3 / Artists

3.1 / Political Activity p. 224

3.2 / Political Oppression p. 258

3.3 / Political Resistance p. 292

Werckmeister, Otto Karl: The Political Confrontation of the Arts in Europe from the Great Depression to the Second World War, (Zurich Studies in the History of Art. Georges-Bloch-Annual, University of Zurich, Institute of Art History, 2019/20, Vol. 24/25, ed. by Wolfgang F. Kersten), Heidelberg: arthistoricum.net, 2020. DOI: https://doi.org/10.11588/arthistoricum.649

3.2/ Political Oppression

/1 THE TOTALITARIAN OPPRESSION OF MODERN ART

/1.1 THE DISCRIMINATION OF MODERN ART

/1.1.1 STRUCTURAL ANTAGONISM

During the decade of the Depression, the conflict between democracy and totalitarianism made the political oppression of artists and its repercussions and consequences into a crucial issue throughout Europe. While the term oppression denotes a mere curtailment of artistic practice, the term suppression denotes political measures of outright interdiction. The issue was confined to the oppression of modern art by totalitarian regimes but played out differently under each of the three by comparison to the preceding decade. In Italy, modern art was accepted to some degree during both periods, in the Soviet Union, it was accepted in the first but rejected in the second, and in Germany, it was rejected in both, with the difference that in the first, the National Socialist Party was not yet in power. Oppression is to be distinguished from the mere rejection of modern art for sponsorship by these regimes, which they were entitled to just like any patron would have been. It pertains to the expansion of the underlying arguments into cultural norms as part of the political regulation of society. In Italy, this never occurred, in the Soviet Union, it remained under debate, and in Germany it was enforced.

These differences relate to the alternative between individualism and modernization, the two contradictory impulses that drove the social history of modern art in general. Since all three totalitarian regimes subscribed to economic and social modernization, modern artists at first offered them their work on the assumption that it would suit their cultural policies as well. Given its social origins in a culturally dissident middle-class milieu, modern art had been always controversial. But it was only when the totalitarian regimes incorporated the rejection of modern art into their cultural ideologies and government policies, that the class-based conflict became politicized, not only in their states, but internationally as well. All three regimes regarded ‘modern’ individualism as incompatible with their collective ideologies of social cohesion. They deemed the cultural dissent from social norms, inherent in the history of modern art, morally irresponsible or even politically subversive, regardless of the conduct and convictions of individual artists, and despite such artists’ efforts at conformity.

In both Italy and the Soviet Union, processes of clarification about the suitability of modern art for the cultural policies of their regimes were drawn out throughout the first four years of the Depression, a time when Germany was still a democracy and the National Socialist condemnation of modern art was just a negative campaign issue without alternative policy options. As a result, modern artists were permitted to accommodate their work to Fascist and Soviet requirements, while Hitler's new government merely abided by the condemnation of modern art from its electoral campaigns. During the following four years, his government failed to come up with a compelling art policy of its own, and it made the condemnation of modern art into a punitive principle. By 1937, an exceedingly aggressive enactment of the anti-modern disposition transcended art policy to become a component of the increased anti-Bolshevik propaganda in preparation of the planned attack on the Soviet Union. The Soviet government had to refrain from responding in kind, because it could not very well tie modern art to the National Socialist adversary.

/1.1.2 PREFERENCE FOR TRADITIONAL ARTISTS

Throughout the decade, all three totalitarian regimes relied on well-established traditional artists with little express allegiance to their ideologies for the realization of their art projects. Wary of their ideologically over-eager modern competitors, they did not need to subject them to tests of ideological conformity. Theirs was a natural choice. For traditional artists to make the necessary changes in their long-accomplished art to suit totalitarian requirements was a matter of adjustment rather than of loyalty. They had no professional ethos that would have required them to make their work be true to their own political convictions. It was the client to whose political preferences they had long learned to tailor-make their work. For totalitarian regimes, traditional art ensured an easy comprehensibility of themes and a straightforward enhancement of expression. It could be developed into a stylistic doctrine, as in Socialist Realism, modified by a consensus of conformity, as in the 'imperial' style of Fascist Italy, or left to individual artists to adapt on their own with variable success, as in Germany's unregulated art production.

In their uphill contest against this natural preference, modern artists could not afford the professional reserve of their traditional colleagues, all the less so since many of them had been publicly touting their principled nonconformity before. Now they were being watched not only with a prejudice of taste, but also with a suspicion of dissent. Bidding for work now required an emphatic profession of political conformity. In the Soviet Union and in Fascist Italy, modern artists had long been marginalized by way of competitions, debates, and publications of organized artistic culture. In Germany, the latecomer to the totalitarian trio, the Reich Chamber of Art was established to exclude them from the start. This abrupt turnabout made the ensuing vituperation a venomous

scare rather than a mere rejection. Because they were under constant obligation to prove their conformity, modern artists' bids for work, if they were permitted to participate in the venues of totalitarian competitions, could assume assiduous extremes of ideological self-recommendation. Accustomed to position themselves as an alternative to traditional art, they were now reduced to claiming a minoritarian niche beside it.

In the Soviet Union and in Germany, traditional artists, who had suffered neglect in the preceding decade, now enjoyed comebacks to belated prominence. For modern artists, the most promising way to acceptance seemed to be to rival their thematic clarity and propagandistic exaggeration on their own terms. Inevitably, this mixture of persistence and expediency brought about their failure. Espousing self-recommendation or reserve, but rarely by casting their art as a political practice, most artists, traditional or modern, attempted to adjust their styles to the perceived ideological preferences of their regimes. For the former, such a professional strategy did not necessarily touch upon their own convictions. The latter, by contrast, had to forego their previous claims to self-expression. In Italy and the Soviet Union, some modern artists even went as far as relapsing into traditional art, or at least assimilating their art to traditional legibility. In Germany, on the other hand, such changes of sides were looked at with suspicion. In one of his speeches, Hitler railed against what he regarded as turncoat artists compromised by their 'degenerate' past.

/1.1.3 MODERN ARTISTS' BID FOR ACCEPTANCE

Just as their traditionalist colleagues, modern artists did not hesitate to pronounce themselves in favor of totalitarian regimes, most assiduously in the Soviet Union and in Italy, where political conformity had long been an asset in the competition for official commissions and acquisitions. In Germany, on the other hand, their professions of allegiance sounded like apologies in the face of stern rejection. Modern artists hoping to work for totalitarian regimes stood ready to forego the expressive individualism inherent in their accustomed artistic culture, which was at variance with the totalitarian quest for social cohesion and political conformity. They stressed the alignment of modern art with functionalist architecture and industrial technology developed during the preceding decade. Eventually, however, despite their ostensible allegiance, or their assumption that their art was aloof from politics and hence safe from political objections, they found out that the political culture had become averse to the art they were practicing, and that their individual convictions did not matter. The only choices left to them were adaptation or retreat.

In Italy, the alignment of modern art with modernization proved to be the platform for being embraced by the Fascist regime. In the vociferous process of their ideological self-alignment, modern artists renounced the destructive ideals associated with their dissident posture towards the culture of the liberal upper middle-class which

had originally brought them to the Fascist movement. In the USSR, modern artists who had formed the leadership of art policy during the first three or four years of the regime, were gradually but implacably dislodged during the latter part of the twenties. Beginning in 1929, they attempted a come-back on a platform of modernization which, unlike that in Italy, entailed adjusting their styles with an expressive inclusion of realist imagery. In Germany, finally, where democratic governments had espoused modern art to a considerable degree, the National Socialist Party stridently attacked it during its struggle for power. After the Party's ascendancy to government, for two years some modern artists vainly attempted to retain a modicum of acceptance by stressing nationalism rather than modernization to prove their ideological affinity.

Nowhere was political oppression of modern art schematically applied across the board. Depending on the appraisal of their individual situation, modern artists who ran afoul of their regime's arts policy might adjust their practice, remove themselves from public visibility to the point of working in hiding, or, as a last resort, leave the country to work abroad. In Italy and the Soviet Union, numerous modern artists went far on the first strategy. Since many of them had long subscribed to Fascism or Communism they had little difficulty in trying to heed the changes of official preferences. While for Italian artists, the path to realism and classicism presented no obstacles, their Soviet colleagues faced arduous scrutiny for abiding by Socialist Realism. Germany was the sole totalitarian state where modern artists stood no chance of official approval or at least of operating on an open market. As if in mirror reverse, only here did they muster the will to fashion what amounts to an artistic counterculture, small, to be sure, and supported, if at all, by a clandestine clientele. Once in exile, it was hard for them to coalesce into a similar counterculture.

/1.2 POLITICAL ECONOMY

/1.2.1 POLITICAL SUPPORT AND POLITICAL CONTROL

When the Depression increased the reliance of artistic culture on state support, and therefore its exposure to state interference, artists were drawn into political cultures racked by ever more acerbic ideological controversies. Faced with totalitarian enforcement or democratic strife, they were obliged to take position on the political preconditions of the support they sought. Such an encroachment of political upon artistic culture was the culmination of the gradual convergence of artistic culture and the public sphere that had been long in coming. It tempted artists to foreground their ideological convictions as part of their professional standing, or, conversely, to compromise them by tailoring their work to political preferences they did not share. The dynamics of the muffled conflict between democracy and totalitarianism made the political oppression of modern artists and its repercussions into a crucial issue throughout Europe.

Only totalitarian regimes subjected artist to political oppression. Unlike the mere political guidance of government or party purchases and commissions, it meant censuring the art on the private market, that is, an ideological market regulation, part of the totalitarian regulation, or politicization, of society in general. Artistic controversies were magnified and distorted into conflicts of political morality. Such an ideological streamlining of artistic cultures was not attempted or accomplished by setting guidelines from on high, but by a vociferous environment of partly internal, partly public pronouncements and debates. All issues of artistic culture were narrowed down to reaching an understanding about how best to fulfill the expectations of totalitarian regimes. In the process, modern art was not just rejected as unsuitable for official acceptance but linked to social attitudes adverse to the social order promoted or enforced by governments. Its rejection was promulgated far beyond artistic culture for purposes of social and political propaganda. It served as a negative foil for ideological uniformity.

In Germany, the turning point from one purpose to the other came in 1937 and pertained to the struggle between Propaganda Minister Josef Goebbels and Party leader Alfred Rosenberg. In 1933, the latter, a fervent adversary of modern art, had been passed over in favor of the former, who deemed a less oppressive policy more suitable for fostering an art to suit the newly-fashioned state. When in 1936-1937 it became apparent that the mass of organized German artists were failing to deliver, Goebbels changed his art policy into a quasi-Manichean confrontation between traditional and modern art, stridently promoted by their antithetical staging in the two Munich shows of 1937 (see Chapter 2.2 / 2.1.3) and in the subsequent tour of the 'Degenerate Art' show as an anti-Bolshevik propaganda event. With this aggressive and repressive anti-modern turn, Hitler and Goebbels finally swung round to Rosenberg's intransigent line, without, however, availing themselves of Rosenberg's collaboration. Only four years later, once war had started, Hitler revalidated Rosenberg's anti-Bolshevik fervor by appointing him to the government—not as a minister for culture, but for the occupied territories in the East.

/ 1.2.2 POLITICAL MARKET REGULATION

To what extent modern artists could pursue their work uninhibited by official requirements or warnings depended on how severely totalitarian regimes were in a position to determine their opportunities to sell. In this respect, conditions in the three totalitarian states varied widely—between near-absolute control in the USSR and near-complete market freedom in Italy, with a clandestine art market in Germany in between. While the thorough submission-and-command procedures of Soviet artists' unions precluded any formal, let alone thematic latitude, Italian artists, despite their compulsory corporative organization, were at liberty to cater to a private market

without precautions. Hence, for opposite reasons, such artists produced little if any work of inconvenient independence in either state. In Germany, the common membership of both artists and art dealers in the Reich Chamber of Art was aimed at an ideological market regulation intended to disadvantage modern art, a purely negative measure which, in and of itself, was not aimed at making traditional artists take up propagandistic themes. Some of them did, to be sure, but a clear majority stuck to their customary political vacuity.

Soviet competitions, culminating in those for the Palace of Soviets, admitted modern artists, but without any chances of success. They served to establish authoritative models for all artists to adhere to. National Socialist art, by contrast, knew no competitions, only selections from offerings of finished work without ideological reasons given, and hence unsuitable for setting paradigms. Soviet and Fascist art had shared the practice of arranging competitions. But while Soviet competitions were venues for arriving at an authoritative ideal of state art, not unlike the ostensibly collective process of policy making by Party meetings, Fascist competitions were meant to uphold artistic diversity within given ideological parameters, which was the principle of corporate order. However, for all their institutional discipline, totalitarian competitions exacerbated themselves into political infighting, as artists rivalled to make conformist art to suit the expectations of their regimes. While in the Soviet Union the risk of rejection entailed the loss of professional standing, in Italy the outcome of competitions fed into ceaseless altercations about the criteria of selection.

Regardless of political circumstances, their corporative organization appealed to artists, since it seemed to anchor their professional security in a social policy underwritten by the government. It did not require political allegiance on their part to join when the three totalitarian regimes made membership obligatory. However, their political risks were far from over. Only for Soviet artists did political submission become obligatory. Their national and regional artists' organizations included a 'cell' of Party members who steered debates about commissions. The Reich Chamber of Art, by contrast, never framed ideological prescriptions because it expected its members to sell on the open market. Italian artists' corporations spared their members political supervision of their work. The streamlined national organizations of artists emerged at the start of the Depression, which indicates its pertinence to the market realignment as the economic component of totalitarian art policy. To compaginate this effort at a viable artistic culture with the effort at fostering an art to propagate the ideologies of the regimes was a process that made modern art the loser.

/1.2.3 TOTALITARIAN MARKET CONTROL

Of the two totalitarian regimes in place before the Great Depression, the Soviet art administration was the first to realize that a dispossessed, impoverished

middle-class could no longer be expected to sustain a viable art market. And since this class had been the clientele of modern art before the revolution, modern artists were obliged to rely on state institutions. Thus, when the government started to withdraw their preferential treatment of modern artists, it encouraged them to address their work to the mass membership of state and party organizations which disposed of public funds for supporting an art of their choice. Inevitably, that choice fell to traditional rather than to modern artists. It prompted a vociferous competition between both camps. The April Decree of 1932, which dissolved competing artists' groups, was intended to quell their disruptive antagonism. In setting the stage for the command system under Party supervision, it confirmed traditional artists as the winning side. This practice remained contentious enough, but it was driven by ideological disagreements rather than by any antagonism between traditional and modern art.

Art policy in Fascist Italy was determined by the regime's speedy anti-revolutionary alliance with big business and industry. It favored an upper-middle-class network of collectors and critics who acted in accord with political officials. State art institutions saw no need to steer the art market toward a different clientele, but allowed it to keep offering ideologically nondescript works to upper middle-class buyers. This policy, which government and party touted as a hands-off open-mindedness, was not changed in 1926, when artists' corporations were pooled into a single syndicate for artists, and not even in 1928 when the National Confederation of Fascist Professional and Artistic Syndicates was subordinated to the Party. Its organization ensured an ample supply of conformist art without ideological guidance. To the Futurists, it came as a disappointment that the Fascist free-market culture of the arts had little use for their provocative modernism from the time before the war. Their work was unsuitable to the prevailing taste for figurative consolidation, the signature of middle-class loyalty to the Fascist regime. Corporative social policy was averse to their egocentric ideological stridency.

When the National Socialist regime belatedly joined the trio of totalitarian states, it faced a four-year slump of the art market at the peak of the Depression. In response, it took radical measures to redirect it toward lower middle-class taste. To that end, it drew all artists into the Reich Chamber of Art, a government organization hard on exclusions but soft on guidance. Because it lacked the long-term institutional consolidation of Soviet and Fascist art policy, the German regime was less successful than its two counterparts in using the political incorporation of artists for the creation of a mass art to propagate its ideology. It is for this reason that its oppression of modern art, meant as a punitive backlash against failure, turned out to be the most vindictive. On the other hand, some dealers and their clients entertained a tenuous underground market, defying the injunctions of the Reich Chamber of Art. For this reason, only in Germany was a small minority of artists able to work in a spirit of dissent,

either by producing modern art despite its official rejection or even an art imbued with an opaque critique of the regime (see below, Chapter 4.3).

/1.3 FROM REJECTION TO OPPRESSION

/1.3.1 CHRONOLOGY

It was during the first four years of the Depression, when Germany was still a democracy, that the marginalization of modern art in Italy and its rejection in the Soviet Union were ideologically articulated. When in 1933 Hitler's new regime repudiated modern art outright, the situation was different, since there had never been any rapprochement between modern art and the National Socialist movement. In both totalitarian regimes in place before the start of the Depression, the ideological terms of the ensuing decisions had been debated and differentiated, if not altogether clarified. They spelled out the criteria for countering modern artists' bids for acceptance. In Germany, which during the first three years of the Depression was still a democracy, political opposition against modern art, a long-term current in the public sphere of the Weimar Republic, surged in tandem with the National Socialist Party's speedy ascendancy to power.

In 1932-1933, ideological opposition against modern art turned into political enactment. In Italy, this turn remained too mild to altogether dislodge modern art from artistic culture, although it had enough of an impact to corner it into defensive postures. In the Soviet Union, the turn took the form of competitions, jury decisions, and exclusions, forcing modern artists into drastic accommodations or retreats. In Germany, on the other hand, the sudden imposition of totalitarian rule in 1933 excluded modern art most severely, most summarily, and most swiftly from public visibility. Implementing the Party's campaign threats, it was enacted with little debate over timid offers of conformity on the part of modern artists. The common turning point came in 1934. In Italy and the Soviet Union, modern architecture lost out in the competitions for the Palazzo del Littorio and the Commissariat of Heavy Industry. In Germany, a government-sponsored show of Futurist painting to make the case for modern art was cancelled at the shortest notice.

In 1936, the Soviet and German regimes proceeded to subject their artists to ever more stringent political supervision. On January 17, the Party Committee on the Arts was formed, and on November 27, Propaganda Minister Goebbels prohibited art criticism without a license. Only the Fascist regime continued to be satisfied with the self-regulating conformity of its artists' corporations. Finally, in 1936 and 1937 respectively, the Soviet Union and Germany, on an ideological collision course with one another, enforced political oppression of modern art by administrative means. In both states, works of modern art were removed from public museums, in the Soviet Union

into storage, in Germany for display in the 'Degenerate Art' exhibition and sale abroad. Although this final suppression of modern art took different political and institutional forms, the accompanying rhetoric, aimed at fictitious threats against the two regimes by imaginary enemies—'bourgeois' and 'Bolshevik' respectively—, attained a similarly fierce pitch. Italy, basking in the peace propaganda of its newly-fashioned 'empire,' was spared this divisive extreme.

/1.3.2 SUCCESS AND FAILURE OF ACCOMMODATION

In Berlin, the 'Aeropittura' show of Futurist painting, which opened on March 28, 1934, with a speech by Marinetti, was intended to reassert the Fascist acceptance of Futurism. It was an official venture of Italian cultural propaganda, with German Reich Ministers Goebbels, Göring, and Rust, as well as Reich Chamber of Art president Eugen Hönig, on the honorary committee. Goebbels presence seemed to signal that the Propaganda Minister was confirming expectations to the effect that German modern artists, too, would find a place in National Socialist artistic culture, as some of them and their sympathizing critics had claimed by underscoring the German essence of Expressionism and the sense of order in modern form. However, on the day of the opening, Party Cultural Leader Alfred Rosenberg had his spokesman Robert Scholz deny in the press that Futurism was in any way representative of Fascist art in Italy, and charge that the exhibition would serve to undermine the implacable anti-modernism of the National Socialist own original art policy, as stated and reiterated since 1924.

In 1930, Alexandr Rodchenko, the foremost Soviet art photographer of internationalist observance and renown in the preceding decade, found himself sidelined by self-described 'proletarian' documentary photographers who attacked him for his 'formalism,' which, they wrote, workers would not understand. Refusing to renounce his style, he was ousted from the artists' group 'Oktjabr.' In 1933, however, he received a commission from the international propaganda monthly *USSR in Construction* for a reportage on the building of the White Sea Canal, which the GPU was organizing by means of forced labor camps and billed as a social and political re-education project. The double issue of the journal he designed proved so successful that his further collaboration was assured. By 1936, Rodchenko's standing was restored. In a self-serving article entitled "Transformation of the Artist," published in *Sovetskoe Foto*, the journal of his former adversaries,[146] he credited his overcoming of formalism to his empathy with the proclaimed socializing effect of the GPU's White Sea Canal project, as if it had also reeducated him to overcome his 'formalism.'

In 1933, Bernhard Hoetger, a German expressionist architect and sculptor, whose symbol-laden *architecture parlante* was a technically retrogressive, pictorially

overdetermined style—prominently on view in an entire segment of the Böttcherstraße built in Bremen between 1921-1931—immediately came under attack by the new regional party leader and the SS daily *Das Schwarze Korps*. The racist, 'nordic' ideology informing Hoetger's expressive style was a prime example of the regressive leanings of the 'Combat League for German Culture,' which Hitler condemned in his culture speech of 1933. Ludwig Roselius, the owner and patron of the Böttcherstraße, had to personally intervene with Hitler to spare his buildings from demolition. Undeterred, Hoetger, who had joined the NSDAP two years earlier, designed in 1936 a huge 'German Forum' for mass meetings, centered on an assembly hall in the dysfunctional shape of a swastika. He put its model on view in two exhibitions, only to be vilified again by *Das Schwarze Korps*. In 1937 some of his works were confiscated for the 'Degenerate Art' show, and in 1938 he was finally expelled from the Party.

/1.3.3 MEASURES OF ENFORCEMENT

The totalitarian exclusion of modern art from public artistic culture was not pursued by measures from on high, but by means of a vociferous environment of partly internal, partly public debates. Here the long-term convergence of artistic culture and the public sphere was narrowed down to controversies on how best to fulfill the requirements of the regimes. In the Soviet Union and Germany, the accompanying rhetoric, aimed at fictitious threats against their regimes by imaginary political adversaries, attained a comparably violent, anti-'Imperialist' or anti-Bolshevik pitch. Italy was spared this most brutal assault on modern art, because it had no part in the looming military confrontation between them. While in Italy ideologically charged attacks embattling modern architects, and, to a lesser extent, modern artists, commonly ended in corporative accommodations, in the Soviet Union and Germany they had an adverse effect on their careers, from an unforgiving rejection of their work to a public or even official denial of their standing, stopping just short of personal harassment.

Consistent with the self-regulating politicization of professional organizations in totalitarian systems, the task of monitoring the conformity of artists was largely left to their own organizations, as soon as governments had made them national and mandatory. Only their political parameters were set by the government or the party, to whom their artist leaders were accountable. In this self-regulating environment, it fell to government-sanctioned art writers and art critics to articulate the terms and issues of oppression in interaction with the artists. Such processes not only served to frame artists' attitudes and practices, they also provided political authorities with the information they needed to monitor or, if necessary, intervene. In Italy and the Soviet Union, artists' organizations developed a prolific discourse culture, complete with congresses, local meetings, publications and journals. In Germany, they accomplished

little if anything to match, for which Hitler severely reprimanded them in 1937. In his judgment, they had squandered the proverbial "four years" they had been given at the start of his regime.

When at the start of the decade, national organizations of artists were established in Italy and the USSR, they had an opposite effect on modern artists. Italian corporations were aimed at reconciling adversarial positions under the roof of Fascist ideology. Soviet organizations, by contrast, promoted a relentless oppression of modern in favor of traditional art and eventually of Socialist Realism. Both policies were the end results of a decade of art-political altercations, which by 1932 had produced the institutional consolidation of Soviet and Fascist art policies. Neither one was exclusionary. Both offered modern artists venues for revalidation, either by bolstering the ideological credentials of their work or by adjusting it to the newly dominant traditionalist preferences. Because the German regime lacked such a long-term institutional and ideological elaboration of its desired artistic culture, it was less successful in using the political incorporation of artists to act on the long-standing condemnation of modern art in its party program.

/ 2 USSR AND GERMANY

/ 2.1 PROTAGONISTS OF OPPRESSION

/ 2.1.1 SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES

Only in Germany was the suppression of modern art dramatically staged in a sweeping public fashion and with a propagandistic drive transcending cultural policy concerns. Only here was this policy kept up for the duration of five years, culminating in the spectacular 'Degenerate Art' Show of 1937, which toured the country for another four years. As a result, the oppression of modern art was internationally perceived as a specific German policy. Its Soviet counterpart was overlooked, because it was handled as an internal affair of cultural policy, flanked by public pronouncements and debates, to be sure, but without official measures or public interventions by government or party leaders. Only starting in 1936 were the similarities noted, and the differences disregarded, as part of the opposition to the Stalinist regime advanced by segments of the international Left. It was Lev Trotsky who, in his book *The Betrayed Revolution* of that year, was the first to point them out as an unqualified equivalence, illustrating his totalitarian equation between Hitler's and Stalin's regimes.

Politically, or historically, this coincidence in time remains unexplained, particularly since in the artistic culture of both regimes, the contemorary art of the other side was never addressed. While the Soviet charge against formalism lacked anti-German overtones, the anti-Bolshevik pitch of German anti-modernism was never exemplified

with Soviet works. Because the political accusations levelled against modern art were specious, if not fictitious, the flanking rhetoric does not help to explain the synchronicity between the tightened German and Soviet oppression of modern art. It may simply have pertained to the cultural enforcement of all-out social control, which both regimes embarked upon in preparation for the expected war. The differences between the arguments were due to the differing purposes of the policies. In the Soviet Union, the elimination of modern art was a stage in the setting up of Socialist Realism as a binding paradigm, still under debate. In Germany, it was being pursued as a vindictive campaign of policy enforcement, but not followed up with any specifications of an alternative style.

Two years after *The Betrayed Revolution*, Trotsky, in the Manifesto 'For an Independent Revolutionary Art' he wrote together with André Breton (see Chapter 4.2), once more denounced the monopolization of traditional and the suppression of modern art as common to both states. However, for lack of political resonance, he and his followers were unable to promulgate this commonality. A contributing factor was that the anti-Bolshevik denunciation of modern art, proclaimed in the perennial 'Degenerate Art' shows, was now inserted into an all-out propaganda campaign in preparation for the military attack upon the USSR, while the Soviet branding of modern art as 'bourgeois' was devoid of anti-German polemics, since the government was still pursuing a short-term peace policy. Thus, when the denunciation of German anti-modernism became part of the anti-fascist agitation by the Popular Front, the similarities with current Soviet art policy were ignored. The non-communist critique of Hitler's art policies in democratic states followed this one-sided judgment, since Germany was perceived as a threat and the Soviet Union as an ally in the coming war.

/2.1.2 ANTI-MODERN EXHIBITIONS

In both the Soviet Union and Germany, the enforced polarization between traditional and modern art culminated in antithetical shows. These pendant shows were not intended merely to defame modern art, but to demonstrate which kind of art was acceptable and which was compromised. Their chronology, political purpose, and configuration, however, were different. Both followed on the heels of tightened art policies, which in Germany stemmed from a change of government, but in the Soviet Union only from a change of policy. They were to put the distinction between acceptable and unacceptable art on public view, with a greater emphasis on achievement in the latter than in the former. The April Decree had acknowledged "that over recent years, literature and art have made considerable advances, both quantitative and qualitative," (see above, 1.3.2) and the two defamatory shows of 1932 and 1933 were not followed up with any other. In Germany the slogan "They had four years' time," coined in 1937, indicates a discontent an urgent need for decisive course correction.

On November 17, 1932, six months after the April Decree which placed the arts under organizational supervision by the Party, the Leningrad exhibition 'Artists of the RSFSR: 15 Years' featured modern and traditional works side by side in a historic balance. Yet a concurrent show, titled 'Art of the Imperialist Epoch,' branded 'formalist' works by modern Soviet artists as 'bourgeois' and anarchist. Here, just as in Munich five years later, derogatory inscriptions on the walls, unpleasant arrangements, and even caricaturist installations were to convey the connection of modern art with a past 'epoch' now being overcome by the accomplishment of socialism through the First Five-Year Plan. Works by several modern artists, including Kazimir Malevich, were hung in both shows. Shortly afterwards, in the Moscow venue of the Fifteen-Year Anniversary show, which opened on June 27, 1933, works were no longer arranged by antithesis, but in a three-way classification that distinguished between "proletarian art," works by "fellow travelers," and a reduced number of "formalist" works, as if to provide guidance for artists to make an appropriate choice.

In Germany, defamatory shows of modern art started to be mounted within a few months of the regime change and continued from time to time throughout the following years. However, they were never complemented with alternative shows of art favored by the regime until the pairing of the 'Degenerate Art' exhibition and the 'Great German Art Exhibition' in July 1937, ordered by Hitler himself. This belated catch-up with the Soviet practice of 1932-1933 was mounted on the shortest of notice, due to Hitler's disappointment with the lack of aesthetic and ideological achievement of traditional artists submitted to the First Great German Art Exhibition. The clampdown in the face of failure had already started with the prohibition of art criticism issued by Propaganda Minister Goebbels on November 27, 1936, and was consummated in the summer of 1937 by the nationwide confiscation of modern art works at public museums. It reached its climax in Hermann Göring's decree of May 31, 1938, which ordered additional confiscations from both public and private collections.

/ 2.1.3 IDEOLOGICAL CHARGES

The charge that modern art was not appreciated by the Soviet masses or the German people was one of the common themes used by the anti-modern propaganda of both governments. The recognition that traditional art enjoyed majority support, and was hence more suitable for propaganda, was indeed similar. However, the policy objectives derived from this insight were altogether different. Whereas in Germany the charge was used to denounce what was presented as a disregard by Weimar cultural policy for the wishes of its constituent population—confirming the illegitimacy of democratic governments' sponsorship of a minority culture—in the Soviet Union it was directed against modern artists' claims that their distortions and abstractions appealed to the masses' aesthetic sensibility. When in 1933 the Soviet government launched the

new cultural policy of shaping a festive visual environment to inspire a contented feeling in the face of low material living standards, the redefinition of art as a medium of aesthetic enjoyment took precedence over that of mass agitation. Socialist Realism was to express the joyful recognition of socialist accomplishment.

When, in his opening speech for the Moscow venue of the exhibition 'Fifteen Years,' the new People's Commissar for Public Enlightenment, Andrei Bubnov—he had succeeded Anatoly Lunacharsky in 1929—attacked "formalism" as an "infantile left deviation," he was restating attacks from past debates where modern artists, led by Mayakovsky, had defended their communist orthodoxy. Claims to a communist modernism had attained a more substantive, and more lasting, political standing than the short-lived, sometimes disingenuous attempts at linking expressionism to the National Socialist 'revolution,' put forth in Germany in 1933-1934. Internationalist in orientation, it had bolstered the success of modern Soviet art abroad during the previous decade. By 1933, communist modernism, despite its international prestige, fell from favor. Now the militant competition with the capitalist powers in the international arena of the Great Depression prompted the new ideological critique of modernism under the catchwords "bourgeois" and "internationalist," both contrast terms to the nationalist significance of Socialist Realism in the making.

It was in Osip Beskin's book *Formalism in Painting*, published in 1933, that Soviet anti-modernism was first spelled out as an official policy, since the author was head of the critics' section in the Moscow Artists' Council and editor of its two art journals, *Isskusstvo* and *Tvorchestvo*. Its political impact resembles that of Wolfgang Willrich's *Cleansing of the Art Temple*, which was published four years later. Ideologically, Beskin's terms "bourgeois" and "internationalist" were apt to illustrate the economic competition between socialism and capitalism, fueled in the culture of the First Five-Year Plan, and now turning into a political confrontation with foreign blockades and domestic sabotage. The success of modern art in the West seemed to confirm the inherent antagonism. Although Willrich never matched Beskin's intellectual sophistication and institutional authority, his book enjoyed a similar if not superior status to Beskin's as a manual for German anti-modernism. Compared to his fictitious polemics against an imaginary Jewish world conspiracy in league with Bolshevism, Beskin's anti-modern reasoning was politically more to the point.

/2.2 CHRONOLOGY

/2.2.1 ADJUSTMENT AND REJECTION

While in Germany the oppression of modern art pertained to a policy of an abrupt break with the Weimar Republic, in the Soviet Union it pertained to a gradual policy change on the premise of political continuity. It was presented as a reassertion

of the principles of Communism, to the exclusion of any contentious diversity about compliance. Thus, despite their protestations, modern German artists remained fatally tied to a discarded, vilified regime. Modern Soviet artists, on the other hand, were merely compromised by ideological aberrations from a new, ostensibly coherent party line, which had been set by the guided procedures of inner-party debates. Leading modern artists, such as El Lissitsky, remained in demand. Efforts by modern Soviet artists to vindicate their work by adjusting it to the new ideological requirements were more coherent and more successful than those of their German counterparts, who merely insisted on a pre-existing ideological compatibility of their work with the new dispensation. Artists such as Emil Nolde and Franz Radziwill postured as ardent National Socialists, but kept painting as they had before.

In the Soviet Union, the systematic consolidation, organization, and public funding of artists' associations and cooperatives pursued since 1929 had been part of the overall change from a partly private to a wholly state-run economy. Since artists could no longer count on the purchase of their work by individual buyers, most sales transactions became part of the political planning process. In Germany, by contrast, the professional organization of artists in the Reich Chamber of Art, ideologically modelled on the fascist paradigm of corporate guilds, entailed little political control of what they produced. Modern artists from Otto Dix to Karl Schmidt-Rottluff, members of the Chamber all, could work and sell on a private art market, provided they stayed out of public view. Because modern artists in the Soviet Union had no such outlets, most of them—with a few notable exceptions such as Tatlin or Filonov—attempted to fulfill the new political tasks set by the party with as much accommodation as they could muster. It was by rebuffing their offerings and overtures, not by inhibiting their work, that the authorities enacted their anti-modern line.

In both states, the contentious phase of political oppression, during which modern artists vainly tried to vindicate themselves, lasted until 1936. In that year, oppression turned into suppression without chances of redress—in the Soviet Union by the enforcement of Socialist Realism as a mandatory style, in Germany by the government-directed denigration of 'degenerate art.' In the Soviet Union, modern artists desisted from the habitual claims of 'avant-gardes' to pro-actively devise ideological visions rather than adhere given policies. Their public remonstrations, despite recurrent rejections, made for the deceptive semblance of a self-adjusting art-political process in the mold of 'democratic centralism' and devoid of brutal oppression. In Germany, by contrast, the regime's unremitting condemnation of modern artists as representatives of the ousted Weimar democracy, and then as agents of 'cultural Bolshevism' hardened some of these artists' dissent into outright opposition to National Socialism, unmatched anywhere in Europe at the time, but at the price of hiding from public exposure.

/2.2.2 BEFORE 1936

Because of these differences, the pursuit of anti-modern art policy after 1933 was steadier and more relentless in the Soviet Union than in Germany, notwithstanding Hitler's, Rosenberg's, and Goebbels' shrill rhetoric. After the turn to a state-owned, planned economy in late 1928, there was no longer a private art market that could have substituted for state and Party patronage. After 1932, this patronage became ever more tightly organized by means of the newly unified artists' organizations of towns or cities, each one ostensibly autonomous, but politically under the control of a Party 'cell' within its ranks. As a result, the Party was able to supervise the production and distribution of art at the source rather than by post-facto censorship. In Germany, by contrast, anti-modern art policy stayed mired in the negative. Its defamatory shows and dismissals from art school teaching posts were not matched by any constructive undertakings. Time and again, Goebbels emphasized that the Reich Chamber of Art would not encroach on the freedom of art. This fanned a never-ending activity of art-political vigilance.

The national organization of German artists in the Reich Chamber of Art, modeled on corporate self-administration, did not exert any pervasive ideological control, let alone a political steering of what the membership produced. The efforts of some modern artists to prove to the authorities the compatibility of their accustomed ideals with the artistic culture of the National Socialist State in the making recall those of their Soviet colleagues to prove that the Communist foundation of their ideals remained viable or could be adjusted to the cultural policy changes of 1932. In Germany, such efforts appear more a matter of contorted, or even disingenuous, expediency, superimposed onto a previous non-political character of art claimed by many modern artists who were uncommitted to the Left, while in the Soviet Union they were advanced with conviction within the cultural environment of 'democratic centralism,' even in the face of recurrent rebuttals.

Institutionally leading masters of modern art in the Soviet Union, such as Vladimir Tatlin or Kazimir Malevich, were publicly vituperated in 1931-1932, to be sure, but merely sidelined to marginal subsistence jobs. In Germany, by contrast, such masters' public vituperation in 1933-1934 went along with institutional ostracism and was followed up by professional harassment. On January 17, 1931, Tatlin was granted the title 'Honored Art Worker,' but was given no more work. Malevich, who had lost his teaching post, was upon his death on May 15, 1935, honored with a state funeral. And in December 1935, Stalin hailed Mayakovsky, whose suicide on April 14, 1930, coincided with his art-political marginalization, as "the best, most talented poet of our Soviet epoch."[147] These three cases go to show that in the Soviet artistic culture of the thirties, the ideological polarization between traditional and modern art was largely confined to the

public sphere of competitions, debates and denunciations. It affected artists' fortunes, but was not personalized to the point where those on the losing side would have been deprived of all their standing.

/ 2.2.3 AFTER 1936

In 1936, oppression of artists in both states intensified, coinciding with, if not related to, the mounting military confrontation between them. The accompanying rhetoric was more vicious in Germany, to be sure, but in subjecting artists to police oversight, the Soviet Union exceeded Germany by far. Once again, policies and ideologies appeared at odds. Andrei Zhdanov's one article in the *Pravda* of March 1936, titled "On Slovenly Artists," pales before the wrath of Hitler's long-winded speeches on cultural policy delivered at the Nuremberg Party Rallies every year. While Hitler, one year later, announced nothing less than an "implacable mop-up war" against non-conformist artists, Zhdanov merely warned that 'formalism' would not "get the patronage of the Soviet people." Thus, in both states, rhetoric and implementation appear in reverse. That the political persecution of artists in the Soviet Union had little, if anything, to do with the alternative of traditional versus modern art accounts for its ideological obscurity. That professional oppression of artists in Germany was advertised in terms of this alternative coincides with the absence of violent measures.

On January 19, 1936, the ascendancy of the Party over the government in the arts was finalized by forming the Party Committee on Arts, which kept a tight oversight on the activities of artists' organizations. Its purge practice, culminating in a two-week marathon meeting of the Moscow Artist Union on May 5-19, 1937, took its toll on artists in office, who were detained, sent into prison camps to perish, or executed. In 1938, Aleksandr Gerasimov, elected and confirmed as president of the Union at this meeting, gave a chilling speech to his membership. He credited the improvement of "the creative atmosphere" and the "new wave of enthusiasm among the entire mass of artists" to the work of "our Soviet Intelligence Service," to which political charges were now referred as a matter of routine.[148] Yet the epithets Gerasimov showered on artists who had been "neutralized" by the secret police—"Enemies of the people, Trotskyist-Bukharinite rabble, fascist agents"—are devoid of artistic qualifications. Matthew Cullerne Bown has pointed out that we cannot discern any consistent ties between political charges and artistic positions or the untimely pusuit of out-of-favor styles.[149]

Adolf Ziegler, president of the Reich Chamber of Art since late 1936, was never able to look back on similar accomplishments. As late as April 23, 1941, he pronounced his intention to "mercilessly proceed against anyone who produces works of degenerate art" and enjoined members to report all such works to the Chamber, implicitly admitting that suppression of modern art had still not quite succeeded (see Chapter

3.1/2.3.3). Unlike Gerasimov, Ziegler could not count on the SS Security Services (SD) or the Gestapo for the enforcement of his threat, although it was the SD that had brought the persistence of "decadent" art to his attention. Even though it had been critically surveying the German art scene in their regular reports since 1938, neither the SD nor the Gestapo had any executive authority over German artists. Thus, despite the scare that Ziegler's decree was sure to raise among modern artists who read it in their Reich Chamber of Art membership bulletin, and despite the tightening of professional sanctions against some of them, including belated expulsions and even some individual controls by local police, the making of "degenerate" art could not be altogether stopped.

/2.3 CLAMPDOWN AND RECALCITRANCE

/2.3.1 CONTENTIOUS OPPRESSION

The contentious oppression of artists in the USSR and in National Socialist Germany was never completely accomplished at any point in time, but protracted throughout the decade. It allowed for diverse ways of interaction between art-political authorities and oppressed artists, resulting in conformity or self-defense, resignation or recalcitrance. The difference in this long-time oppression in both artistic cultures pertains to their unequal sense of accomplishment. The self-assurance of Socialist Realism as an articulate style of the Soviet regime made the denunciation of 'formalism' a mere exercise in ideological clarification, while the personalized persecution of 'art bolshevism' betrays an unsuccessful effort at fashioning a style of the National Socialist regime. This difference between triumphalism and vigilance had its origin in the political regulation of art production. While the Bolshevik Party's market control was firm, the National Socialist authorities were aware that the "art of decline," despite its unremitting official denunciation, subsisted on the private art market beyond their administrative reach, allowing artists to evade their control.

In both states, modern artists did not always take their oppression lying low. Either they remonstrated with the authorities, insisting that their art had been ideologically compatible with the regime's political culture all along, or they tried to make some formal or thematic adjustments without succumbing to the new criteria, no matter how clearly these were stated. Accommodation came easier to Soviet than to German modern artists. The 'formalism' of the Soviet artists, long accustomed to complying with expectations of ideological adequacy, was flexible enough for realistic modifications. The 'degeneration' of their German colleagues, most of whom had kept a distance from politics, was rated as beyond recovery. In a mix of adaptation and tenacity, Soviet modern artists, from Melnikov to Rodchenko, kept striving for official approval. It was by refusing their offerings, not by censuring their work, that the authorities held them

at bay. German modern artists, on the other hand, merely reaffirmed the ideological conformity of their accustomed practice.

In both states, the endurance of artists' oppression was fanned by political priorities beyond the task of fashioning an art to the liking of their regimes. The spectacle of an essentially confrontational artistic culture, with its constant risk of being compromised, mirrored the totalitarian dynamics of an ever-tightening political subordination of society at large. In the USSR, growing oppression was not aimed at the persistence of modern art, but at the political deviations of the organizational leadership. Since 1936, it adopted the standard measures of the 'Great Terror,' including dismissals, imprisonments, and executions, with Education Commissar Andrei Bubnov, shot in 1937, as their most prominent victim. In Germany, the pairing of anti-modern and anti-Bolshevik shows, underway since 1938, was related to the government's efforts at whipping up political support for the planned attack on the Soviet Union, which was actively prepared at the Hossbach Conference of November 5, 1937. In the context of war propaganda the charge of 'art bolshevism' acquired a subversive significance.

/ 2.3.2 LEONIDOV AND FILONOV, VILLAINS OF SOVIET ART POLICY

Starting in 1930, two prominent Soviet modern artists, architect Ivan Leonidov and painter Pavel Filonov (see Chapter 2.2 / 2.1; 2.3/2.1.1), were singled out in official pronouncements and in the press as exemplary targets for the vituperation of modern art, to the point of having their names turned into deprecatory tags, "Leonidonovitis" and "Filonovitis," as if their art was a disease. Leonidov had been one of the star students of the 'Higher State Artistic Technical Studios.' In 1930, at age twenty-five, he had just been appointed to a professorship at his school. The older Filonov, already prominent in the pre-war art scene of St. Petersburg, had been informally attached to the Leningrad Academy, where he taught his own master class until 1925. Since both artists were temperamentally inclined to reiterate their long-standing claims to Communist orthodoxy by unyielding public statements, they set themselves up even more as targets for the denunciation of modern art on the part of their opponents with a power base in state art institutions, intent on a rollback of previously accepted modern ideals.

In December 1930, conservative architect Arkadi Mordvinov launched the first public broadside on Leonidov in an article entitled "Break the Foreign Ideology: Leonidovism and Its Misdeeds."(150) It summarized a public debate about Leonidov staged by the Association of Proletarian Architects. Mordvinov's attack damaged Leonidov's reputation so severely he had to quit his newly acquired professorship. The matching term "Filonovitis" was, it seems, only coined as late as 1936, but public denunciations of Filonov already started in late 1930. The occasion was his projected retrospective in the

Leningrad Russian Museum, to which he had been invited in early 1929. The show was mounted, but not opened, to the public and was eventually canceled in November 1931. The public controversy about the opening of the show was accompanied, or orchestrated, by a press campaign that branded Filonov's art with terms such as morbid and crazy, full of militant formalism, metaphysical hysteria, and pathological self-expression.(151) Workers' delegations and committees of cultural bureaucrats inspected the paintings already hanging on the walls to pass their judgments.

As late as February 1936, Leonidov was still permitted to address the All-Moscow Conference of Architects, now wholly committed to the ideology of 'socialist realism in architecture,' with a defiant defense of his views.(152) "I have been tagged with a number of 'isms'—I am a Constructivist, and a Formalist, and a Schematist, and so on," he declared. Concluding his speech with the words: "One should believe in socialism—and it is hardly a fault to dream a little in this connection." Leonidov insisted on the convergence of political conformity and creative independence, which had been the elusive ideal of modern Soviet artists during the preceding decade, but which had by now been squashed by political oppression. Filonov, a more senior figure, had made this self-contradictory convergence the backbone of an elaborate theory of 'revolutionary' or 'proletarian' painting, which he promoted in printed programs and public pronouncements. As late as 1934, he was still able to defend it in public lectures and podium discussions, and to restate it in internal memoranda for his circle of followers.

/2.3.3 BARLACH'S AND NOLDE'S REJECTED CONFORMITY

Ever since museum director Max Sauerlandt and NSDAP chief ideologue Alfred Rosenberg clashed about modern art's value for National Socialist culture in the debates of summer 1933, Ernst Barlach and Emil Nolde were often paired off as outstanding targets of anti-modern art policies. In a mixture of recognition and rejection, their harassment continued throughout the decade. Both artists mounted quite different but equally tenacious, and eventually futile self-defenses aimed at a vindication of their work as they had practiced it before. Barlach insisted on the non-political but home-bound character of his figures, Nolde on his ardent National Socialist party membership. Their exceptional prestige earned both respectful treatment but no art-political leniency. In the 'Degenerate Art' show, Nolde appeared more prominently than Barlach, but in the ensuing mass raids of public collections, works by both were consfiscated by the hundreds. Barlach died in 1938, too early for exclusion from the Reich Chamber of Art, which did not hit Nolde until 1941, when his success on the semi-clandestine, private art market, revealed by his tax returns, appeared to defy his defamation.

Barlach, whose expressive realism kept him remote from modernist extremes, drew National Socialist ire through his wooden war memorial of 1928 in Magdeburg

Cathedral. The Prussian government had commissioned it, but a majority of the Magdeburg community had it dismantled. Rosenberg and other critics denounced its seemingly defeatist expression and the Slavic appearance of its figures. Soon other war memorials by Barlach incurred similar attacks and were likewise dismantled or even destroyed, leading to a spreading ostracism of his work, exclusion from exhibitions and, in 1936, confiscation of a book publication of his drawings. Time and again, he protested, without, however, offering ex-post-facto National Socialist self justifications. When he died on October 24, 1938, the SS newspaper *Das Schwarze Korps* featured a full-page illustrated obituary that praised him as one of the leading but controversial German artists of the century, whose high qualifications exempted him from the charge of cultural bolshevism. All the more sharply did the author reject Barlach's "neurotic," "racially inferior" figures.

Emil Nolde outdid himself in advertising his National Socialist convictions, put forth at length in the second volume of his autobiography issued in 1934, and made official by joining the Party in that year. They were to authenticate his claims to paint in a 'Nordic' style, in line with the short-lived ideological ingratiation of expressionism with the regime during the years 1933-1934. However, Nolde's efforts to synchronize his art with his politics were repudiated, culminating in his prominence at the 'Degenerate Art' show of 1937. His disgrace did not impede his rising sales on the private art market, which peaked in the same year. As late as April 1941, when the SS Security Service hit upon his tax records, did SD chief Reinhard Heydrich see to his expulsion from the Reich Chamber of Art. Nolde never tried to adjust his art to National Socialist requirements. On the contrary, sometime in 1937 he embarked on producing a steady stream of small-scale watercolors not for show or sale. They undilutedly displayed his colorful simplifications and expressive distortions. Even more significantly, he accompanied them with aphoristic texts containing none of his National Socialist ideas.

/ 3 EMIGRATION AND EXILE

/ 3.1 THE NECESSITY TO EMIGRATE

/ 3.1.1 INTERNATIONAL PROSPECTS

In Italy, the corporative alignment of the arts, largely accomplished by 1932, included a limited accommodation of modern artists, even to the point of tolerance for mild expressions of dissent from government art policy. As a result, modern artists never left the country. On the contrary, the opportunities offered by Fascist support for the arts lured some of them into returning from Depression-ridden France. The Soviet regime, on the other hand, had by 1932 become successful in shaping a conformist artistic culture in which all artists of renown participated for better or

worse. Modern artists, though sidelined, were tolerated nonetheless. Thus, artists did not feel the necessity to emigrate for political reasons, as some of them—such as Marc Chagall—had done during the preceding decade. Germany was the only totalitarian state with a steady stream of artists' emigration. Although the regime had announced the exclusion of modern artists from the start, these artists tested their remaining opportunities with recurrent frustration, making for a hesitant process of emigration, until the 'Degenerate Art' policy of early 1937 deprived them of their last illusions.

Only in Germany did the newly ascendant totalitarian regime have to deal with a pre-existing, thoroughly politicized artistic culture it had vowed to abolish. However, the imperfect achievement of totalitarian control over German society at large, compared to the forcible alignment of Soviet society accomplished during the decade, enabled those artists to pursue their work, and dealers and collectors to support that work, even under adverse conditions, allowing them to develop subjective postures of recoil or continuing dissent from the regime. And when this was no longer possible, the government did not prevent them from going abroad in search of better opportunities for their work, or in certain cases, a public forum for their views. Italian artists never wished to emigrate, Soviet artists were legally prevented from doing so. Thus, art of dissent under oppression and in exile was a German phenomenon.

The roughly three hundred German artists who emigrated succeeded in positioning their art as an arguable anti-fascist alternative to the cultural policy, and the art, of the National Socialist state, most often on artistic, but at times also on political grounds. They were a living proof of the inability of that state to achieve the totalitarian goal of a monopoly culture. The relative political prominence of German artists in exile was largely personal, because they were in no position to participate in the cultural policies of their host countries. The small professional groups they managed to organize were controversy-ridden, short-lived, and only tangentially concerned with politics. The limited public impact of German artists in exile is apparent by comparison to the much higher influence of German exiled writers, who fled the country earlier and in greater numbers, because the National Socialist regime ascribed a greater subversive potential to their political dissent or literary nonconformity and hence suppressed them with more drastic measures.

/ 3.1.2 GERMAN EXODUS

Sweeping dismissals of modern German artists from teaching posts in April 1933, forcible membership in the Reich Chamber of Art in September of that year, vicious defamations in the press and vituperative exhibitions throughout the year all spelled a mounting threat, which politically inclined or modern artists had to consider in weighing their prospects if they stayed. Absent from such assessments were

the regime's anti-Semitic measures and lawless crackdowns on political opponents, because most modern German artists were neither Jewish nor political opponents. The anti-Semitic measures affected their dealer networks because some prominent art dealers were Jewish, but others who were not continued to do business. Only those modern artists who in the Weimar Republic had publicly sided with the Left, such as George Grosz and John Heartfield, felt so acutely threatened that they emigrated at once. Most of the others, who conceived of their art as non-political, stayed in the hope of being tolerated if they kept out of public view, and only left when their professional situation became hopeless.

What delayed German modern artists' emigration over several years was a protracted learning process regarding the National Socialists' determination to act upon their notorious, principled aversion against modern art, and to turn it from an ideology into a policy. Only gradually did it dawn on them that the regime could never tolerate an art that was fatally tied to the "system time" of the demolished Weimar Republic. It took some time for many modern artists to disabuse themselves of the hope that their oppression merely stemmed from an undue politicization of the arts, which might eventually subside. The uneven, sometimes erratic enactment of National Socialist art policy in individual cases made it appear susceptible to remonstrations, or even still open for reconsideration, particularly since it had not been legally codified. It was not until the government's draconian clampdown during the first half of 1937 that the last modern artists made up their minds to emigrate. Max Beckmann's reported decision to take a train abroad the day after listening on the radio to Hitler's opening speech at the 'House of German Art', even if apocryphal, epitomizes their moment of truth. It was his way of heeding Hitler's dictum: "They've had four years' time."

As early as March 31, 1933, Beckmann was dismissed from his professorship at the Städel art school in Frankfurt. He kept working in Berlin, where he had already moved in January, partly relying on a few wealthy collectors, partly on his clandestine business connection with the Munich art dealer Günter Franke. Only as late as July 19, 1937, did Hitler's speech convince him that his situation was untenable. Already the year before, Beckmann had discussed emigration with one of his principal collectors, Stephan Lackner, himself a Jewish émigré. Now Lackner vainly tried to mastermind his move to Paris as a stable business base. Beckmann even hoped to settle in the United States, but since he obtained no residency permit in either country, he stayed moored in Amsterdam.

/ 3.1.3 WORKING ABROAD

Unlike German writers in exile, who had lost their markets and were forced to build a literary counterculture in their language from abroad, German exiled artists, hoping for access to the art markets of their host countries, had few if any professional

motivations for focusing their work on German politics. As a result, they did not start out using their new-found freedom to get back at their former oppressors. However, by the time of their arrival in France, the country of refuge for most of them, the Depression had caused a domestic retrenchment of the modern art market in recession. If they had come with any confidence in the international appeal of modern art, they were disappointed. Even a celebrity such as Beckmann found it impossible to get a foothold in the network of French dealers. Rarely had these artists left Germany because of their political opinions. On the contrary, they had ascribed their oppression to what they perceived as an undue politicization of artistic culture. Before the ascendancy of the Popular Front, the non-political make-up of modern art in France did not encourage them to politicize their work.

It was the difficulty of blending into the artistic culture of their host countries, most notably that of France, center of the modern art world, that prompted German exile artists into bonding in small, variable interest groups of their own. It was not until 1936 that they claimed to represent a genuine German art, in opposition to the conformist art of the National Socialist regime. Unable or unwilling to assimilate—as German painters who already lived in Paris such as Max Ernst and Otto Freundlich had managed to do—the new immigrant artists operated within the closed circuits of exile culture. This did not improve their market chances but let them seek some political recognition in a country that avoided political confrontations with the country they had fled. It did not help that the perception of modern German art on the international market was focused on Expressionism and Bauhaus abstraction, represented by celebrities such as Max Beckmann and Vasily Kandinsky. Both these famous exile artists pointedly detached themselves from politics, banking on the internationalist cachet of modern art.

It followed from this national self-assertion by default that its inherent opposition to the National Socialist regime would fit into the anti-fascist posture, embraced since 1935 by the cultural policies of the Popular Front. It was spearheaded by two prominent left-leaning German artists—Otto Freundlich and Max Ernst—who had taken up residence in Paris long before the National Socialist regime's accession. The growing anti-fascist self-assertion of this posture provoked political counter-initiatives by the German Foreign Service to thwart its public manifestation, to which governments of the host countries, intent on appeasing Germany's increasing belligerence, were all too ready to cave in. Political restrictions imposed on foreign residents in general were now applied to artistic expression. Eventually, German artists in exile succeeded in positioning their work as an arguable alternative to the art of the National Socialist regime, and as a challenge to its oppressive art policy. Even without confronting the regime outright, they were helped by the growing international perception of German oppression of the arts as a harbinger of a war on democracy.

/3.2 ORGANIZING ABROAD

/3.2.1 POLITICAL OR UNPOLITICAL

Leftist artists in exile of activist temperament and with ties to communist party organizations—most prominently John Heartfield and George Grosz—did not wait for their less politically-minded colleagues to coalesce into a professional community intent on making their work into a challenge to the National Socialist regime, relying on the public profile they had attained before. It took the new inclusive cultural policy of the Popular Front to energize the self-awareness of German exile artists as a group, where leftists were in the minority, but initially acted as leaders. On its anti-fascist platform, they now aspired to nothing less than a historic alternative to National Socialist art, rooted in the 19th-century antecedents of German democracy. Faced with the aggressive foreign cultural propoganda of the National Socialist regime, which harassed them with diplomatic interventions, German artists in exile, as weak as they were as a group, met with a genuine political response. Time and again, Czech, French and British authorities, under the appeasement policies of their governments, censored or restrained their shows.

It was against all such obstacles that German artists in exile had to assert their political group identity as a means of enhancing their visibility in an unaccustomed artistic culture. The small professional organizations they could form were weak, short-lived, only tangentially concerned with politics, and had a minimal effect on the public sphere. They were in no position to participate in the political culture, let alone the cultural policies, of their host countries. The prominence a few of them attained was due to their individual determination. Furthermore, German exile artists and their associated writers, who were so keen on making their art into a vehicle for political opposition from abroad, came to realize that their ambitions were politically irrelevant or inopportune, particularly since large segments of public opinion were averse to any overt politicization of the arts, be it National Socialist or anti-fascist.

The first group of German artists in French exile, the 'German Artists' Collective,' was founded in early 1936. It included Otto Freundlich and Max Ernst as well as Communist graphic artist Hanns Kralik, who had been working underground for the resistance, in 1934 had been imprisoned in a concentration camp, and in 1935 had escaped to Holland and from there to Paris. The shared leadership of the two prominent modern painters in Paris and the former party activist from Germany personified the Popular Front coalition policy of disparate positions, deemed necessary for anti-fascist consolidation. It is suggestive of how the polarized ideals of abstraction versus realism, or modern versus traditional, had to be politically reconciled. These were the crucial issues of the realism debates within the Popular Front artistic culture of the moment.

Within the German exile artists' community, however, such debates did not take place. Here questions of the appropriate style for making anti-fascist or progressive art were suspended for the sake of expediency, which eventually got the better of anti-fascist activism.

/3.2.2 POLITICIZATION

That it should have taken the Popular Front movement for the protests and remonstrations of German artists in exile to blend in a common initiative goes to show that any aspirations on their part to meaningfully participate in the anti-fascist struggle could only be activated on a leftist platform. They were not spared the internal controversies germane to such an orientation. The foundation of the Collective of German Artists was preceded by the big exhibition of John Heartfield's anti-National Socialist photomontages, held in April and May 1935 at the communist Maison de la Culture, which established Heartfield as a role model of an artist's anti-fascist activism in the anti-fascist struggle. Leading figures of French leftist culture attended its first public meeting, held on December 4. The new group was affiliated with the 'Hotel Lutetia' Conference of German emigrants on the Left, united over and above their factional differences according to Popular Front principles. It was indeed sometimes called "the artists' group of the German popular front."(153) Its three leading artists—Otto Freundlich, Max Ernst, and Hanns Kralik—were all communists of various leanings.

The KDK's first chairman was Otto Freundlich, an abstract painter of doctrinaire communist convictions but without party affiliation, who had been living in Paris since 1924 and since 1933 was a member of the AEAR. In his inaugural lecture "Confessions of a Revolutionary Artist" (*Bekenntnisse eines revolutionären Malers*)(154) he dwelt on the communist significance of the term "collective" in the new group's name. Max Ernst, who had lived in Paris since 1922, had become a core member of the surrealist circle led by André Breton, whose peculiar brand of communism was now at variance with the party line. In 1935, a few months before the 'Collective's' foundation, he had produced two paintings of "Barbarians marching West," clearly anti-fascist projections of the German threat. Hanns Kralik, the newcomer to Paris, was a party-loyal communist and activist artist of working-class origin. Once in Paris, he carved a woodcut cycle titled *In Spite of Everything* as a testimony to his concentration camp experience.

The group leadership of this anti-fascist directorate did not last long. After a few months, Freundlich resigned as chairman. Many members shied away from the inescapable politicization of the arts inherent in Breton's demand (see Chapter 1.1/1.2.3). For the National Socialist regime to target them as political adversaries, they felt, was a misjudgment of their essentially non-political self-understanding. It was one thing to escape from Germany to pursue their art under conditions of

political freedom in a democratic state, and quite another to turn their escape into a deliberate response to 'fascist' oppression at home, let alone into a 'weapon' for the anti-fascist struggle. However, they had no other rallying point to turn to, particularly since the artistic cultures of their host country failed to fully embrace them. For this reason, the political engagement of the 'Collective' did not outlast the year 1936. It seems that, for a while, German artists in exile had suspended their group representation, until the 'Degenerate Art' exhibition of July 1937, which publicized their domestic oppression abroad, triggered a rebound that needed no more backing from the Left.

/ 3.2.3 THE 'GERMAN ARTISTS' LEAGUE'

In September 1937, an altogether different group of German exile artists in Paris without leftist ties met to restore the old 'German Artists' League,' disbanded by the National Socialist regime upon its accession. Their express purpose was to counter the 'Degenerate Art' show with an exhibition of suppressed German art, in order to capitalize on its new notoriety. Founded in May 1938, named 'Free German Artists' League' and later simply 'Free Artists League,' to accommodate members exiled from annexed Austria, it was aimed at mounting a group exhibition program whose sales appeal was boosted by its protest against German suppression of modern art. When these plans took shape, their ideological thrust was jeopardized by the French and German appeasement politics initiated that year. Because the League was registered with the Prefecture of Paris with the express designations "non-political" and "neutral as to party politics," it did not engage in anti-fascist activities. However, because the Popular Front regarded the defense of free culture as an activist political position to take, it was not difficult for leftist artists from the former 'Collective' to join.

It was in Prague that a looser association of German exile artists, named 'Oskar-Kokoschka League,' confronted the issue of the relationship between modern art, the Popular Front, and the anti-fascist struggle more squarely than in Paris. In its lecture program, philosopher Ernst Bloch and composer Hanns Eisler, both communists, presented a joint text titled "Avant-Garde Art and the Popular Front."(155) Faced with the question of whether the Hitler regime's suppression of modern art reciprocally qualified the latter as an anti-fascist weapon of use for the Popular Front, the authors recalled the origins of modern art as a minority culture, which, despite its revolutionary rhetoric, had never been embraced by the working-class. It could however be drawn upon for the aesthetic modernization of propaganda. The text was one of the few contemporary attempts to credit modern art with an anti-fascist agency by drawing on the claims to social and political progress inherent in is age-old designation as an 'avant-garde'. The desperate reassertion of its value for a working-class culture, flew in the face of its persistent class limitation, which curtailed its political effect.

The two aims pursued by organized German exile artists in Paris and Prague—to market their work abroad and to challenge the National Socialist regime with an artistic counterculture—were contradictory. Only during the short government of the Popular Front in France did they appear compatible. Whenever appeasement policies were being pursued, they proved irreconcilable. As a result, an anti-fascist validation of modern art—or of German modern art in particular—never came to pass. Modern art had to wait for its rising popularity in the USA during the last year before the war to receive such a validation, and consequently, an ideological connotation with democracy. On this platform, the work of modern artists in exile was marketed here with some success. On January 9, 1938, Kandinsky wrote to Paul Klee from Paris that he had heard "[...] that at the moment people are getting more and more interested in the German 'Degenerates' [...]. In America, that is. And German artists are headed for the big time in America."(156) Klee's own soaring sales in the following two years, after several years of fruitless marketing by various dealers, confirmed Kandinsky's forecast.

/3.3 THE NEW BURLINGTON GALLERY SHOW

/3.3.1 CONFLICTS OF ORGANIZATION

While in early 1938 only leftist members of the Free Artists' League contributed to the anti-fascist exhibition *Five Years of Hitler's Dictatorship*, organized in Paris by the Thälmann Committee, the League's first collective exhibition in its own right was held in Paris from November 4 to 18, 1938, under the title *Free German Art* in the communist Maison de la Culture. It was intended, in the words of critic Paul Westheim, to "serve [...] the cause of German culture simply by prompting the public and the press to take issue with the art dictatorship of the Third Reich and to recognize it once again, most unequivocally, in its hostility to culture."(157) It was a deliberate response to the 'Degenerate Art' exhibition now circulating through German cities. Its venue in the Maison de la Culture fitted the anti-fascist culture promoted there in the name of the Popular Front, still in office at the time of planning. When it opened, however, a new, conservative government was in place. Thus, in his opening speech, League chairman Eugen Spiro stressed that the show was meant to "avoid all political tendencies and opinions."(158)

Earlier in the year, from July 8 to 20, 1938, an independent consortium staged an even more comprehensive exhibition of modern German art at the New Burlington Gallery in London. Initially, it was to be titled 'Banned Art' as a defiant response to the 'Degenerate Art' exhibition.(159) During the preparations, however, this confrontational impetus came to be neutralized. Although the organizers counted on the cooperation of the League in Paris, they were careful not to give any political offense. Originally,

they wanted to arrange the show according to 'schools,' including works by German artists in good standing with the authorities so as to restore a balance between both sides of the divide. Only when the League in Paris balked at this scheme did they abandon it. It was the British supporters who engineered the political conversion of the show, now innocuously titled 'German Art of the Twentieth Century,' from an anti-fascist manifestation into a fictitious compromise, in order not to provoke the German regime at a time when Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain's government was pursuing its appeasement policy.

The debate about this reorientation came to a head over the Free Artists' League's demand to include the fragments of a painting by Oskar Kokoschka, cut to pieces by German police during a house search in Vienna. As the London organizers rejected it, it became exhibit number one at the later Paris show, published as a postcard, and written up in press reviews. The organizers had promised to forward the show to Paris, to be mounted by the Free Artists' League, but in April revoked the agreement. On April 6, 1938, furthermore, they informed the League that Thomas Mann, cultural figurehead of German emigration, had been struck from the list of honorary sponsors. In response, the League threatened to withdraw their contributions, but eventually relented.(160) Since the League had at least successfully vetoed the inclusion of artists from Nazi Germany, the exhibition turned out to be a reassertion of modern German artists oppressed in their native country, although it stopped short of addressing the oppression itself. Westheim was right in calling it on its "non-interventionist policy." Only its sales were high, a market boost for modern German art abroad.

/ 3.3.2 MAX BECKMANN'S PROMINENCE

Max Beckmann, along with Oskar Kokoschka the most prestigious German-speaking artist in exile, was chosen for the keynote opening speech to voice the political accommodation program of the London exhibition. Here he claimed to uphold a non-political notion of artistic freedom against an unspecified specter of oppressive mass politics which recalls current definitions of totalitarianism, even though he did not use the term. Beckmann delivered his speech in German, followed by a translation, standing before his triptych *Temptation*, which he had started at home and finished in Amsterdam the year before. It featured a painter tied up on the ground before his canvas, unable to paint. However, Beckmann failed to even mention this obvious allegory of an artist's captivity, let alone its historic circumstance. His self-portrait *Der Befreite* (*The Liberated One*), painted in Amsterdam that year, is a defiant response to this imprisonment scene. Here the artist is emerging from the door of a cage. The opened handcuff around his right hand hangs down with the key still inserted in the lock. With his left hand, he is grasping the chains in the arched form of a knuckleduster, as if to use them as a weapon.

The *Temptation* triptych was the centerpiece of a whole room filled with Beckmann's works, which had been brought from Paris and Amsterdam, a re-creation, as it were, of the Beckmann room in the National Gallery at Berlin, which had been assembled in 1932 and dismantled one year later. The arrangement could be understood as a restoration of Beckmann's national pre-eminence. All three panels show the main figure in captivity, featuring multiple enslavement tools: handcuffs, foot shackles, chains, a cage, a rope and a bridle that draws blood from a woman creeping on the ground. The tied-up painter is holding on to a framed but blank picture—or is it a mirror?—on his easel, helplessly watching a model who towers above him but turns away. The historic situation seems to impose an understanding of these configurations as allusions to the National Socialist oppression which had driven the artist into exile. And yet, even though the triptych was reproduced on the front page of the *Times Literary Supplement* as the lead illustration of a report about the show, such a topical understanding was nowhere voiced.

In his speech, Beckmann emphasized to "have never been politically active in any form. [...] So perhaps I have passed in blindness by many things of the real and political life. Admittedly I assume the existence of two worlds: the world of the spirit and the world of political reality. [...] The greatest danger threatening all of us human beings is collectivism. This I resist with the full force of my soul."(161) Beckmann thus maintained a non-political understanding of artistic freedom against a historically unspecified threat of oppressive mass politics. As a compensation of his self-admitted "blindness" to political reality, he conjured up a "drunken vision" of which one of his painted figures had "sung" to him, "perhaps from the *Temptation*," the backdrop of his speech. With his clear-cut distinction between what he termed spiritual and political lives, Beckmann dodged the historical circumstances of the emergency of art to which he was alluding in his triptych and his speech. Such an evasion was just what the organizers of the exhibition wanted to keep it out of political jeopardy and in line with British appeasement policy.

/ 3.3.3 READ'S CHALLENGE TO HITLER

On November 9, 1938, after the exhibition had closed, British art critic Herbert Read, one of the organizers, summarized the difficulties of mounting it in a letter to Vasily Kandinsky. He complained that most of "the German expressionists [...] are so determined to make political capital out of their unhappy fate that they antagonize the only people who are likely to buy their paintings."(162) "Politically and intellectually I am totally opposed to fascism and continually fight against it," Read went on to write. "But there are political realities and there are aesthetic realities, and it is necessary to preserve the distinction," echoing Beckmann's opening speech. "I mean, that if one strives for the freedom of art, one does not at the same time strive for the polarization

of art."[163] Coming from a long-time, ardently Marxist advocate of revolutionary art, who at about this time promised André Breton his cooperation with the newly-founded Trotskyist 'Federation of Independent Revolutionary Artists'[164], Read's non-political stand was not only expeditious, but proved untenable at this time. Soon he found himself entangled in a public clash with Hitler himself.

Despite its political precautions, the exhibition drew Hitler's attention. He denounced it in his opening speech at the second 'Great German Art Exhibition,' reported in *The Daily Telegraph* of July 11. Hitler charged that "the London exhibition [...] had been arranged for political purposes. It was another attempt by the enemies of Germany to belittle National Socialist cultural achievements."[165] In his instant rebuttal of the *Daily Telegraph* report, Read had to backtrack on his resolve to keep the exhibition out of politics. He admitted to Hitler's accusation that showing modern German art meant discounting National Socialist art as an achievement. Still, he insisted that the show was merely devoted to "the artists' freedom to expression [...]This principle is ethical, not political."[166]

Contrary to Read's misgivings, the exhibition, as far as one can tell, turned out to be a considerable sales success. Of the nine works Paul Klee contributed, five sold so quickly he had to replace them with others before it closed. Was it due to its political restraint or to the new international prominence it bestowed on the National Socialist oppression of modern art? The sales success coincided with the growing popularity of German exile art in the United States on account of its domestic oppression. Max Beckmann's exhibition at the Buchholz Gallery in January 1938 was applauded, and so were numerous subsequent shows. At the Golden Gate exhibition in San Francisco of July 1939, he was awarded a gold medal and a price of $1,000 for *Temptation*. The award acknowledged modern art's new status as the democratic answer to its totalitarian oppression, which Alfred A. Barr, director of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, bestowed on it at the opening of the Museum's new building (see Chapter 4.3 / 1.3.2). This status became a fundamental cachet for extolling modern art as a culture of freedom and, by implication, of democracy.