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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

3.3/ Political Resistance

/1 FROM DISSENT TO RESISTANCE

/1.1 GENERAL

/1.1.1 FIELDS OF CONFLICT

Since the 19th century, if not earlier, it had become commonplace for artists to use their work to convey social or political dissent. This was an outcome of their professional transition from dependency on patronage to self-directed work for exhibition, that is, for the public sphere, where taste converged with ideology. By the time of the Depression, this turn of the arts into a vehicle of ideological opinion had become even stronger than before. Mounting state interventions in the crisis-ridden art market politicized professional competition. Embittered confrontations in the public sphere heightened the pressure to decide between alignment or dissent. This is what André Breton called a ubiquitous raising of banners (see Chapter 1.1/1.2.3). For social or political convictions to be activated into dissent, they had to be positioned on an ideological scale from Left to Right, with communism and 'fascism'—in its generic understanding—as extremes. Democracy was absent from this scale. Only the insistence on an unaccountability of art to politics amounted to an implicitly democratic claim for free expression.

When artists' dissent from political authority had to reassert itself against oppressive policies, it turned into defiance. And for defiance to harden into resistance, it had to link up with political opposition movements. Without such linkage, dissent fell short of political engagement and was thrown back upon itself. Resistance, on the other hand, is a reciprocal posture, whether or not it encounters a response. In an oppressive artistic culture, with few or no venues for public nonconformity, dissent did not have to manifest itself in order to be recognized as such. All it took was a minimum of sympathizers disposed to recognize the oppositional significance of seemingly innocuous themes—like-minded social circles, trusted acquaintances, or, ultimately, family and friends. The making of resistance art meant withdrawal from the open market as a gateway to the public sphere, subsisting on private sales to familiar buyers, or, rarely, joining up with clandestine opposition circles. Accordingly, it varied from deliberate defiance of official art regulations to pictorial denunciations of the government.

In the art-historical literature, the pertinent issues have been pondered under the alternative catchphrases "between resistance and accommodation" and "accommodation versus resistance."[167] These terms equate expression of dissent with political opposition, and the undisturbed pursuit of work in an oppressive artistic culture with political subservience, in disregard for the above distinctions. Even though artists were seldom active in political resistance movements, the term resistance has been borrowed from the political struggle against dictatorships—which in the Second World War became a matter of life and death—so as to validate performative postures of mere dissent. In his three-volume novel *The Aesthetics of Resistance* (*Die Ästhetik des Widerstands*) of 1975-1981, Peter Weiss presents a fictional historical narrative spanning the years 1933-1945 where the belief in the resistance potential of the arts is first built up and then disenchanted by events. The art-historical literature has ignored its pessimistic conclusion.

/ 1.1.2 MODERN RESISTANCE?

Under the democratic or semi-democratic regimes of France, Germany, and Italy of the time before the First World War, modern art had flourished as a vehicle of opposition against the social or political order. Between 1918 and 1922, the revolutionary movements that inaugurated the totalitarian regimes of Russia and Italy quickly absorbed this oppositional dynamic. In the early Weimar Republic which held on to democracy, on the other hand, the Dada movement kept its disruptive potential alive to the point of provoking the government to react with legal measures. However, the opposition or oppression that modern art incurred during the Depression was a backlash against the acceptance it had already attained. Modern art's defensive struggles were centered on the argument that political charges against it were out of place because art was non-political. Modern artists and their representatives turned a blind eye to the political preconditions of their own ascendancy. Quick to protest political decisions to their disadvantage, they would never challenge governance per se.

Under the Bolshevik and National Socialist regimes during the Depression decade, modern artists' attitude of resistance remained essentially passive. It was a fallback position after their tenacious efforts at acceptance had been repudiated. Until 1936, modern artists in Germany and the Soviet Union argued their case in public, until their failure forced them to withdraw into privacy. In Germany, a few dealers entertained a tenuous underground market for modern art in defiance of its official denigration, and a few collectors were able to maintain private networks which shielded modern artists from public exposure. Such were the conditions under which some modern artists could stick to their styles in the spirit of opposition to the regime, while others chose to emigrate. Thus, when it comes to the issue of political resistance, their self-reassertion is no mirror reverse of their oppression. Modern artists

were non-combative victims of totalitarian oppression. Their stubborn self-defense does not qualify as political resistance.

The artistic culture refashioned after World War II has made it seem as if modern art has earned its democratic credentials from a struggle against totalitarian oppression. However, no modern artist of any renown, except for Oskar Kokoschka, devised an ideological, let alone a political, platform of resistance against their oppression other than that of being left alone. Artists who did invariably worked in figurative styles of traditional origin, no matter how inflected by a modicum of modern abstraction. The political culture informing the convictions of those on the Left had in turn rejected modern art as a 'bourgeois' escape from political reality. In both the USSR and the Hitler State, modern artists, after unsuccessful efforts at ingratiation, ended up as victims rather than opponents of their regimes.

/ 1.1.3 AGAINST TOTALITARIAN OPPRESSION

It took totalitarian oppression for dissent to turn into resistance, albeit at the price of retreating from the controlled art market and the censored public sphere. Resistance included intentional deviation from official art policy, concealed pursuit of themes critical of the regime, and, at the utmost, linking up with subversive opposition groups. How far dissenting artists were able go in charging their work with their political views depended on how tightly their regimes monitored their professional organizations. Between near-complete control in the USSR and near-complete license in Fascist Italy, the loop-holed enforcement of German art policy left them some room for oppositional engagement. Yet, compared to literature with its media base in the public sphere, their potential for public impact was minimal. While the German regime staged a highly publicized book burning three months after its accession, it never had paintings burnt for show. And the Soviet regime persecuted writers, but not artists, to the death.

In Italy, where oppression of artists was negligible, so was artists' dissent. If it existed—as in the case of painter Renato Guttuso—it never took a thematic shape that might have prompted the authorities to intercede. In the Soviet Union, where by 1932 oppression had become near total, dissent paraded as a deviant form of communism, which the regime permitted to be voiced, at least until 1936. While the submission-and-command routine of Soviet artists' unions precluded any formal, let alone thematic opposition from arising, Italian artists, whose corporative organization was just as compulsory, were at liberty to cater to a private market that paid lip service to conformity. Thus, for opposite reasons, a clandestine culture of political resistance in the arts did not develop in either state, while in Germany, where it did, its chances to have any effect were nonexistent. Inside the Third Reich, artistic dissent depended on exclusion or withdrawal from the public sphere. In exile, where oppositional artists

lacked any clientele, they had to seek a foothold in sympathizing institutions for backing their activities.

Until 1936, the artistic cultures of all three totalitarian regimes were still disturbed by political disputes. In Italy and the Soviet Union, these were about which kind of art best suited their regimes but never questioned their legitimacy. Only Germany could boast an art of true resistance, that is, an art that rejected the regime. This fundamental difference between the three states is due to the time lag between the installation of totalitarian rule, with Germany as a latecomer by a dozen years. While it was still a democracy, Germany had the time to develop a uniquely contentious artistic culture, whose acrimonious conflicts were conditioned by the social and political antagonisms that racked the Weimar Republic throughout its existence. Although the National Socialist government successfully undid the Weimar 'system' within the first year of its tenure, it was structurally incapable of equally swiftly eliminating its artistic culture, as the slogan "They had four years' time" heralding its clampdown of 1937 goes to show. All artists who hardened their surreptitious opposition into clandestine resistance were perpetuating political positions from before 1933.

/1.2 SOVIET ARTISTS' RESISTANCE

/1.2.1 THE PRESSURE OF ORTHODOXY

After the Party's ban on political opposition in late 1927, Soviet artists who harbored any political dissent became reluctant to express it in their work. The April Decree of 1932 made institutional control of artistic culture so thorough that the grudging recalcitrance of some artists shrunk into the stubborn resistance of only a few. Since these artists were barred from emigrating, they had no chance of opposition from abroad. Still, until 1936, sidelined modern artists of strong resolve in the mold of Vladimir Mayakovsky stuck to a self-devised Communism of conviction. In their competition entries and public pronouncements, Ivan Leonidov and Pavel Filonov dared to defy Party-ordained Socialist Realism by professing to ground their stance on pristine Bolshevik tenets. Undeterred by recurrent setbacks, they publicly persisted in their non-conformity. They may have trusted in a self-adjusting art-political give-and-take according to the principle of 'democratic centralism,' which provided for a two-way interaction between leadership and membership. Since they were shut out from office, they were spared the murderous censorship that bore down on Soviet writers.

In December 1935, Stalin's posthumous canonization of Mayakovsky as "the best, most talented poet of our Soviet epoch" acknowledged that the prestige of leading modern artists had survived their professional marginalization. A small number fought losing battles for public acceptance but eventually resigned themselves to

working in near-isolation. Clinging to a combination of autobiographical coherence and ideological idiosyncrasy, they upheld the axiomatic self-determination of modern art. Closed communities of disciples or admirers supported them. In tacit recognition of their standing, the authorities subjected them to demotion and surveillance, but not to outright suppression. Unlike most of their regime-accommodating colleagues, such as Rodchenko or El Lissitsky, they clung to the long-term logic of their work. Their idiosyncratic versions of Communism would have been branded as heterodox had they publicly pronounced them. They might not have endured the current acrimonious, partly disingenuous debate routine.

By 1936, the all-penetrating police control of Soviet society prevented any underground activity. To take an adversarial posture vis-à-vis the government, even only by demanding creative freedom, would have been denounced as 'Trotskyism,' a charge that assumed a non-existent domestic network of political resistance. The specter of a surreptitious front of 'sabotage,' allegedly uncovered in the three show trials of 1936-1938, could be tied to any opposition in art policy. This distinguishes the Soviet from the German oppression of the arts, whose two keywords of Jewishness and Bolshevism were never specified, let alone codified, to substantiate an arguable charge. Any assertion of a subjective Bolshevism at variance with the Party line, whereby sidelined modern artists sought to vindicate their work, entailed the danger of retribution. In Germany, by contrast, similar efforts were merely brushed off, for the Reich Chamber of Art offered no venue for the give-and-take of accusation and defense.

/1.2.2 MALEVICH AND FILONOV

In 1929, Kazimir Malevich, who in 1927 had spent three months in police custody because of his foreign business deals, was dismissed from his teaching post at the State Institute for the History of Art in Leningrad. Still, in 1932 he was assigned a 'research laboratory' at the State Russian Museum in the same city and allowed to cultivate a small circle of followers. Under these conditions of relative license, Malevich felt safe enough to resume a line of semi-abstract figurative works with peasant imagery he had pursued from 1909-1912. He never exhibited them and left no clue as to what they meant. Their unusual period dating "1928-1932" coincides with the beginning and ending years of the First Five-Year Plan, when agriculture was violently collectivized. While the paintings of 1909-1912 foreground peasants as quasi-icons of a primitivist ideal then current in Russian modern art, those from "1928-1932" cannot but recall one of the most explosive political issues of the day. The 'formalist' idealization of faceless peasants, passively standing with their arms down, appears to signal their dejection. Yet, kept at home, the paintings incurred no reprimand.

When the April Decree interdicted all arts' groups outside of Party control, Filonov's private 'painter's collective,' provocatively self-described as "a society of

proletarian, Communist (i.e. non-Party) masters,"[168] became illegal. Yet, despite repeated interrogations and detentions of his students by the NKVD, it was tolerated, and Filonov was left unharmed. In his unabashed ideological heterodoxy, Filonov's emphatic self-designation as a communist in the time after 1936 differs from the assiduous professions of party loyalty by most other artists. His voluntary withdrawal from any intervention in art policy and his proud recoil to privacy for the sake of self-fulfillment let him get away. The gloomy intricacy of Filonov's enigmatic pictures from those years matches Socialist Realism in representational precision, but is the opposite of the cheerful view on social life mandatory for any art allowed to reach the public. The series of paintings titled *Air Raid* in particular, featuring terrorized men on the run, might even refer to arrests and interrogations.[169]

The license to intransigence granted these two famous modern artists came at the price of Malevich's official marginalization and Filonov's self-imposed solitude. Until 1935 and 1936 respectively, both had still been allowed to make their losing cases, but after 1936 they disappeared from public view. They had lost, in Andrei Zhdanov's words, "the patronage of the Soviet people" (see Chapter 4.2 / 2.2.3). Malevich, who had never professed, much less proclaimed, his communist credentials, did not give up on the loss of his prominence. The gloomy abstraction of his peasant series did not prevent him from painting the realist *Head of a Girl for the Painting 'The Socialist Village,'* shown at the exhibition 'Woman in Socialist Construction,' which opened in Leningrad on April 24, 1934. Filonov was more obdurate. To the end, he held on to extremely personalized versions of both painting and Communism, both at variance with official doctrine. Even after repeated NKVD inspections, the authorities tolerated both. One of his followers committed suicide after an interrogation, but the master and his circle were not intimidated.

/ 1.2.3 **CHRONOLOGY**

Does Malevich's and Filonov's creative independence from Party-controlled mainstream art qualify as resistance, or even as political resistance? The April Decree, rather than promoting the instant adoption of Socialist Realism, inaugurated a four-year-long internecine debate about the past, present, and future course of Soviet art as part of Party policy, which in 1936 turned deadly. During those four years, both artists were able to resist their institutional and public marginalization, just as Ivan Leonidov, as late as February 1936, was allowed to defend himself against the formalism charge in a conference speech (see Chapter 3.2 / 2.3.2). All three artists commanded enough respect to be spared official censure of their work. In return, none of them crossed the red line of publicly questioning the Party line. One who did was architect Mikhail Okhitovich, who as early as January 8, 1935, voiced his principled critique of the new architectural policy in a conference speech and was

quickly ostracized (see Chapter 1.1 / 2.3.2). However, this straightforward act of political resistance remained an exception.

Malevich did not live to see the tightening of oppression enacted by the Party Committee on the Arts, newly formed on January 17, 1936, which made political witch hunts, in the form of meetings like the Okhitovich affair, a regular instrument of purging artists' organizations of their leadership. By 1937, arrests and executions following such meetings became part of the 'Great Terror.' The standard charge raised against compromised artists was that of 'Trotskyism.' It targeted their resistance, real or imagined, against measures of control, which Trotsky had so categorically rejected while in office and which he now denounced from exile in his *Betrayed Revolution* of 1936. It gave a name to what would have constituted artistic resistance, if only as a groundless ideological accusation. The word resistance was never used, but the equivalent term 'sabotage,' already commonplace for several years, served as a catch-all term for any suspected obstruction of government art policy.

Measured with the charges against artists with organizational responsibilities, Malevich's mix of intransigence and accommodation seemed just as harmless as Filonov's dogged insistence on ideological self-determination. Although Filonov's 'school' with its "non-Bolshevik" Communism was a typical case of what the April Decree had been intended to prevent, its seclusion spared it from interdiction. Yet just as those charges were merely groundless pretexts in the deadly infighting that raged within artistic culture, there is no evidence of any other artist producing work that might have qualified as resistance, even in the muffled fashion practiced by those two outstanding painters. It is difficult to imagine what political goal, beyond professional license, resistance artists might have envisaged in the Soviet Union—certainly no toppling of the regime as their Party supervisors charged and as their more numerous German counterparts did. The conduct of Soviet art policy, more flexible than its erratic German equivalent, was also more successful in minimizing artists' options.

/ 1.3 FIGHTING HITLER'S ASCENDANCY

/1.3.1 To Stem the Tide Due to the internal antagonisms among the Weimar Republic's social segments and political movements, its artistic culture had been rent by more political strife than that of any other European state. It gave artists associated with diverse political groupings an arena to oppose the parliamentary ascendancy of the National Socialist Party during the first three years of the Depression. The two foremost artists who devoted their work to this opposition—A. Paul Weber and John Heartfield—were graphic artists who worked for journals and other publications of political groups. In a democracy, such were the preconditions for reaching the operational field of the public sphere. To what extent did these artists' public

stand express their personal convictions, to what extent was it programmed by the groups for whom they worked—by assent rather than subordination, to be sure, but still in accord with their ideologies?

The first artist to advance an anti-National Socialist polemic under the catchword 'resistance' was A. Paul Weber. He worked for the publishing house of a nationalist group called 'Widerstand' (Resistance), founded in 1926 by the political publicist Ernst Niekisch, which survived the divide of 1933 until its belated suppression in 1937. Weber became a regular contributor to, and later co-editor of, its monthly *Widerstand*. Niekisch opposed the Weimar governments' observance of the Versailles Peace Treaty and advocated Germany's emancipation from 'Western' oversight. In January 1932, he published a booklet entitled *Hitler—a German Disaster* (*Hitler—ein deutsches Verhängnis*), in time for the presidential elections where Hitler drew President Hindenburg into a run-off vote. In their campaigns, the 'Hindenburg Committee' and the Prussian Social Democrats distributed it for free. One might have expected that in 1933 the National Socialist regime would have quickly retributed, but Niekisch's 'Widerstand' circle was tolerated, continued to meet, and kept publishing its *Widerstand* monthly until December 29, 1934, when it was finally banned.

The rise of John Heartfield, a founding member of the German Communist Party in 1919, to become the most popular artist of political resistance against the National Socialist regime was the end result of his cooperation with the manifold print undertakings of communist culture in the Weimar Republic, intended to foment a 'revolutionary' struggle against its support for capitalist exploitation. Comintern official Willi Münzenberg built the 'International Workers' Aid,' which in 1921 had been launched in Moscow as a front organization of Soviet foreign propaganda, into a proliferating publications network. He was the conduit of the Comintern for setting the ideological guidelines of Heartfield's work, which culminated in his regular contributions to the weekly *Arbeiter-Illustrierte Zeitung* (*Workers' Illustrated Journal*). Since the start of the Depression, the recurrent themes of Heartfield's output were the alleged ineptness of successive Weimar governments in dealing with the economic crisis due to their collusion with big capital, and big capital's financial and political support for the rapid ascendancy of the National Socialist Party as the last resort to maintain the social oppression it required to secure its profits.

/1.3.2 **A. PAUL WEBER'S WORK FOR '*RESISTANCE*'**

For the cover page of the brochure *Hitler, a German Disaster*, A. Paul Weber depicted a skeletal figure of death in SA uniform, raising his arm in the Hitler salute, and towering over a throng of likewise saluting followers who brandish military parade banners featuring the swastika. Although the uniform would not suit the party leader, the figure was probably meant to depict Hitler himself. An illustration in the text shows

the fulfilment of the underlying death prophecy: leaderless mass formations carrying swastika flags are storming up to the crest of a precipice, only to tumble down on the other side into a large, swastika-adorned coffin at the pit of an excavated grave. The scene seems to suggest an unwitting self-annihilation of the masses. Only in these two drawings did Weber limit himself to illustrating the "disaster" Niekisch predicted in case Hitler's movement should succeed. As gloomy as it appears, it did not envisage war, only an internecine strife that would end in the misery of the German nation under the enforcement of the Versailles Treaty.

In the first issue of *Der Widerstand* to appear in 1933, within weeks of the National Socialist takeover, Weber published *The End of the Song: The Swamp* (*Das Ende vom Lied: Der Sumpf*). Once again, it features an endless throng of National Socialists marching in formation right into a swamp which submerges them. Only their arms raised in the Hitler salute and their tattered banners are sticking out. The drawing illustrates Niekisch's article "Decay," which restates the author's opinion that National Socialism would sink into a "bourgeois swamp" because of its parliamentary politics and capitalist support, right when that strategy paid off. Weber's drawing was the opposite of the films and photographs of masses marching through the Brandenburg Gate on January 30. *The Swamp* is one of the c. 200 drawings Weber contributed to the monthly *Widerstand* and the daily *Entscheidung*, illustrating texts by Niekisch and others that were meant to be critical of but not opposed to the new regime. The authorities must have been willing to allow for that distinction.

The death threat Weber made of Niekisch's warnings raises the question of the degree to which his drawings expressed his own convictions at the time. After all, before he joined the 'Widerstand' circle, he had drawn pseudo-patriotic, even anti-Semitic illustrations for a wide range of reactionary publications. It has been observed that his correspondence is almost devoid of political opinions.[170] The record of his collaboration with Niekisch shows the politician's admiration for the artist, but no unequivocal adherence to the politician on the artist's part. In the Hitler booklet, on the other hand, he surpassed the author in ideological acerbity. The reciprocal disparities between the two are suggestive of the uncertain move from dissent to resistance, and how successful it could be in engaging the authorities. It took the Gestapo until 1937 to close in on the 'Widerstand' circle after almost five years of surveillance. Both Niekisch and Weber were detained in concentration camps, but only the former received a life sentence, while the latter was soon released.

/ 1.3.3 **HEARTFIELD, PARTY ARTIST**

The foremost outlet for Heartfield's work was the *Arbeiter-Illustrierte Zeitung* (*Workers' Illustrated Daily*), *AIZ* in short, issued since 1921 under changing titles until the definitive title was adopted in 1927. Printed by various publishers under Münzenberg's

oversight, it was distributed by a network run by workers in their free time, for minimal commissions, primarily to a working-class readership. Münzenberg's use of photomontage as the principal form of illustration for the *AIZ* drew on the cultivation of this technique in the workers' culture, fomented by the KPD in emulation of Soviet cultural policy. Thus, when Heartfield began to contribute in 1929, he fitted his work into an established practice. Party writers hailed his affinity to workers' photography. In 1932, when the election of July 31 gave the NSDAP its first parliamentary majority, Heartfield used two photographs of Hitler to denounce him as a stooge of big capital. One takes the form of an x-ray exposing his gold coin-filled esophagus as if it were a spine, the other shows him in small scale, raising his arm back over his shoulder in his typical salute to receive a wad of banknotes from a giant banker standing behind him.

When Heartfield went on an extended working trip to Moscow from April to December 1931, he was not only lionized by an exhibition of his work and related lectures and public discussions, but also participated in the country-wide travelling endeavors and photography instruction programs organized by the all-Russian cooperative 'The Artist,' and contributed photomontages to the journal *USSR in Construction* (see Chapter 2.3 / 3.1.2). The critical debates about his work, held by Soviet artist photographers and writers during his stay, must have made it clear to him that the propaganda purposes of photomontage in the crisis-ridden Weimar Republic had to differ from those in the upbeat Bolshevik state of the First Five-Year Plan. The 'realism' in which his critics found him wanting would have stripped his caricaturist photomontages of their critical edge. Yet the ideological line Heartfield had to heed was determined by the editorial board under Münzenberg's oversight and, through him, by the Moscow office of the Comintern, which at that time aimed at the 'revolutionary' destabilization of the Weimar Republic. Still, there is no reason to doubt that it jibed with his convictions as a Communist in good standing.

In the process, Heartfield developed the photomontage technique from the willfully paradoxical art form of his Dadaist beginnings into a political mass medium, posturing as the parody of an "illustrated journal," which replaced reportage with a propagandistic distortion pretending to reveal the supposed truth behind the surface of documentary photography. During his 1931 Moscow visit, Heartfield had the opportunity to measure up with Soviet photomontage as practiced by El Lissitsky and Gustav Klucis. Their affirmative enhancement of documentary photography to fit into the triumphalist celebration of leadership and achievement was the opposite of the combative contradiction to reality he pursued at home. It could never serve as a 'weapon' for the 'class war' raging in a capitalist democracy. Only in the photomontages devoted to the Soviet Union was Heartfield ready to abide by Soviet practice.

/ 2 SUBVERSION AT HOME

/ 2.1 GOING UNDERGROUND

/ 2.1.1 OPPORTUNITIES FOR DISSENT

From the start, Hitler's new government was determined to do away with the Weimar Republic's artistic culture of ideological strife, but was never quite successful in replacing it with a homogeneous artistic culture of ideological conformity. Artists retained a tenuous chance of expressing their dissent in private, short of any challenge that might have drawn the authorities' attention. Underground, the combative politicization of artistic culture during the Weimar Republic survived in a trickle of muffled but determined opposition to the National Socialist regime. It was carried on by a small number of sidelined artists whose firm convictions made them immune against sharing the majority's attempts at accommodation. Except for Paul Klee, none of them were of modern persuasion. Lacking any audience for shows or publications, these artists were thrown back onto addressing their work to private or even secret circles of sympathizers, either remnants of the Left or loose circles of the liberal middle-class. Only rarely did they join up with clandestine movements of political resistance.

Artists' habit of charging their work with political opinions had been conditioned by their reliance on the freedom of the private art market, which the new regime now tried to regulate but not control. All it took for them to continue was membership in the Reich Chamber of Art, which most of them initially obtained, even those politically compromised or of modern persuasion. Membership did not oblige them to abide by certain formal or thematic standards. They needed it to ply their trade, not only for access to the market, but also to obtain art materials. They faced censorship only when they showed their work in public, but were left some leeway to work and sell in private or in hiding. Even fierce opponents of the regime, such as Hans Grundig, Otto Dix, and Magnus Zeller were members of the Chamber. Grundig, a former communist, lost his membership only as late as 1936, when the long-lasting disputes between Josef Goebbels, Alfred Rosenberg, and Robert Ley about the Chamber's jurisdiction were finally settled, and when Goebbels, with new Chamber President Adolf Ziegler at the helm, began to tighten its political oversight mission.

Under these circumstances, art of dissent in the ideological sense of the term was more frequent than art of resistance in the political one. As long as the former remained allusive, it was hard to pinpoint and to censure. No matter how daring, its remoteness from the public sphere reduced it to an expression of outrage rather than a political intervention. True resistance came to mean withdrawal from a censored artistic culture to the secrecy of free expression. Rather than a foray against the regime,

it was a defiant retreat. There is a historic discrepancy between the quasi-didactic, fiercely derogatory panoramas by Hans Grundig, Otto Dix, and Magnus Zeller and their anticipated lack of resonance. It appears as a historic irony that Hitler's, Rosenberg's, and Goebbels' wrath struck modern artists so severely, although few if any of their works could be accused of anti-government tendencies, while those who used traditional art forms for their scathing condemnations fell through the net of surveillance.

/ 2.1.2 DIVERSE RESISTANCE

In the recondite artistic culture of dissent, a mode of illustrative topicality in the tradition of leftist art from the time of the Weimar Republic may be distinguished from a liberal one of allusive protest. Straightforward illustrative denunciations of the regime only came from the Left. Gloomy fantasies, myths or allegories were pursued by both. Only a few artists on the Left addressed National Socialist oppression so openly that they had to work in hiding. Artists without articulate political convictions confined their dissent to thematically vague lamentations or predictions, most often with a symbolical veneer that shielded them from charges of subversion. The difference between both modes of imagery was that the former bore the risk of persecution, while the latter was all but safe. In any case, it was not their imagery which brought political harassment upon artists, but their statements and affiliations. The sole practice of modern art entailed no more than professional sanctions, albeit sometimes of great severity.

The most straightforward resistance came from artists on the Left, not only because of their convictions, but also because of their ties, however tenuous, to Communist resistance groups that lent some agitational intention to their work. However, their seclusion threw them back upon acrimonious soliloquies. They were largely disconnected from subversive opposition movements operating inside the Third Reich. In return they were largely spared any punitive measures beyond professional interdictions. In 1933, Hans Grundig and Curt Querner painted self-portraits expressing their raging dissent. Grundig's conveyed the mindset prompting the prolific production of paintings and etchings with anti-regime subjects that he kept up until 1938, when his political ties finally landed him in a concentration camp. Querner, on the other hand, did not let his rage inform his work.

By the end of 1934, the attempts by some modern artists and their representatives to ingratiate themselves with the new regime had proven futile. Henceforth, the relationship between the two became a one-sided victimization that left the losers no chance of a comeback. All that modern artists could hope for was inattentive lenience, until the 'Degenerate Art' show of 1937 dashed such hopes. It treated modern artists as cultural delinquents rather than political opponents. And indeed, no modern artist inside the Third Reich pursued his or her work in the spirit of outspoken opposition.

Time and again they sought to vindicate themselves by insisting that their art was non-political. Thus, the contest between oppression and resistance did not pertain to the polarization between traditional and modern art which drove the art policy of the regime. For all their outcries against their denigration, modern artists and their adherents had no political stand to reaffirm.

/ 2.1.3 **MIDDLE-CLASS DISSENT**

Some artists opposed to the regime, but unrelated to the Left, devised an allusive imagery whose significance may have been obvious to sympathizers but remained obscure to the authorities. Even without apparent topicality, their works may have served as conversation pieces for confidential agreement. They contributed to a culture of muffled middle-class dissent for which the cultivation of disgraced art provided a refuge of mental reservation. Their work suited the critical mindset of an 'inner emigration' trying to hold on to the contentious culture of the Weimar Republic in the privacy of their homes. Reliance on networks of such private clienteles secured them a tenuous measure of subsistence and shielded them from public exposure. Such were the conditions for expressing a veiled but telling opposition, apt for social segments unable or unwilling to venture into open postures of resistance.

Such an allusive art of dissent could not be anything but traditional, since it had to rely upon familiar conceits from mythology, fairy tales, allegory, or everyday life in order to insinuate its critical significance. A recollection of traditional imagery as part of middle-class educational privilege was needed to bring it across, but the required *double-entendre* stopped short of any clear-cut message. It made for a peculiar take on the medley of classical mythology and Christian iconography that had been taught in academies and art schools for centuries. It was now drawn upon for allegories of dissent, not only cultivated by the 'inner emigration,' but also by the underground Left, where its thematic references were more obvious.

In a "Letter from Paris: Painting and Photography" written in 1936 for the Moscow exile journal *Das Wort*, Walter Benjamin imagines how such artists of resistance operate: "They go to work at night, with windows covered. For them, the temptation 'to paint after nature' is slight. Besides, the pallid regions of their paintings, which are peopled by specters or monsters, are not monitored from nature, but from the class state."[(171)] He pointed to this kind of painting because he had found it nowhere mentioned in the proceedings of two international congresses about art of which his "Letter" was a report: *Entretiens: L'art et la réalité. L'art et l'état* of 1935 and *La querelle du réalisme* of 1936. The grandiloquent papers and debates about art policy published in both proceedings left no room for a subjective art of conscience. As an emigrant, Benjamin could have no knowledge of the clandestine art inside the Third Reich he so aptly characterizes. Perhaps he imagined it by analogy with comparable

works "peopled by specters or monsters" produced by artists such as Max Ernst or Pablo Picasso, who worked in the public limelight of democracy. In any event, he valued art in hiding from oppression as the true art of political resistance.

Josef Scharl was a left-leaning but politically unaffiliated painter with a successful early career. The portraits, landscapes, flower beds and still lives he painted during the early years of the Weimar Republic were ideologically indifferent. Only since the start of the Depression did he convey his political views in some of his pictures. He took up themes of social critique with a caricaturist edge that painters of the New Objectivity had addressed before him: the arrogance of the rich, the misery of the poor, the plight of prostitutes, and the dead or mutilated soldiers of the First World War. His 1931 portrait of a war veteran with a maimed face, derived from published documentary photographs, recalls similar works by Otto Dix. With his frontal images of obnoxious officers in fantasy uniforms, he alluded to the military pomp and combative violence that flanked the National Socialist electoral ascendancy. In *Triumphal Procession* (*Triumphzug*) of 1932, a foolish cohort surrounds a grim-faced general—called *Dictator* in a print version of the painting—marching behind the marble statue of a Roman emperor.

In 1933, Scharl confronted the new regime as a stern opponent, although it caused him no professional harm. However, his highly stylized, colorful paintings found less and less of a market, and he could no longer make a living. By 1935-1936, he had to rely on monthly contributions from a short subscription list and on a small network of well-to do supporters. By 1938 he judged his situation so precarious that he emigrated to the USA. In this situation, Scharl joined a private circle of like-minded upper middle-class professionals and intellectuals who shared his rejection of the regime. In their regular gatherings, they combined a culture of music and modern art with reading foreign newspapers and listening to broadcasts from abroad. These 'inner emigrants' appreciated the images of veiled opposition Scharl painted since 1933. Some of these may have served as conversation pieces at their meetings. Alongside standard anti-war figures such as killed or mutilated soldiers, a shackled prisoner, and obnoxious commanders, they feature apocalyptic beasts and horrified men.

'The Newspaper Reader' (*Der Zeitungsleser*) of 1935 personifies the anxiety that only a like-minded viewer could have appreciated. His keen attention and shocked expression leave no doubt about the troubling news, but the garbled, cryptic lettering on the front and back pages of the paper forms no words. In 1936, the year of Germany's accelerated remilitarization, Scharl painted *Tricephalus* (*Dreikopf*), an enthroned three-headed warrior in patched-up hat and dress who is clutching the handle of a sword. His three faces have their eyes closed. The predator fangs of the middle head are dripping with blood. From the two lateral profiles, knots of serpents dart out. One of them wears Hindenburg's, the other Hitler's moustache. The artist must have

rated paintings such as this compromising enough to hide them away in the basement in anticipation of a house search, which however never happened. He overestimated the political risk he took with his allusive imagery.

/2.2 RESISTANCE FROM THE LEFT

/2.2.1 HANS GRUNDIG

In the Weimar Republic, Hans Grundig had been an activist member of the German Communist Party, a graduate of the 'Marxist Workers' School' of his home town Dresden. He devoted his work to a wide range of the Party's cultural activities, concentrated in the local chapter of the ASSO (see Chapter 3.1/1.3.2), with little attention to the art market. Before and after 1933, he lived on public assistance. Grundig's linocuts and flyleaves were sold for a pittance at assemblies and demonstrations or published in the Party press. In his 'class struggle pictures' of 1932, he responded to the misery of the Depression with the standard social critique pursued by leftist artists. For him, gallery painting was just another medium of agitation. As a member of the travelling theater company 'Left Turn' (*Linkskurve*), where he worked not only as a draftsman but also as an actor, Grundig found an apt environment for the politicization of his art. The participating actors, writers, painters, and musicians used to gather at his apartment. After their activity was curtailed in 1933, they still kept in touch.

Grundig's communist prominence on Dresden's pre-1933 art scene did not prevent his admission to the Reich Chamber of Art upon its foundation in September 1933. Only in 1936, after repeated house searches and detentions, was he expelled. Working for a circle of like-minded friends and fellow artists who visited his atelier, he produced a body of c. sixty dry point etchings, some of which he even managed to send abroad. In these etchings he moved from his pre-1933 social critique to allegorical denunciations of National Socialist oppression, either by proverbial slurs or by animal fables. Different from the allusive imagery of non-leftist artists, they were full of visual violence. Grundig opted for this allegorical mode not as a camouflage, but as an alternative to the illustrative topicality pursued by his wife, Lea Grundig, with whom he worked in a friendly competition on shared themes.

Between 1935 and 1938, Grundig summed up his condemnation of the regime in a large triptych with the apocalyptic title *The Millennium* (*Das tausendjährige Reich*), a spoof on the Hitler State's non-Biblical self-designation. It shows the destruction of a temporary reign of ostensible peace, but not by the righteous, as in Revelations 10, but of deranged idol-worshippers cavorting below anarchist black flags. Flying under glowing skies, airplane squads are bombing the city into craters and ruins, starting the all-out war that ends the apocalyptic interim. A block of men on the margin of the left-hand panel designate the Communist resistance as the steadfast believers of

Revelations 20:4. In the right-hand panel Lea Grundig appears as a fearless witness. In the predella, literally underground, she reappears asleep next to her husband. *The Millennium* was Grundig's magnum opus, a hidden picture only accessible to trusted friends. Nevertheless, its topicality would not have been apparent to a house search team. To place his wife with eyes wide open in the midst of the catastrophe may have been Grundig's way of acknowledging her more realistic and hence more risky pictorial approach.

/2.2.2 LEA GRUNDIG

Lea Grundig, Hans Grundig's wife, joined him in becoming a member of the KPD in 1926 and likewise participated in the multiple cultural undertakings of the Party with a steady stream of graphic work. Despite her visibility in pre-1933 Party culture, she succeeded in concealing her former membership from the Gestapo during several detentions and interrogations. Remarkably, the Gestapo surveillance she had to endure until her incarceration in 1938 did not focus on her work, but on her connections with the Party's subversive network. Her copious police files[172] record her most fleeting encounters, but never mention her clandestine artwork. When, at the end of 1938, both artists were permanently imprisoned—she for her efforts at emigrating to Palestine, he for suspected treason—Lea Grundig had assembled a body of unmistakable anti-regime etchings with impunity, which is even more astounding since they were meant for surreptitious distribution.

Because she was Jewish, Lea Grundig, unlike her husband, was barred from membership of the Reich Chamber of Art and hence had no working license. She thus ran a particular risk by creating her etchings in tandem with him. Her retrospective account of her friendly competition with her husband on similar subjects is hard to verify, since none of their etchings bear matching titles. Hans Grundig's fables and allegories lack the topical pertinence and tragic sarcasm of Lea Grundig's hands-on scenes of life under National Socialist oppression. The competition she recalls may refer to this principled difference in the two artists' conception of resistance art. Had her openly illustrative etchings been discovered, they would have added corroborating evidence to the Gestapo's inconclusive dossier about her subversive ties.

Surely for protective reasons Lea Grundig did not inscribe the telling titles on her etchings at the time she made them, but added them only after 1945, when she grouped the etchings into five titled cycles suggestive of her wide-ranging topical concerns: *Under the Swastika*, *War is Threatening*, *Women's Life*, *The Jew is Guilty*, and *About the War in Spain*. She thereby turned them from devises of political resistance into historical testimonies against the defeated Hitler State. But even without the titles, their topicality is hard to miss. Lea Grundig dared to push the limits of resistance farther than any other artist still working in the country. While her husband's metaphorical

or apocalyptic imagery leaves no hope for any struggle, she adhered to the axiomatic communist assurance of eventual victory against all odds. One of her etchings shows an upright standing man looking up defiantly, although he is immobilized by ropes tied all around his body. It's title *He will free himself (Er wird sich befreien) contradicts what can be seen*.

/ 2.2.3 KÄTHE KOLLWITZ

Käthe Kollwitz, the most famous woman artist of the Weimar Republic, a left-leaning Social Democrat, had taken a high profile in the anti-war movement, in working-class causes, and in public initiatives of support for the Soviet Union. In early 1933, she joined Heinrich Mann and other prominent intellectuals in signing an appeal to Socialist and Communist workers for unity in the elections of March 5. In retaliation, Prussian Education Minister Bernhard Rust threatened to close the Prussian Academy of Arts unless both resigned their membership. They did, but Kollwitz retained her salary and her studio for a while. Later she moved into an atelier building where other dissenting artists had taken refuge, protected by a conformist colleague. However, all her efforts to exhibit were thwarted. When in July 1936 the Soviet daily *Isvestia* published an interview with her, Gestapo officers threatened her with detention in a concentration camp unless she publicly recanted. For another eventuality like this, Kollwitz prepared herself for suicide by carrying a flask of poison on her body.

Kollwitz' activist anti-war stance was personally driven by the death in action of one of her two sons in World War I. Focused on the theme of women shielding or mourning their male children, it culminated in a pair of over-life-size granite sculptures that portrayed herself and her husband kneeling in grief, which were to be placed on her son's grave in a German war cemetery at Esseren in Belgium. Financed by the German and Prussian governments and five years in the making, in May 1932 the sculptures were on view in the entrance hall of the Berlin National Gallery to great acclaim. That Kollwitz should have submitted the plaster model of the mourning mother for the sculpture exhibition of the Prussian Academy in the fall of 1936, however, was tantamount to a defiant gesture. It was the year when the military occupation of the Rhineland, and the law to lengthen compulsory military service from two to three years' time, were stepping up German war preparations. Kollwitz' ultimate anti-war statement jarred with this belligerence. Predictably, the authorities removed the sculpture from the show before it opened.

The second work Kollwitz submitted was accepted: a small-scale bronze relief for a joint tomb of her husband and herself, completed at the end of March 1936. It featured the face of a sleeping youth emerging from the protective cover of his mother's coat. When the artist four months later prepared for suicide under duress, the serene image acquired a sinister topicality. In November 1938, under the impact of the funeral

of ostracized sculptor Ernst Barlach she had attended the month before, Kollwitz created the even smaller bronze relief *Lament*, a face with eyes closed, half covered by both hands. Taken together, the two reliefs stand out as testimonies of the defiant resignation with which Kollwitz responded to the coincidence of political oppression, curtailed public visibility, and advancing age. Her situation made her feel to be at the end of both her life and her career and impaired her will to work. To openly express such feelings was the last resistance stand for her to take.

/ 2.3 HIDDEN PICTURES

/ 2.3.1 MAGNUS ZELLER'S *TOTAL STATE*

At the end of World War I, Magnus Zeller had been a self-professed revolutionary artist. By 1935, he led a dangerous double life. As a member of the Reich Chamber of Art in good standing, he showed and sold conventional, ideologically innocuous landscapes and still lives, while in the secrecy of his atelier in a village outside Berlin, he painted several large pictures denouncing the regime. Already before 1933, Zeller had joined the 'Combat League for German Culture' (see Chapter 3.1 / 1.3.2). Under the new government, he continued to be active in art politics. Ideologically, he subscribed to Alfred Rosenberg's 1933 booklet *Revolution in the Pictorial Arts?* Politically, he acted as a liaison between the 'Combat League' and the Berlin Secession. In his correspondence with his main collector, Karl Vollpracht, on the other hand, Zeller disparaged the 'Combat League's' tenets and scolded the expulsion of the Secession's Jewish members. In 1934, he stopped his art-political activities, but his career continued to run smoothly.

Starting in 1933, Zeller filled a pigskin volume with a series of drawings discrepant with his work for show and sale. They were mordant condemnations of the new regime, only to be viewed by his family—who named it *Evil Book* (*Böses Buch*)—and some friends. He developed four of these drawings into paintings hidden at his home. Their style does not resemble that of the works he made for show and sale. The genre of political caricature Zeller applied to them was designed for the public sphere, at odds with the high-risk privacy required for the situation. Total opposition required total retreat. Zeller's was the extreme case of painting in secret or in hiding, a situation he shared with artists as diverse as Emil Nolde and Otto Dix. His pictorial wrath seems all the fiercer as it stemmed from his disappointment with the regime whose art policies he had actively supported before. His accessible work gave no inkling of his subversive opinions.

Two of Zeller's four oppositional paintings date from before the outbreak of the war, both from 1938. They are quasi-apocalyptic condemnations of the Hitler State. One depicts its protagonists from Hitler on down, herded together by a huge devil on their

way to hell, the other a colossal statue enthroned between red flags on a wheeled platform, which throngs of slaves are dragging forward under the whiplashes of guards in black uniforms. The first, a small watercolor titled *Entry into Hades*, does not show a migration of the dead into the netherworld as in Greek mythology, but a mass descent into the inferno as in Christian iconography. Hitler and his chort appear before the ruins of a war as walking dead in various stages of decomposition, the leaders turning into skeletons. The original title of the second, a large oil painting, was *The Total State*, a polemical inversion of the fascist term denoting the concurrence of the ruled with their rulers into a brutal spectacle of ancient autocracy. After 1945, Zeller changed it to *The Hitler State* (*Der Hitlerstaat*) and painted swastikas into the flags.

/ 2.3.2 OTTO DIX' *FLANDERS*

In 1933, Otto Dix' highly visible participation in the Weimar anti-war movement had netted him instant dismissal from his professorship at the Dresden Academy and prominent exposure in several defamatory shows. Nonetheless he managed to become a member in good standing of the Reich Chamber of Art, so that he could make his living with innocuous landscape paintings. All the while, Dix produced several pictures of opposition to the National Socialist regime. He stored them in the private atelier he had kept at Dresden so that they would not be exposed to a house search of his home at Randegg Castle, where he had moved in the fall of 1933. Like Grundig and Zeller, he showed them only to a few confidants or friends. In 1933, Dix greeted Hitler's rise to power with a large oil painting titled *The Seven Deadly Sins (Die Sieben Todsünden)*, featuring a procession of monstrous figures, one of whom hides his face behind a mask in Hitler's likeness. The painting still represents the new regime as a carnivalesque spook that will go away. It diminishes Hitler's stature by ridiculing him as a childlike dwarf.

In 1934, however, Dix became more serious in his opposition. He decided to follow up on his famous anti-war picture *Trench* of 1921, the centerpiece of the defamatory exhibition *Mirror Images of Decay* held at Dresden town hall in September 1933, with the equally ambitious oil painting *Flanders*, which he completed only two years later. It shows three surviving German soldiers emerging from a ravaged battlefield. In the distance, another soldier is crawling through the mud. *Flanders* illustrates the prologue and the conclusion of the widely-read pacifist novel *Under Fire* (*Le Feu*) by French communist author Henri Barbusse, which had appeared in 1917. In 1924, in time for the pacifist commemorations of the start of World War I, the author had written the preface for a small book with reproductions of Dix' etching series *The War*. By 1935, the year he died, he was a leading activist of the international peace movement. During the two years Dix was working on *Flanders*, the German government reintroduced the draft on March 16, 1935, and extended it from one to two years on August 24, 1936.

On March 7, 1936, German troops occupied the Rhineland in violation of the Versailles Peace Treaty. And on July 18, 1936, the Spanish Civil War broke out, with German troops soon to fight on Franco's side.

True to the "vision" evoked in the prologue of *Under Fire, Flanders* depicts "a great livid plain unrolled, which to their seeing is made of mud and water, while figures appear and fast fix themselves to the surface of it, all blinded and borne down with filth [...] And it seems to them that these are soldiers. The streaming plain, seamed and seared with long parallel canals and scooped into water-holes, is an immensity, and these castaways who strive to exhume themselves from it are legion."(173) In the concluding chapter, titled "Dawn," the survivors draw a pacifist lesson from their experience: "Between two masses of gloomy clouds a tranquil gleam emerges; and that line of light, so black-edged and beset, brings even so its proof that the sun is there."(174) The three soldiers in the foreground of the painting are variations of the mourning soldiers' busts at the foot of the cross in Ernst Barlach's wooden war memorial of 1929 at Magdeburg Cathedral, which in March 1933 had been removed by a National Socialist-dominated church council. The double loop of barbed wire forming a crown of thorns confirms the reference to the crucifixion. Thus, Dix not only built on his own body of art derived from his experience as a combat soldier, as in his earlier battle paintings, but inserted his new work into the artistic and literary contributions to the current peace movement. While Barlach was lying low under unremitting oppression (see Chapter 3.2 / 2.3.3), and Barbusse was riding high as a spokesman of the anti-fascist pacifism of the Left, he put his opposition on record in the secrecy of his atelier.

/ 2.3.3 RUDOLF SCHLICHTER'S *BLIND POWER*

For eight years, Rudolf Schlichter, a founding member of the German Communist Party in 1919 and of the 'Red Group' in 1924, had been active in various cultural undertakings of the Left, but in 1927 he reversed himself. He returned to the Catholic Church, joined a circle of nationalist conservatives around the writer Ernst Jünger, and abandoned his expressionist style of social critique. In 1933, he greeted the National Socialist takeover as an opportunity to revalidate his newly-embraced realism as a suitable style for the cultural renewal he expected from what he termed the "national revolution." When the Reich Chamber of Art was founded in September of that year, he co-authored a position paper rejecting the resurgent invocation of that term in defense of modern art. Yet in 1934, Schlichter fell into disgrace with the authorities, to the point of a temporary expulsion from the Chamber and a trial for his allegedly "un-National Socialist" sexual lifestyle. Finally, in 1937, eighteen works of his were removed from public collections, four of them to be included in the 'Degenerate Art' exhibition. Only now did he turn against the regime.

In January 1932, Schlichter had exhibited a nearly life-size oil painting titled *Greatness and Doom* (*Größe und Untergang*).[175] It shows a half-nude warrior holding a sword and a hammer, striding forward to the brink of a rock from which he will crash at the next step because the drawn visor of his helmet prevents him from seeing where he is going. Inside his opened body a small nude couple in a sexual engagement is tormenting his entrails. In a poem he wrote at the time, Schlichter speaks of a warrior as a conflicted man suffering from an "evil breed of [...] hellish evil creatures." They eat away at his "manly chaste heart" so that he is "exposed to the disaster of strange, unknown desires."[176] The warrior thus appears as a moral emblem for the inner and outer threats to the artist's self-fulfillment. It is as such an emblem that Schlichter chose a watercolor version of the painting for the cover design of the first volume of his lengthy autobiography, titled *Recalcitrant Flesch* (*Das widerspenstige Fleisch*), which is largely devoted to his lifelong obsession with sex, even in its perverted forms and its destructive impact on his work, much of which had dwelt on themes of sexual depravity.

During the first three years of the new regime, Schlichter kept the painting out of public view. But when in June 1935 the Reich Chamber of Art used his autobiography as part of the evidence in a drawn-out investigation that ended in his temporary ouster, he reworked it in a few decisive places, retitled it *End of Blind Power* (*Ende Blinder Macht*), and identified the warrior figure as Mars, the god of war. The two most salient alterations are the clefs that open a sight through the closed visor, and the title *Laws* on one of the volumes the warrior carries under his arm. They invest Mars with the attributes of Athena, the war goddess of the arts and law. A burning city behind him marks him as the destructive rather than the constructive of the two Greek deities of war. In a letter dated June 9, 1935 to Ernst Jünger, Schlichter owns up to the dissenting significance of the reworked painting,[177] which Jünger confirmed in a letter of January 14, 1936 with the remark: "I suspect that there is a way of painting and drawing that will immediately lead to tyrannicide."[178] Nevertheless, in 1936 Schlichter put the picture on show in two Stuttgart exhibitions of his work. In the following year, when earlier works of his were on view in the 'Degenerate Art' show, the Reich Chamber of Art reprimanded him for this. Henceforth, he kept the painting under wraps.

/ 3 POLEMICS FROM ABROAD

/ 3.1 PRINTED PROPAGANDA

/ 3.1.1 PUBLIC LIMITS

Prague, Paris, and London were the three capitals of democratic states where exiled German artists sought to strike back at the National Socialist regime. In Prague and Paris, they were able to rely on small groups of German-speaking artists for

support. In Paris, the Popular Front movement, and later government, offered them a sympathetic public forum. In London, appeasement policies curtailed their activities. In 1933, Prague became the first base of artists' resistance from abroad, because it hosted the foreign bureaus of the Social Democratic and Communist Parties after their prohibition at home. Until Czechoslovakia's annexation on March 15, 1939, German emigrés were able to issue newspapers and journals where artists found space to publish their polemical prints and drawings. In Paris, it took the new, inclusive cultural policy of the Popular Front to pool the political dissent of German exile artists into organizing as a group, where leftists, although in the minority, took the lead. Prime Minister Léon Blum's liberalized foreign resident regulations legitimized their political initiatives, which fitted into the ongoing resurgence of anti-fascist culture.

The wish of German exile artists to engage in political opposition to the National Socialist regime in order to discredit it in the eyes of foreign audiences depended on two pre-conditions: a supportive community or institution backing them and access to print media to disseminate their graphic works. They needed the public sphere to activate their dissent into resistance. Political organizations of the Left in Prague and Paris, partly under the oversight of Comintern cultural official Willi Münzenberg, provided opportunities to reach the public through print media or exhibitions. Other public manifestations, such as the exhibition *Olympics under Dictatorship*, held in Amsterdam in August 1936, were independent of the Left. Recondite or vigorous, in order to become operative artists' resistance had to be embedded in supportive environments, large or small, be it the anti-fascist exile network in Argentina, where Clément Moreau found his place, be it the minuscule committee affiliated with the organization 'Aid for Spain' at Porza in the Tessin, to which Reinhard Schmidhagen contributed his woodcut cycles.

Whenever attention-grabbing shows augmented the public impact of graphic work by German emigrant artists in opposition, it attracted diplomatic interventions on the part of the German embassies in their countries of refuge. Whether such interventions were successful or not, the ensuing controversies validated their political viability. They started in Czechoslovakia, the country most vulnerable to German pressure, with a request by the German embassy to remove several photomontages by John Heartfield from an exhibition held at Prague in April 1934, a request that was partly granted, partly refused. Heartfield addressed it in yet another photomontage added to the show as a defiant exposure of German oppression. The most spectacular intervention hit the Amsterdam exhibition *Olympics under Dictatorship*, an international show denouncing the Olympics in Berlin, in which several German exile artists participated. Repeated remonstrations by the German ambassador forced the removal of nineteen of their works and prompted the Dutch government to cancel the Rotterdam venue of the show a few days after it had opened.

/ 3.1.2 GRAPHIC IMAGERY

Since exile artists had to rely on the print medium to disseminate their oppositional public propaganda, their choice was limited to illustrations in black-and-white. This automatic choice of traditional over modern art suited the long-standing preference of artists on the Left, who acted at the forefront of resistance from abroad. Publishing ventures, though numerous, had small print runs and hence a limited impact on public opinion, quite different from the literature published by German exile writers regardless of their language barrier. For these, print was the only medium, whereas for artists, it was either a specialty or a sideline. As a result, no exile artists matched the stature of Thomas and Heinrich Mann, Anna Seghers, or Bertolt Brecht, writers whose widely-published books allowed for long accounts and arguments, and who could network with international colleagues to foment public debates.

The most straightforward polemical prints were illustrations of atrocities perpetrated by the regime, sometimes based on artists' own experiences, such as in Karl Schwesig's and Hanns Kralik's, sometimes on published reports, such as Clément Moreau's, complemented by caricatures of National Socialist leaders and personnel. After his escape to France, Karl Schwesig, a member of the KPD and of the communist-led ARBKD before 1933, recorded his sufferings in a SA torture cellar in a series of fifty drawings, some of which were exhibited in 1936 and 1937 in Brussels, Amsterdam, and Moscow. The German government retaliated by stripping him of his cizizenship. Working from his imagination based on what he had heard and read, Clément Moreau, moored in faraway Argentina, published a stream of linocuts depicting National Socialist oppression in left-wing newspapers and journals.

A few exile artists devised a non-illustrative agitational imagery with symbolic or expressive implications, but always with sufficient thematic clarity to suit their polemical aims. Their freedom of expression and their quest for public impact shunned the allusive mode that some oppositional artists back in Germany shared with some anti-fascist artists in France and Spain. Gert Arntz applied the style he had developed for Otto Neurath's institutions of pictorial statistics in Vienna and Amsterdam, (see Chapter 3.3 / 2.2.2) in order to give a semi-caricaturist appearance of analytic objectivity to the woodcuts and linocuts he published in communist newspapers of several countries. On the other hand, Reinhard Schmidhagen's two woodcut cycles of 1938 about the Spanish Civil War, entitled *Guernica* and *The Other Front* (*Die andere Front*), consist of large-scale compositions of unspecific victims with emotional emphasis.

/ 3.1.3 CLÉMENT MOREAU

When the graphic artist Clément Moreau, a life-long participant in leftist group

undertakings, had to leave Switzerland in 1935 for his lack of German citizenship, he obtained a 'Nansen Passport' (a travel document for stateless persons), which allowed him to emigrate to Buenos Aires. Here he joined a community of German expatriates who tried to counteract German diplomacy. As a drawing teacher at the German Pestalozzi School, established in 1934 as a counterweight to the government-sponsored Goethe School, he co-founded an anti-fascist aid committee called 'The Other Germany.' Headed by August Siemsen, a former social democratic Reichstag deputy, this committee grew into a veritable cultural organization by and for German emigrants in Argentina. Beyond helping German refugees to settle, it was the committee's self-declared objective to denounce the 'Third Reich' in Argentine public opinion. Moreau oversaw the cultural programs organized for this purpose, including public readings, chant performances, and even a cabaret show. In 1937, he quit his teaching job to devote himself to running them full-time.

Moreau's prolific output of prints and drawings for the two German-language journals *Argentine Daily* (*Argentinisches Tageblatt*) and *The Other Germany* (*Das andere Deutschland*) culminated in a series of 107 linocuts issued as a booklet under the title *Night over Germany* (*Nacht über Deutschland*), a step-by-step pictorial narrative of a refugee's fate, apt for the purpose of the aid committee. The series starts with the contrast between a mass meeting of conformist listeners, standing under poles with loudspeakers and swastika banners, and a small group of dissidents, listening behind closed doors to a foreign broadcast and betrayed by a neighbor. The listeners are caught by the Gestapo, some tortured or strangled in prison, but one of them escapes and ends up stranded abroad. The narrative is an unmitigated account of suffering and murder, of bureaucratic callousness at home and abroad, unbeholden to the endurance creed of Communist resistance. It highlights the permanence of mistreatment on both sides of the border, from oppression to indifference. The final print shows the anguished face of the survivor crying out for help.

In 1937, Moreau started to work on a satirically illustrated sequence of excerpts from Hitler's *My Struggle*, to be serialized in the journal *Argentina Libre*. He assembled forty-three of them in a booklet with the same title, covering Hitler's youth and early political career. The series contrasts Hitler's self-confident enhancement of his biography into a course of destiny, leading from childhood to leadership, with the clueless misery of his actual origins, the brutality of his war service and the machinations of his ascendancy as a party leader. From a sorry figure of subservient conformity, Hitler develops into an unprincipled monster. Moreau may have based his illustration not just on his own derogatory response of Hitler's book, but on Rudolf Olden's and Konrad Heiden's critical Hitler biographies, which were published in 1935 and 1936 respectively to counter the international reputation *My Struggle* had acquired by then.

/3.2 JOHN HEARTFIELD'S 'WAR AGAINST HITLER'

/3.2.1 ACTIVITIES IN PRAGUE

The National Socialists' government takeover on January 30, 1933, instantly drove the staff of the *Arbeiter-Illustrierte Zeitung* into exile in Prague, and Heartfield followed two-and-a-half months later. Already on March 15, 1933, they resumed publication of the *AIZ* with a print run of only 12,000 copies, a steep drop from the 500,000 it had reached in its successful pursuit of a national working-class readership at home. The change of venue reduced the *AIZ*'s readership potential to the German-speaking minority of the Czechoslovak population, who would have no vital interest in the fundamental political issues of class struggle and revolution against a democratic government that guided the illustrated weekly while it had appeared in Germany. Its habitual attacks against Social Democracy were no longer relevant. Accordingly, the *AIZ*'s' prolific polemic against Hitler and his party became its top theme. It changed from electoral propaganda to the denigration of the Hitler State, launched from a neighboring country that was under the rising threat of annexation because of its German-speaking areas. As a result, Heartfield's work provoked mounting protests by the German embassy.

Rather than denouncing Hitler and his party as stooges of big capital, a key theme while Hitler was not yet in power, Heartfield now focused on the new regime's domestic oppression and international belligerence, while glorifying the Soviet Union as a bulwark of resistance against it. In this counterpoint of satirical and adulatory imagery, the USSR replaced the working class. Heartfield's transformations of the swastika, now Germany's state emblem, into a rotating tool of torture or execution were diplomatically most offensive. He collaged it using four blood-dripping executioner's axes, a frequently used prop, or short wooden beams, nailed at a right angle to the four ends of the cross that Christ shoulders on his way to Calvary. His photomontage of a packed crowd filling a giant arm with clenched fist raised in the communist salute was published in 1934 to invoke an "anti-fascist front," according to the caption. It illustrates the Comintern's 'United Front' strategy of ongoing revolutionary struggle, announced and enacted in the two failed workers' uprisings of Asturias and Vienna that year.

The *AIZ*'s increased dependency on the Comintern's international bureau, under Münzenberg's direction, amplified the coverage of Heartfield's photomontages to issues of its world-wide strategy. Now he had to deal with the military interventions of several 'fascist' regimes, from Italy's conquest of Ethiopia in 1935 to Germany's and Italy's armed support of Franco in the Spanish Civil War and on to Japan's invasion of China in 1937. As a counterweight to this world-wide military upsurge, his celebration of the Soviet Union changed from extolling its economic and social progress to hailing its technical and military strength. His sustained comparison between Soviet

achievements and German failures was meant to encourage readers to rally to the Left. This pro-Soviet triumphalism culminated in 1934, the year of the 'United Front,' with the publication of a special *AIZ* issue commemorating the 17th anniversary of the Russian revolution. Heartfield's cover featured a giant worker's face, looking upwards with an upbeat smirk, illustrating the message of the caption: "A New Man—Master of a New World" *(Ein neuer Mensch—Herr einer neuen Welt).*

/ 3.2.2 **PROVOKING THE REGIME**

Once in Prague, Heartfield linked up with Czech liberal art circles in sympathy with his views. In April 1934, the Mánes Artists' Association included in its 'International Caricature Exhibition,' a collection of his photomontages which attacked the National Socialist regime so severely that German ambassador Dr. Koch protested to the Czechoslovak Foreign Ministry, demanding the removal of seven of them. The ambassador's intervention demonstrated that an artist could engage a dictatorship. In September of the same year, Heartfield was deprived of his German citizenship. The *German Newspaper Bohemia* (*Deutsche Zeitung Bohemia*), a paper of Czechoslovakia's German-speaking minority, played the incident up, fanning the conflict between nationalities that Germany would eventually invoke as a pretext for its annexation of the country. Heartfield promptly retaliated with yet another photomontage denouncing this "Intervention of the Third Reich," as its title said. It shows an exhibition wall exposing the bricks of a prison wall in the spots left bare by the unhung works. "The more pictures they hang away, the more visible does reality become," reads the inscription. The photocollage testified to Heartfield's unyielding resistance.

As it became difficult for Heartfield to obtain documentary photographs from Germany as materials for his collages, he fell back on published photographs from the compliant German press, mocking their propaganda messages by scathing quotations of their titles. He developed this technique of pictorial debunking into his primary device of argumentative attack. Some efforts were made to carry the attack back to the regime. Miniature editions of the *AIZ* were smuggled into Germany, sometimes camouflaged as classic pocketbooks. Postcards featuring Heartfield's photomontages were mailed to government and Party officials. Even postage stamps were faked by substituting familiar motifs with anti-fascist ones. Such interventions depended on Communist party agencies steered from Prague and feeding into the precarious activities of small resistance networks back home. Their impact was minimal, however. No incidents of distribution or discovery of any copies are on record.

The steady surveillance to which the German government subjected the activities of Wieland Herzfelde's and Willi Münzenberg's publishing conglomerate in Prague, and the work of John Heartfield in particular, shows how seriously it took their challenge. It was, however, less concerned with their subversive impact at home than with

their foreign propaganda effect.[179] Since Heartfield delayed his emigration until mid-April 1933 under orders from the Party, it seems that the Gestapo did not target him until he had started work in Prague, where he joined the editorial group of the *AIZ* only after the first issue had been published. It was the resistance from abroad which preoccupied the German authorities. Already on May 24, 1933, ambassador Dr. Koch reported about Heartfield's activities to the Gestapo in Berlin, which started to bug Heartfield's telephone in Prague. In November 1937, the SS daily *The Black Corps* (*Das Schwarze Korps*) even produced an anti-Heartfield poster based on one of his own photomontages. The SS Security Service's 'Dossier about Emigrants' Press and Literature' includes his name.

/ 3.2.3 **INTERNATIONAL FAME**

In the spring of 1935, a huge exhibition featuring 150 of Heartfield's photomontages was staged at the communist Maison de la Culture in Paris. It made him an international star of anti-fascist activism in the arts. For the preparation of the show, he had to travel from Prague to Paris on a detour and under cover, as if he were a secret agent. Heartfield acquired his new fame for two reasons: first, for using art as a self-declared anti-fascist propaganda tool, and second, for validating photomontage as an art form on a par with others. On May 2, the evening program of the exhibition featured ten artists and writers, including Tristan Tzara, Louis Aragon, and Léon Moussignac, in a podium discussion on the question "Is Photomontage an Art?". One year later, Aragon published his essay "Heartfield, Or Revolutionary Beauty," although by now Heartfield's work was reoriented to the Comintern's new Popular Front policy, which placed the class-transcending anti-fascist struggle at the top of the agenda over revolutionary insurrection. In any event, he hailed Heartfield's photomontage as a fulfillment of realism's political potential.

In the summer of 1936, the Comintern's change of policy became manifest in the renaming of the *Arbeiter-Illustrierte* to *Volks-Illustrierte* (*People's Illustrated Journal*). The first issue with the new title featured Heartfield's photomontage *Liberty Herself is fighting within their Ranks* (*Die Freiheit selbst kämpft in ihren Reihen*), an adaptation of Delacroix' iconic painting *Liberty is Guiding the People* of 1830, with the figure of the top-headed bourgeois outside the margin (see Chapter 2.2 / 2.2.2). Accordingly, the newly-titled journal changed its coverage. Its denunciations of the National Socialist regime were focused on its war preparations. They took their place among international armed conflicts such as the Spanish Civil War and the Italian colonial war in North Africa, and were counterpoised with reassuring images of Soviet military power. In his photomontages dealing with these themes, Heartfield shed much of his daring pictorial short-circuits in favor of more straightforward pictorial settings whose mocking significance depended on satirical contradictions between image and

inscription. Quoting familiar symbols and proverbs was his way of moving with the transition from revolutionary art to art for the people.

Eventually, Heartfield's manifold international undertakings—beyond the *AIZ/VZ*—netted him an unparalleled reputation for merging artistic innovation and political poignancy for the anti-fascist struggle. At the end of the decade, he had become such a celebrity that a show of his work, held from December 4 to 22, 1939, at the Arcade Gallery in London, was advertised as 'One Man's War Against Hitler.' In retrospect, Heartfield would have to cede this title to George Grosz, whose pictorial assault on Hitler had no organizational backing and found no resonance until the start of World War II (see Chapter 2.3 / 3.3.1). While Heartfield's political resistance was embedded in communist party culture, Grosz had become a party apostate who broadened his anti-fascism into anti-totalitarianism and hence, like André Breton, was no longer able to take sides. Since the start of his exile in the USA, Grosz refused Wieland Herzfelde's entreaties to join Heartfield in contributing to anti-fascist publications. His *Interregnum* appeared in 1936, the same year the *Volks-Illustrierte* was given its new name. The totalitarian equation and the dismissal of artists' resistance Grosz represented in this work made it unsuitable for the anti-fascist struggle.

/ 3.3 OSKAR KOKOSCHKA'S LEADERSHIP

/ 3.3.1 THE TURN TO POLITICS

Unlike Heartfield, whose activist resistance against the National Socialist regime followed from his life-long adherence to Communism, in 1933 Oskar Kokoschka harbored no political engagement that might have programmed his resistance from the start. It is for just this reason that he came to be recognized as the leading resistance artist during the following six years. In a letter of September 1933, he still wrote, rather cynically: "It seems to me, I am against the new times, against Democracy, against Liberal-Social Communism, and for the stone age."[180] It was the National Socialist clampdown on modern art, including the instant removal of Kokoschka's works from the Dresden art collections, which prompted him to adopt a consistent strategy of denouncing the regime. Starting in late 1933 with the essay "Totem and Tabu: Mental Exercises of a Cynic," he advanced a critical assessment of National Socialist cultural policy in eight literary texts which, though unpublished, informed his frequent public interventions.[181] His work, however, remained unaffected by his political activism.

Kokoschka's move from Vienna to Prague in 1934 was no emigration. With his long-established prestige in the art world of the city, he was soon granted Czechoslovak citizenship, which spared him the political restrictions imposed on German emigrants. His social networks, including several dealers and collectors, enhanced his public profile. His cooperation with cultural institutions, especially with the 'Union for Law

and Liberty' and with the 'Bert-Brecht Club,' a group of leftist German emigrants with Heartfield as a fellow member, enlarged his public platform. In March 1936, he even gave a speech at the Brussels Peace Congress as a member of the Czechoslovak delegation. The target of Kokoschka's interventions was not only the National Socialist art policy and its political preconditions, but also the authoritarian turn of Austrian governments—starting in 1934 with Chancellor Engelbert Dollfuß's bloody suppression of a workers' uprising at Vienna—which in 1938 predisposed a later government to acquiesce in the country's German annexation.

By the time of his 50th birthday on March 7, 1936, Kokoschka had become such an anti-fascist celebrity within artistic culture that Willi Münzenberg's Comintern-sponsored journal *Counter-Attack* (*Der Gegen-Angriff*) acclaimed him, and the Vienna daily *Der Wiener Tag* featured a long article from his hand that summarized his views, not only about art, but about society and politics. One year later, a group of mainly leftist German exile artists in Prague founded a 'Kokoschka League' ('Kokoschka-Bund') for the promotion of a "genuine German humanist [and] progressive art."(182) Although they did not offer him membership—probably because they knew that he did not share their leftist politics—he permitted them to use him as a figurehead. Finally, after his escape from Prague to London in 1938, Kokoschka joined Heartfield and others in launching the 'Free German Culture League' ('Freier Deutscher Kulturbund'), of which he was elected co-president in 1941. By the end of the decade, he had become one of the top representatives of German exile culture.

/ 3.3.2 **POLITICAL WRITINGS**

With historical acumen, Kokoschka ascribed the origins of the current political crisis to the measures governments worldwide had been taking to remedy the effects of the Depression, which in his view favored rearmament over social welfare and were flanked by ideologies proclaiming the "bankruptcy of democracy, the myth of the state, [and] the restoration of hierarchy."(183) Kokoschka was convinced that this process was likely to end in a "war of all against all."(184) It was not merely due to the operational mode of capital, but to its political mismanagement. To counter the "general ethical failure"(185) of the powers-that-be, Kokoschka advocated an international reform of public elementary schooling that would instill peaceable reason in the general population from childhood on. To regard the onslaught of irrationalism against reason as a historic predicament was politically nondescript, however. It distinguished Kokoschka's liberalism from Heartfield's Communism. Kokoschka conceived of education as independent of political systems, yet to charge it with the restoration of reason was contingent on democracy. This de-facto democratic posture netted him his wide appeal.

Starting in 1935 at the latest, Kokoschka used the term "totalitarian state" not only on the National Socialist regime, but any kind of oppressive regime. Without naming

Italy or the Soviet Union, he applied it to both "fascism and vulgar Marxism."[186] Their populist origins, he argued, resulted from the rise of democracy after World War I. He was not concerned with the historical operation of totalitarian governance. What he singled out was its reliance on a mandate from an unenlightened populace accepting oppressive order. An internationally standardized elementary education would undo the populist pseudo-legitimacy of totalitarianism. Kokoschka's diagnosis was as accurate as his prescription was imaginary. Convinced that the state-directed economy of totalitarian states depended on accelerated arms production, he predicted that the quest for *Lebensraum* (living space) by a "purely totalitarian state" would "lead to total war."[187]

In a lengthy unpublished text Kokoschka drafted in response to the 'Degenerate Art' show, he applied his condemnation of populism to the widely-held belief that the plight of modern art in the Third Reich was due to the personal prejudice of Hitler, an uneducated simpleton with a failed ambition to become an artist—the "house painter," (*Anstreicher*), as he was commonly smeared.[188] From a detailed analysis of Hitler's address at the opening of the 'House of German Art' in Munich, Kokoschka construed the argument that a "simple man from the people," swept to power by "a parliamentary plebiscite or a military putsch,"[189] had been empowered to impose, "in his simple German jargon,"[190]his resentments on the artistic culture of the country. In his contemptuous put-down of Hitler's speech, Kokoschka skipped the question of how much the dictator was able rely on popular assent. When he chastized a misguided popular will Hitler claimed to implement, he overlooked the class limitation that had prevented modern art from winning general acceptance to this date.

/ 3.3.3 **TESTIMONIAL PAINTINGS**

There are only two paintings in which Kokoschka made his resistance apparent before the start of World War II. The first was a portrait of the publisher Robert Freund he had painted in 1909. After the German takeover of 1938, the Vienna Gestapo cut it up into quarters during a search of the owner's home. Somehow the fragments made it via Prague to Paris, where the 'German Artists Collective' (see Chapter 3.2 / 3.2.1) published it as a postcard with the backside imprint "Destroyed by the Vienna police, Gestapo, Section II H, on May 5, 1938."[191] It was as a *Corpus Delicti* that the Free Artists' League wished to include the reconstructed painting in the exhibition it organized jointly with its London section in July 1938 at the New Burlington Gallery, which was assembled with much controversy about its diplomatic restraint. Only after critic Paul Westheim, exiled in Paris, blasted the organizers' initial rejection was it finally hung. Since the show was intended to reassert the merits of modern art in Germany now being suppressed there, including several works by Kokoschka, it shied away from polemical works. In the end, Kokoschka, by now the most prestigious artist in public opposition to the Hitler State, could not be denied a testimony of his own victimization.

One year earlier, as a house guest of one of his collectors in July 1937, Kokoschka was painting a self-portrait for the host when he learned of the opening of the 'Degenerate Art' exhibition, where several works of his were shown. In a spontaneous reaction, he titled it *Self Portrait as a Degenerate Artist (Selbstporträt als entarteter Künstler).* He does not seem to have adjusted the collected, pensive attitude with folded arms he had adopted for the sake of expressing his response to the dramatic news. However, he probably added the blurred depiction of a stag hunt in the background to match the title he gave to the finished picture. If so, this would suggest the defiance of a hunted man. Although its sense of victimization corresponded to the cut-up *Portrait of Robert Freund* at the New Burlington show, Kokoschka never used it as a public statement. The *Self Portrait as a Degenerate Artist* remained secluded at the collector's home. Only in June 20, 1939 was it first shown at a one-man exhibition of Kokoschka's work in London.

In the government-sponsored 50-year anniversary exhibition 'Today's Mánes' in Prague, which President Eduard Beneš opened on October 10, 1937, Kokoschka and Heartfield were were both invited to participate as newly-appointed honorary members. While Kokoschka's exhibits are not known, Heartfield's elicited yet another request from the German embassy that five of them be removed. The two artists' prominence at the show confirmed them as the leading German-speaking artists who kept up an unremitting public resistance from abroad. On March 1, 1939, after their flight to London, they worked together in founding the 'Free German Culture League'. Still, they formed an unlikely pair. Their political socialization had been conditioned by the class division between traditional and modern art. While Heartfield's grew out of a working-class culture bent on activating art for political intervention, Kokoschka's was embedded in the culture of the upper-middle-class, which had sponsored modern art and now wished to shield it from any politicization, active or passive.