trotsky, however, Grosz was unable and unwilling to imagine any meaningful challenge to the Hitler regime proffered by the Left. His long-term political disappointments prevented him from sharing Trotsky's and his small cohort's indefatigable self-delusions about the anti-fascist viability of their 'Fourth International.' For his 'Interregnum,' there was no end in sight but destruction.

Still, after the United States had finally entered the war in 1943, the anti-Hitler cartoons of *Interregnum*, which Grosz in 1936 had addressed to a left-to-liberal political culture, acquired a new resonance as prophecies of an all-out clash between dictatorship and democracy. Between 1942 and 1944, Grosz enlarged several of the drawings into oil paintings which met with some success. One of these, titled *Cain*, on which he worked through all of 1943-1944, is based on the drawing *And Cain Killed Abel*, which shows a concentration-camp guard sitting by a corpse, at rest from his murderous work. The guard has been turned into Hitler himself, to whom a host of minuscule victims are creeping up to devour him in revenge. The painting sold to an American collector. Grosz chose to ignore that it was not Hitler's victims who eventually prevailed over him, but the American and Soviet armies, at variance with the totalitarian equation drawn in *Interregnum*. Back in 1936, it had been beyond his political judgment to imagine that it would take the apocalyptic war he pictured in his drawings to bring about the end of Hitler's regime, as the eponymous title promised.