4 / Toward War

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4.2/ Traditional versus Modern Art Revisited

/1 VIEW FROM THE USA

/1.1 THE NEW YORK WORLD FAIR OF 1939

/1.1.1 MONUMENTALIZATION OF DEMOCRACY

The motto of the New York World Fair of 1939—"The World of Tomorrow"—hailed technical modernization as a path to social progress. It expressed the business-oriented philosophy of the Fair's organizing committee, which was dominated by private industry. The government merely played a supporting role by way of legal regulation and financial assistance. Still, in the words of committee chairman George McAneny, the Fair "should celebrate the cultural progress of America, its progress in social and educational directions, in government and administration."(252) Several grand pavilions representing some of the biggest US corporations provided an unabashed demonstration of US leadership in technological productivity and social wellbeing. It was for this reason, rather than because of any government guidance, that the all-pervasive ideology of the architectural and pictorial setup was largely focused on the democratic political system of the host country. It culminated in a giant statue of its first president, George Washington, dressed in the robes of his 1789 inauguration, whose 150th anniversary coincided with the Fair.

At the center of the exhibition area stood the monumental 'Federal Building' as a backdrop for the 'Court of Peace,' flanked by a 'Tower of the Judiciary' and a 'Tower of Legislature.' It was filled with a didactic show, explaining the workings of the federal government in the twelve areas of its jurisdiction. Large murals depicting key events in US history decorated its walls. At the center court, adjacent to the 'Trylon' and the 'Perisphere,' a multi-figured sculptural ensemble by Paul Manship, attached to an enormous sundial entitled *Time and the Fates of Man,* along with a quartet of allegorical figure groups entitled *Moods of Time*, was placed on the reflecting surface of a pool. These sculptures transfigured the pictorial paean to democracy into cosmic dimensions. Elsewhere, Leo Friedlander's four plaster statues, over 10 meters in height, depicted *Freedom of Speech*, *Freedom of Religion*, *Freedom of Press*, and *Freedom of Assembly*, fundamental tenets of the US constitution. At the Paris Expo, only the Soviet Pavilion had featured a comparable political iconography. All the more remarkably, the government had no hand in the design of this ideological display.

The most suggestive visual evocation of democracy, however, was not an artwork but an animated show installed inside the 'Perisphere.' It featured a large-scale model of an urban area in motion under changing lights, to be viewed by visitors from two rotating galleries above. Billed as the view of a generic city as it would appear in 2039, the model showcased Futuristic technologies of urban planning. Named 'Democracity,' and advertised as "Democracy in the World of Tomorrow," the show transfigured the capitalist productivity of the United States into a world-wide political order to humanize modernization. One could view it as a democratic answer to the ongoing capital reconstruction projects of the three totalitarian regimes in Europe, where monumentality took precedence over urbanism. At the Paris Expo two years earlier, it had been the reverse. Le Corbusier's initial proposal to devote the whole event to urbanism had been rejected. The Italian and the German pavilions had been decorously designed by the architects in charge of monumental capital reconstructions. Le Corbusier's urbanistic vision had been banished to a makeshift tent at the outskirts of the exhibition grounds.

/1.1.2 RECONFIGURATION OF PAVILIONS

The 'Federal Building' amounted to a de-facto US pavilion in the central location which at the Paris Expo had been assigned to the Palais de Chaillot. This building had represented a supra-national, and hence non-political, ideal of bringing art and technology together. A French pavilion had been altogether missing, leaving the confrontation of the arts to the three totalitarian states. At the New York World Fair, where democracy appeared supreme, such a competitive configuration of pavilions was no longer to be seen. Germany, poised for a war within five months after the opening, did not participate. France, one of Germany's first intended targets, featured an artistically nondescript, functional pavilion, anachronistically focused on export, tourism, and gastronomy. This left Italy and the Soviet Union as the only two of the four European states to use their pavilions for advertising their political systems, and they did so in even more triumphalist terms than they had in Paris. The enthroned goddess Roma and a single male worker stretching a glowing red star up to the sky were lifted atop, soaring structures no longer configured for comparison.

The organizers of the Soviet pavilion seem to have overtly taken up the challenge of democracy as the guiding notion of the Fair. "In his work the Soviet artist primarily addresses the people. His art is democratic," asserted the introduction to the catalog, citing the hundreds of thousands of visitors to art exhibitions in the USSR as a fulfilment of the ideal of an 'art for the people' (see Chapter 1.1/3.1.2). Two enormous wall-to-wall murals, *Meritorious Personalities* and *Sports Parade*, were produced by 'painters' brigades' under the direction of Vasily Yefanov and Yury Pimenev,—converts to Socialist Realism. They depicted packed masses of enthusiastic people marching

forward in parade formation, embodying the structured order of totalitarian mass 'democracy.' As if to match the US version of democracy with the Soviet one, Nikolai Andreyev's steel figure of a worker raising the red star atop the building emulated the posture of the Statue of Liberty. On the reliefs of the lateral façades, groups of soldiers and armed civilians appeared to advance, imbued by "the heroic spirit of the Civil War." They were aggressive versions of the festive groups on the Paris pavilion.

In 1936, Fair Corporation President Grover Whalen had travelled all the way to Rome seeking to obtain Italy's participation from Mussolini in person. *Time* magazine ranked the Soviet pavilion, one of the largest and most expensive of the Fair, as the best foreign exhibit. Public and press seemed unconcerned with the looming collision course between both states. Indeed, unlike the artistic and iconographic contrast between the Italian and the Soviet pavilions at the Paris Expo, these two pavilions looked deceptively similar. And, unlike the forward-charging sculptures of their predecessors, theirs were at rest, and seemingly at ease. Each appeared to celebrate its own triumph, reassuring the public of a peaceful coexistence with democracy. One year later, at the second season of the Fair, both pavilions were gone. Soon after the Hitler-Stalin Pact was signed on August 23, 1939, and the USSR had joined Germany in occupying Poland on September 1, the Soviet Pavilion was first closed and later razed. And when in June 1940 Italy declared war on France, the Italian Pavilion was also closed, yet left standing as a dark and empty shell.

/1.1.3 THE UNBUILT 'GERMAN FREEDOM PAVILION'

The World Fair's propagandistic emphasis on democracy must have encouraged the 'Free Artists League,' the minuscule association of German exile artists in Paris, to try to fill the gap left by Germany's non-participation in the Fair by a "German Freedom Pavilion" of their own. In New York, a large committee chaired by mayor Fiorello LaGuardia supported the initiative. However, in March 1939, the German Embassy in Paris filed an official objection with the International Bureau of Expositions against this unwanted replacement of a government pavilion by an anti-government one. A backup plan to show at least parts of the exhibit at another New York site for the duration of the Fair came to nothing, since meanwhile political support for it had dwindled. The artistic centerpiece of the aborted exhibition was to be a sequence of thirty (or thirty-three according to other sources) painted plywood panels entitled *Germany, Yesterday and To-Morrow*. The panels added up to a pictorial survey of German history leading up to the democratic republic founded after World War I, its abolition by the National Socialist regime, and its hoped-for restoration.

The project description, no doubt elaborated in contentious group meetings, reiterated the term democracy as the key value of a German liberal tradition, starting with the revolution of 1848, and continuing through the November revolution of 1918

and the communist-led February revolution of 1919. It invoked an imaginary "German Popular Front" to challenge the current dictatorship. The title of the show alluded to the "World of Tomorrow" in the motto of the Fair, but also drew on the title of a 1935 speech by communist painter Otto Freundlich—"German Art Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow"—in which Freundlich had argued for including modern art in the cultural policy of the Popular Front. However, its celebration of 19th-century bourgeois democracy prevailed over communist rhetoric. This was the most ambitious manifestation of German artists in exile as a force of political resistance, in fact the only one of any consequence. But it was accomplished at the price of a didactic poster realism that overrode the styles of individual members, particularly those of modern persuasion. The panels were shipped to New York City in early 1939, when the show had already been cancelled, and eventually got lost.

The cooperation of over a dozen members of the 'Free Artists' League' excluded any personal deviation from the didactic realism of this sweeping primer in German political history, particularly any adjustments to a modern style, which by necessity would have been personal, impairing the series' visual, and hence ideological, coherence. As a result, the group's three most prominent members of modern persuasion—Otto Freundlich, Heinz Lohmar, and Max Ernst—consented to having both their trademark styles and their communist convictions sidelined for the sake of sharing an argumentative platform with their traditionalist colleagues which did not lend itself to Popular Front coalition pluralism. Freundlich, the most doctrinaire of the three, withdrew from active cooperation within the leadership committee. The other two were flexible enough to subordinate their artistic and political profiles in order to accomplish the group's objective for the occasion, which placed the pictorial invocation of political democracy over the defense of modern art against oppression.

/1.2 STATE ART OF DEMOCRACY

/1.2.1 STATE SUPPORT FOR THE ARTS

Of all democratic states affected by the Depression, the United States alone possessed the economic resources and the political will to enact multiple programs of government support for the arts that proved a match for those of the totalitarian states in Europe. They were likewise meant to feed into the government's art of self-representation but were steadily contested within a democratic political culture. Those programs—the Public Works of Art Project (1933-1934), the Section of Painting and Sculpture (1934-1943), the Treasury Relief Art Project (1935-1943) and the Federal Art Project (1935-1943)—were part of a comprehensive recovery initiative, the Works Progress Administration, whose promise had swept Franklin D. Roosevelt and his Democratic Party into office in 1932 . Their success during the remainder of the

decade demonstrated that a state policy for the support of artists which sponsored traditional imagery and was aimed at popular appeal could be implemented just as well in a democratic as in a totalitarian state, albeit only at the price of endless public and political controversies which pitted government agencies, artists' groups, and the press against one another.

Those multifarious art programs had to stand the test of political debates in Congress and the public sphere, debates which spared none of their political, ideological, and aesthetic merits or liabilities and did not shy away from addressing their apparent similarities to their totalitarian counterparts. By 1939 they had lost so much support that the government allowed them to lapse. Their fundamental political intent—to bring the artist "into far closer touch with his community and thereby into closer touch with American life"[253]—did recall the populism of Soviet and German art policy. The difference was that rather than merely serving as an ideology for the regulation of the art market, they were tailor-made for regional or local institutions, apt to embed the arts in social life. They particularly resembled the Soviet policy of keying art works to the propaganda of a general policy aimed at regulating working society at large. The difference was that such a propaganda function could not be imposed as a party line but had to endure the democratic give-and-take between government agencies, business and civic pressure groups, the press, and the artists themselves.

However, social and political relevance was not the sole acknowledged target of U.S. art support programs. As Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau Jr. emphasized in his executive order of October 16, 1934, establishing the Public Works of Art Project, his aim was to promote the "best art the country was capable of creating with merit as the only test."[254] The question of how politics and quality could be reconciled was limited to traditional art in its various forms between academic orthodoxy and 'social realism.' Modern artists, a small minority in any case, had little chance of complying with the populist government program. This de-facto exclusion of modern art, never addressed on principle, faintly echoes its totalitarian suppression. In their quest for representations of contemporary life, in a way that made ordinary citizens view their own concerns according to the premise of social equity as a precondition for economic recovery, those programs also recalled their totalitarian counterparts, with the difference that their underlying ideology was subject to political debates whose charges varied between propaganda and censorship.

/1.2.2 CONTROVERSIAL ENACTMENT

Through its competing artists' associations, congresses, shows, and journals, US artistic culture of the Depression unfolded within a charged-up public sphere where all art-political issues were contested and defended with unmitigated acuity, rather than being decided from above as in the totalitarian states of Europe or obviated by the

governments of democratic France, except during those of the Popular Front. In this contentious culture of democracy, the competition between traditional and modern art, the political relevancy of the so-called avant-garde, the incommensurability of elite art and a mass public, the artist's political engagement, and, above all, the alignment of both traditional and modern art with the Left, were all addressed as issues of state art policy. The underlying fundamental conflict was that between state art policy and the private art market, whose failure to provide most artists with a living had spawned the Federal Government's relief programs to begin with. It was not only the art market's Depression-prompted slump, but also its ingrained overvaluation of prestigious artists, which seemed to make it fail in rooting the arts in a popular culture.

Unlike the state-controlled, corporative artists' organizations of the totalitarian states in Europe, artists' organizations in the United States, which had been springing up since 1933, were voluntary interest groups negotiating with the agencies of the Federal Arts Programs on their own behalf. And, unlike similar artists' groups arising at that time in France, they did not merely lobby for support, nor did they shy away from opposition. One of the foremost political conflicts regarding the enactment of the Federal Arts Programs was with Communist-initiated artists' associations such as the Unemployed Artists' Group and its successor, the Artists' Union, whose quest for work those programs promised to fulfill, even though the CPUSA had initially opposed the recovery policies of the Roosevelt Administration. Because of the Programs' practice of paying wages to artists for commissioned work, the Artists' Union attempted to affiliate with national labor unions, first in 1935—unsuccessfully—with the AFL and then in 1938—successfully—with the CIO. Taking a page from the unions' confrontational labor-strife tactics to press for their demands, artists took to picket lines, demonstrations, work stoppages, and sit-ins.

The leftward ideological drift of the Federal Arts Programs increased after the creation, in the summer of 1935, of the Popular Front, a broad alliance between the CPUSA and New Deal Democrats which did not attain political representation—as it did in France and Spain—but some prominence in the public sphere. Now the CPUSA dissolved its affiliated artists' groups, encouraging their membership to join the Federal Art Programs. The resulting influx of leftist artists prompted administrators of those Programs to start monitoring their work so as to prevent their all-too strident social critique from interfering with the Programs' propaganda mission of promoting the co-operative work ethics of the WPA. Unlike the implacable Soviet screening of commissioned work, however, they often met with resistance. The high point of an artists' political organization in a democracy, not only independent of, but opposed to the government, was reached in February 1936 with the convention of the First American Artists' Congress. This leftist, if not outright Communist, assembly debated not just art policy but politics at large, taking its cue from the USSR.

/1.2.3 POLITICAL CLOSURE

This comprehensive effort to fashion a state art of democracy within a competitive economy came to an end within six years, because it was contingent on changing electoral majorities and exposed to professional opposition arising from the public sphere. Tied as it was to the contested recovery policy of President Roosevelt and his Democratic Party, it did not survive the recovery's setback of 1938. In that year, seventeen fine art societies joined to form the Fine Arts Federation of New York, founded to oppose the creation of a permanent government art agency in the name of private enterprise. Denouncing an alleged collusion between labor unions and the state aimed at overriding artistic quality in favor of political objectives, they claimed to uphold the free market against state support. "The proposal introduces a certain totalitarian concept of Federal functions incompatible with the free enterprise which has heretofore been the particular genius of our democracy," read one of its statements, released in February 1938,[(255)] expressly drawing a line between the art policy of European dictatorships and the private art market allegedly akin to democratic government.

Thus, opposition against the federal arts projects was part and parcel of a conservative opposition against the WPA in general. In August 1938, the leftward ideological drift of the work commissioned by Federal art agencies even became the target of a congressional investigation by the House Committee on Un-American Activities, under the chairmanship of democratic Representative Martin Dies Jr. The first step in the abolition of the Federal Arts Program was the congressional defeat in the summer of 1938 of House Joint Resolution 671 recommending the setup of a permanent fine arts bureau attached to the federal government. The second and final step was the House Appropriations Committee's motion in the summer of 1939 to abolish New Deal art projects altogether. This political demise of the Federal arts programs drew the line between state patronage, which was successfully enacted in the monumental rebuilding of the government center in Washington DC, and state support for the arts as a free enterprise, which was rated as an ideological overextension and an undue politicization of the arts, because it exposed them to the perils of political control.

When Congress rejected the creation of a permanent Federal office for the arts, the United States parted company not only with the totalitarian states of Europe, where various state or party agencies supervised the arts or even managed art production, but also with democratic France, whose powerful Fine Arts administration was largely exempt from political interference. Compared to both European alternatives, the Federal arts program, because of its more democratic ambition, was both more sweeping and more vulnerable. That it was neither drawn upon for the long-term capital reconstruction nor for the short-term New York World Fair, goes to show that it was never meant to foster an official art of the United States. The demise of the

program coincided in time with the ideological ascendancy of modern art as a paragon of democracy, which began after modern artists started to embark on an anti-leftist course that happened to jibe with the anti-leftist stance of the program's opponents in the name of private enterprise. And it was the private market that provided modern artists with their living.

/1.3 THE DEMOCRATIC INVESTITURE OF MODERN ART

/1.3.1 TRADITIONAL AND MODERN ART AT THE NEW YORK WORLD FAIR

The makeshift construction of most buildings at the New York World Fair prevented its architectural surface from matching the classical appearance of its numerous sculptures. Still, even its plainest functional buildings would not qualify as specimens of a 'modern' architectural style, as Henry Russell Hitchcock had defined it in 1932 on behalf of the Museum of Modern Art. A case in point was the intricate General Motors Corporation building, designed by Albert Kahn to resemble a factory. It served as a backdrop for Joseph Reiner's sculpture *Speed*, a large statue of the mythical hero Bellerophon riding Pegasus, his captured winged horse, described on its base as a "Modern Equestrian Group—Symbol of the Breath-taking Speed of Today's Methods of Communications." The Fair's most prominent sculptor, Paul Manship, was a Rome-Prize-winning erstwhile resident of the American Academy in Rome. Upon his return to the United States, he had earned success for his moderate modernization of the classical tradition by cloaking it in an Art Deco style. In his sculpture groups at the center of the Fair, however, he kept this kind of stylization to a minimum.

It may have been because the Fair, no matter how emphatic its pictorial emphasis on democracy, was no government venture but a civic corporation of Big Industry, that 'Democracity,' its ideological centerpiece, happened to be devoid of government buildings, merely visualizing democracy as an ideal lifestyle enabled by technical modernization. For all the aesthetic impact of its dazzling vistas, which so impressed its millions of visitors, this model panorama was also devoid of any artistic embellishment. Its creator, industrial designer Henry Dreyfuss, chose not to draw on the tradition of 'machine art' developed in the United States since the early twenties, and embracing architecture and the decorative arts, which he had long practiced himself. 'Democracity' was at odds with the ornate reconstruction of the capital center being pursued in Washington DC since 1928, which adhered to the age-old representation of democracy by the classical tradition, and was not only every bit as ambitious as its counterparts in the three totalitarian states of Europe, but, unlike those, was actually completed, a de-facto triumph of democracy in architecture.

In several of the Fair's big corporation buildings, 'machine art,' which had been publicized as early as 1934 in a special show at the Museum of Modern Art, was

confined to a quasi-illustrative application. In the building of the Ford Motor Company, Henry Billing's giant assemblage of moving colored reliefs transfigured the image of a Ford V-8 engine. However, most other industry-specific sculptures still adhered to the classical imagery which dominated the official sections of the Fair, translating technological processes into mythological equivalents, such as Chester Beech's four *Riders of the Elements* before the Firestone Pavilion and Joseph E. Renier's rebounding horseman in the Communication Court. The Fair's art exhibition called *Contemporary Art of 79 Countries*, in preparation since 1937 with the participation of national juries, and installed in the pavilion of the IBM Corporation, was entirely confined to traditional art as the surest common denominator of an international show. Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels had endorsed the German section.

/1.3.2 MOMA'S EXHIBITION 'ART IN OUR TIME'

Modern art had to wait until the last year of the Depression to be expressly reclaimed for democracy—not by the state but by a private institution, the Museum of Modern Art in New York City. The occasion was the opening of MOMA's new building in May 1939 with an exhibition titled 'Art in Our Time,' timed to coincide with both its 10th anniversary and the opening of the New York World Fair. By contrast to the Federal Art Project, which has been called anti-modernist and anti-capitalist at once,(266) the rising appreciation of modern art particularly of European origin, in the United States, was animated by the private initiative of wealthy collectors, led by the Rockefeller family, who had founded the Museum of Modern Art in 1929, the first year of the Depression, and enlarged it ever since. As Trustee Paul Sachs announced at the celebration of the new building's completion on May 8, 1939: "In serving the elite, [the museum] will reach, better than in any other way, the great general public."(257) Sachs thus defined the Museum's attempt at a newly-fashioned national artistic culture as having a trickle-down effect, meant to mitigate the class division that had haunted modern art from the start.

Not long after its foundation, MOMA strove to make good on this expansive ambition by means of a national membership drive animated through citizens' support committees all over the country, and by a scheme of traveling exhibitions, which during 1938 and 1939 staged no less than 38 shows in 148 sites. This initiative was expressly aimed at making modern art overcome its upper-class cachet and reach the common people. Comparable but more tentative initiatives had been part of the art policies pursued by the national and regional governments of the Weimar Republic during the decade preceding the Depression. Since 1929, their limited success was stopped by a rightist backlash, in sync with the National Socialist ascendancy. After 1933, under Hitler's government, they were denounced and undone. The promotion of the show 'Art in Our Time' explicitly reacted to the National Socialist persecution of modern art,

which had forced modern German artists to immigrate to the United States and bolstered the appreciation of their work. Max Beckmann's 1933 triptych *Departure* was prominently featured, wrongly described in the catalog as referring to his exile in 1937, "caused by official disapproval of his art."(258)

In the show's opening speech, MOMA Director Alfred A. Barr hailed modern art as a paragon of liberty, the democratic answer to the traditional art championed by the oppressive regimes of both Germany and the Soviet Union. No less than President Roosevelt endorsed him on May 19, 1939, in a radio address for the occasion: "The conditions for democracy and for art are one and the same. What we call liberty in politics results in freedom in the arts." In his speech, the President did not limit himself to extolling modern art as a paragon of freedom, but expressly dwelt on the Museum's nationwide programs of popularizing modern art, architecture, industrial design, painting, and film. These he linked to the legacy of the Federal Art Project, in disregard of the latter's populist preference for traditional art with a social content. When the President claimed that, as a result of MOMA's efforts, "a nation-wide public" would be enlightened about the arts in all its forms,(259) he replaced visual education in the social life of its citizens, an essential goal of the Federal Art Project, with mere appreciation "of the best and the noblest in the fine arts," as determined by the country's moneyed elite.

/1.3.3 RECOIL FROM POLITICS

However, the commercial art world, where modern art started to flourish again in the waning Depression, would have none of its implied politicization by way of ideological alignment with democracy. In his influential essay "Avant-Garde and Kitsch" of August 1939, art critic Clement Greenberg kept modern art aloof from any political responsibility for the sake of artists' creative freedom. Abrogating the connection between art and "the masses" which had informed the Federal Art Project, Greenberg invoked "our ruling class" as the fitting patron of "the avant-garde."(260) Already in 1937, French critic Christian Zervos, writing in the *Cahiers d'Art,* had done the same (see Chapter 1.1/3.1.3). Greenberg's "ruling class" was a blunt but uncritical term for the Rockefellers' sponsorship of the Museum of Modern Art. On this explicit class basis, Greenberg disavowed fascism, communism, and "capitalist mass culture" in equal measure, shirking the word "democracy." When he hailed abstract art as the "avant-garde" of an unspecified progressive force beyond all politics, he unwittingly rehearsed the position of the Manifesto of Coyoacán, yet dispensed with its "revolutionary" epithet.

At first, U.S. artists of modern persuasion such as Mark Rothko, Jackson Pollock, and Arshile Gorky had worked for the Federal Art Project despite its traditionalist bent. When they founded the 'American Abstract Artists Group' in 1936, their leftist

posture merely veered from the Stalinist orthodoxy of the 'American Artists Congress' towards Lev Trotsky's anti-Soviet Communism. In the same year, abstract painter Stuart Davis published his essay "Abstract Painting Today," where he contrasted the intrinsic internationalism of modern art with the "domestic naturalism" dominating U.S. painting. He called modern art "a direct progressive social force" for being unbeholden to control, and for that reason bestowed on it the epithet "democratic."[261] Two years later, Greenberg exempted his "avant-garde" from any political involvement, be it democratic or totalitarian, because the mass appeal required for art to be politically effective would make it into what he labeled "kitsch." This was a head-on contradiction to President Roosevelt's confidence in MOMA's contribution to a democratic culture of the American people.

Greenberg underpinned his wholesale condemnation of traditional art with the derogatory term "kitsch," which he applied to academic art per se. Hence his sweeping verdict did not stop at the art supported by what he called "totalitarian" regimes, "because kitsch is the culture of the masses in these countries, as it is everywhere else," democratic states included. In three lengthy passages about the arts in Germany, Italy, and the Soviet Union, Greenberg refused to ascribe the cultivation of "kitsch" to any imposition by their regimes, but recognized its mass support. Pimenev's and Efanov's panorama murals in the Soviet Pavilion of the New York World Fair would have confirmed his judgment, had he believed in their intended significance. More problematical was his avoidance of the term democracy when assessing the situation in the USA. The abundant films and photographs showing masses of visitors perambulating the academic imagery of democracy at the Fair would have confirmed his generic ascription. Yet, to detach the "avant-garde" from society at large was to confine it to a political void.

/ 2 POLITICAL ASCENDANCY OF TRADITIONAL ART

/ 2.1 THE ARROGANCE OF TRADITION

/ 2.1.1 THE TOTALITARIAN ACHIEVEMENT

By the end of the Depression, the political confrontation of the arts, when measured by the long-term conflict between totalitarianism and democracy, seemed, in the eyes of many beholders, to have been decided in favor of the former, if not in terms of artistic quality, then certainly in terms of restoring a productive artistic culture with a wide mass acceptance and a political mission to fulfill. Highlighted by their capital reconstruction schemes, the art of all three totalitarian regimes appeared to stand triumphant, each one with a stylistic profile that looked all the more distinctive since it could be compared within a shared international trend. Those schemes appeared

to herald, postulate, or threaten trenchant historic changes, while democratic France appeared to cling to the status quo. All three regimes explicitly promoted the ascendancy of traditional over modern art as an aesthetic guideline for the enforced national organization of artists that would safeguard the viability of their profession, and, at the same time, devise a monumental or populist art for their political self-representation. The governments of the Third Republics saw no need to match those two intentions.

No matter how retrospective those regimes rated their return to traditional art, it could not be denied that because of their resolve to change the future, they had mustered the economic strength and the political will to plan and launch, if not complete, vast programs of monumental art and architecture, more or less classical in form, which unmistakably visualized their political systems. Domestically, the totalitarian regimes reinvested traditional art with its age-old function of promoting social stability and political order as ideological covers for political oppression. In its classical form, it was to shape buildings and images to canvas political authority. In its realistic form, it was to redeem its populist potential for fostering an art with the widest propaganda appeal. This cultural arrogance remained unmatched by any state art programs conceived by short-term democratic governments in France, let alone in war-wracked Spain. Their competitive coexistence at the Paris Expo allowed the totalitarian states to boast their self-claimed superiority over democracy. How the inherent conflict was going to turn into war remained unclear.

Traditional architecture, particularly of a classical pedigree, proved to be flexible enough to be stripped of its decorous academic codification. It lent itself to be 'modernized,' either through geometrical simplification, as in Italy and Germany, or through a decorative enhancement derived from other styles, as in the USSR. None of their buildings could have been mistaken for one of the past. At least initially, Fascist art in Italy tended to be anti-academic in its stress on 'revolutionary' innovation in sync with technological modernization. It was not until the proclamation of the Fascist 'Empire' in 1936 that the classical tradition was invested with an ideology of restoration. But even then, it remained inflected by an emphatic quest for geometric plainness. In the USSR and Germany, such a surface modernization of traditional art did not go as far and went into different directions. 'Socialist Realism,' focused on enrichment and enjoyment, excluding any connotations of austerity. In Germany, the classical tradition remained restricted to architecture and sculpture, where it was inflated to impress a sense of overwhelming power.

/ 2.1.2 DEMOCRATIC DIFFIDENCE

With its origins in the artistic culture of the French Revolution, the official or officious art of the Third Republic, both in its representative architecture and its symbolic imagery, had been largely framed in terms of the classical tradition. It had been

cultivated in academic institutions of teaching and art management, which developed it beyond a merely retrospective classicism. Upholding this tradition, which had by now been shared by alternating republican and imperial governments, implied no political choice, all the less so since successive short-lived governments of changing parties—with the two-year-long exception of the Popular Front—did not draw on any conflictive ideologies to stimulate popular support. Thus, unlike the three totalitarian regimes, French governments saw no need to fashion a new kind of art to flank fundamental political change, and to make such an art look traditional to herald such a change. On the contrary, they pursued traditional art in the name of political continuity, merely updating its appearance.

The design of a traditionalist architectural setting to fit the World Exposition of 1937 into the Paris cityscape was meant to anchor it in this long-term neoclassical environment. Its centerpiece, the Palais de Chaillot, could be envisaged as a distinctly contemporary addition to public buildings from the past that exalted the state in whatever constitutional form it took. Its sculptures, and those in the courtyard of the National Museum of Modern Art nearby, were commissioned from established academic artists, and so were the two outstanding national war memorials at Chalmont and Mondement, completed at that time. The public art of democratic France could therefore be perceived as the most traditional of all four states. Still, neither the Palais de Chaillot nor any other building at the Expo exalted democracy in the way of Jules Dalou's *Triumph of the Republic* (see Chapter 1.1 / 3.1.3). But in an international setting of ideological contest, taking democracy for granted was not enough. In the eyes of some French observers it paled before the self-assertive art of totalitarian regimes as a show of social cohesion and political will.

The modest ascendancy of modern art fostered by the Popular Front in the name of the Left hardened the nationalist intransigence of traditional artists and their supportive critics. Such critics looked with admiration at what they took to be an ideologically consistent art patronage in Germany and Italy, oblivious of the democratic credentials the classical tradition was meant to boast at home. Already at the international Congress about art and the state held in Venice in 1935, French critic Waldemar George, a prominent proponent of traditional and fierce opponent of modern art, made the former's resurgence dependent on a strong state with an "authentic hierarchy of values" and "the faith in a leader," conditions he saw "accomplished in fascist Italy" and wanted France to follow.(262) One year later, debates sponsored by the short-lived Popular Front governments of France and Spain, aimed at reasserting modern against traditional art, remained largely inconclusive, since they were not tied to the framing, let alone the implementation, of state art programs. No matter how strongly it was associated with the ideology of progress, modern art remained a free market affair, put at risk by the Depression.

/ 2.1.3 THE INTERNATIONAL SUCCESS OF TOTALITARIAN ART

The Paris World Exposition of 1937 appeared to seal the international ascendancy of a monumental style that combined advanced building technologies with a classical appearance. This was a supra-political style, conservative and dynamic all at once, regardless of the economic and social conditions under which it was achieved, a style to override, or mask, the conflict between political systems. The shower of gold medals all three totalitarian regimes collected at the Paris Expo confirmed the international ascendancy of a traditional art developed beyond academic conventions, and capable of conveying a dazzling determination. Perhaps the jury was guided by the peace propaganda on which the Expo had eventually been focused under the government of the Popular Front. Among the recipients, Albert Speer's pavilion, the models of three Moscow subway stations, and Leni Riefenstahl's documentary film *Triumph of the Will* found themselves in the company of Jacques Lipchitz' *Prometheus* as the only modern exception. Such an international recognition of totalitarian art contradicted current critiques to the effect that art could never flourish under oppression.

The international success totalitarian art enjoyed at the Paris Expo was due to the semblance of a cohesive culture whose traditional makeup seemed to embody the ideal of a non-conflictive social order as a condition for the success of technical modernization and economic productivity, masking the domestic political oppression and the foreign political confrontations it entailed. Classical architecture and traditional imagery were conceived to fashion a decorous monumental scenery for any working society, designed to bolster popular enthusiasm for strong government. In France by contrast, the labor conflicts and financial shortfalls that delayed the timely completion of its Expo buildings left such an ideal unfulfilled for all to see. French architects must have cooperated at an early stage with their German and Soviet counterparts on the unified topographical configuration according to a monumental concept of classical observance. It took the foreigners little adjustment to harmonize the appearance of their buildings with that of the French without foregoing the specifics of their long-elaborated styles.

The French ideal of modernized monumentality appeared compatible with the art of National Socialist Germany, of Fascist Italy, and, to a lesser extent, of the Soviet Union, no matter how unequivocally the political ideologies of the three totalitarian states rejected the democratic system of the Third Republic. Classical monumentality proved flexible enough to suit any ideological connotation. Faced with the ascendancy of modern art and architecture during the first decade after World War I, which had been based on an alignment with technological modernization, traditional art now changed in ideological significance. As an answer to the aesthetic acclamation of labor-saving technology in modern architecture, it furnished decorous backdrops for

the celebration of a corporative working society without strife. Foreign observers were so impressed by the deliberate art policies of the three totalitarian regimes apparent at the Expo because they ascribed them to the state-supervised corporative organization of their artists, which seemed to make them more self-confident than their unregulated counterparts in democratic France. What they overlooked was that their most conspicuous accomplishments were owed to artist elites.

/2.2 ACCELERATED MASTERWORKS

/2.2.1 THE MOSCOW SUBWAY

The debates about the reorientation of Soviet architectural policy since 1932 frequently invoked the working people's supposed demand for beautiful and decorous buildings beyond mere practicality. This tenet was programmatically implemented in the station buildings of the Moscow Metro, which were to embellish the daily commute of millions between home and work. "Every station a palace, every palace a building shaped apart!"(263) Thus did Politburo member Lazar Kaganovich, who oversaw the project from the start, characterize this artistic transfiguration of the work schedule. 'Palace'—a key ideological term denoting the revolutionary abolishment of class privilege—became the catchword of the project to justify its material and aesthetic splendor. The construction campaign was itself staged and publicized as a propaganda spectacle, complete with mass rallies and delegation visits, films and plays, books and journals documenting its progress. Huge mockups of single stations were installed on public squares, smaller models of three of them earned gold medals at the Paris Expo of 1937, and at least one was shown at the New York World Fair of 1939.

In 1932, the Politburo and the Soviet government jointly launched the subway project as a short-term enterprise, independent of the capital reconstruction plan still under development. Both gave it union-wide priority for obtaining funds and materials, and eventually assumed its organizational supervision. Despite recurring temporary setbacks, the first segment opened in 1935, the second in 1938. In order to stick to the breakneck schedule despite organizational shortfalls and laggard labor discipline, starting in the spring of 1933, the Party permeated the labor force with a mass of Komsomols, members of its youth organization recruited from other workplaces. They staged the construction process as a political campaign with the attendant procedures and ceremonies of Party activity. Eventually, the enterprise was so thoroughly politicized that the two Moscow Party committees under Lazar Kaganovich and Nikita Khrushchev, sidelining its technical and administrative leadership, micro-managed it on the spot. Both politicians oversaw not just the technical construction, station by station, but exercised their aesthetic judgment on all details of embellishment.

Numerous prominent Soviet architects, sculptors and painters were enlisted to collaborate on the art work of the Metro stations. Costly, colorful materials were gathered from all over the USSR, along with special machines and artisans capable of handling them. First, an independent central planning workshop coordinated all these efforts until, in late 1934, the Moscow Party Committee took over. Despite the haste, customary procedures of competitions and revisions were followed through, and the Mossoviet's Planning and Architecture Authority still revised the winners' submissions. Project workshops for each station further adjusted the designs. Eventually, Kaganovich and Khrushchev had the last word. In this way, the Moscow Metro turned out to be the confirming accomplishment of the art policy inaugurated by the April Decree of 1932. It was a complex masterwork of splendor and diversity, pooling the designs and styles of numerous architects and artists under Party guidance, and the perfect fulfillment of the ideology of an art for the people.

/2.2.2 THE NEW REICH CHANCELLERY IN BERLIN

The stunningly speedy construction of the New Reich Chancellery in Berlin from January 11, 1938, to January 10, 1939 betrays a similar connection of political planning and artistic accomplishment. It became part of Hitler's enactment of his expansionist plans, which started with the annexation of Austria in 1938 and Czechoslovakia in early 1939, "the first building of the new, grand German Reich."(264) Active preparations had already started in November 1937. However, by contrast to other representative building ventures, the planning of the Chancellery was never publicized. Not even the laying of the cornerstone was celebrated. Any conspicuous announcement would have disturbed the peace delusions whereby Hitler cloaked his annexation strategy. All the more boldly was the building's significance hailed in the sumptuous book officially published soon after the opening, as an instant monument, or even instrument, of Germany's expansion. Hitler's earlier speech at the non-public topping-out ceremony served as its introduction. It spelled out the correlation with brutal clarity, confirming the warlike character of the overall design.

Like the Moscow Metro, the Chancellery did not form part of the master plan for the capital reconstruction, which foresaw a 'Führer's Palace' at the feet of the Great Hall. Eventually, it was to be handed down to Hitler's deputy, Rudolf Hess. Even now, it was only used on rare ceremonial occasions, while Hitler continued to conduct his daily government business from the old chancellery building. The one-sided ceremonial purpose of serving for diplomatic receptions shaped the symmetrical layout, which plotted a pathway from the main portal facing the 'court of honor' through three gathering rooms inside, on to a lengthy 'marble gallery' leading to the doorway of Hitler's office, and ending before the giant writing desk behind which Hitler was to receive his visitors. The pathway was marked by recurrent images of a half-drawn sword, from

Arno Breker's bronze figure of the Wehrmacht to the left of the portal, on to a flat repetition of the figure, now attacking, in a marble relief of the 'round room,' and then on to a wooden inlay at Hitler's desk, next to the face of Mars, the Roman god of war. The sequence illustrated the conduct of Hitler's diplomacy with its mix of menace and restraint.

In his opening speech of January 9, 1939, Hitler credited the Chancellery's timely accomplishment to Speer's artistic and organizational talents, and the dedication of 8,000 construction workers to the job. Just as a collective Party organization had achieved the timely completion of the Moscow Metro, here it had been the 'leadership principle' of National Socialist governance. Authors of the official publication strove to make the building of the Chancellery appear as part of the supposedly labor-friendly national economy. Only a small part of labor and materials were diverted from ongoing overall building activity, stressed one of them. The lavish use of marble gathered from all over Germany, including the newly-annexed 'Ostmark,' had revived the languishing regional quarry trades. Thus, by contrast to the obvious public utility of the Moscow subway, the hidden ceremonial splendor of the Chancellery, the foremost artistic monument of the turn from populism to autocracy in Germany during the final years of the decade, was dressed up in a populist veneer. Not he as a person, said Hitler in his speech, would receive foreign dignitaries here, but the German people—"through me."

/ 2.2.3 THE SITE OF THE E42

Unlike the other two totalitarian regimes, at the end of the decade Fascist Italy was unable to boast an outstanding building drawing on all the arts and fully representing the regime. Its main architectural project, the city-like site for the 1942 World Exhibition, actively pursued since 1936, stood unfinished, ideologically mired between its peaceful cachet and Italy's growing readiness for war. On the one hand, the projected subordination of foreign pavilions to a Roman city plan—stacked with permanent monumental buildings that touted the accomplishments of Roman-Fascist cultural continuity and designed in an all-but uniform 'modernized' classicism—testified to the regime's promotion of 'universal Fascism' as a world-wide paradigm, in its foreign cultural policy throughout the Depression. On the other hand, the celebration of the Ethiopian conquest, with a 'Piazza Axum' in the center of the site, made no bones about Italy's policy of conquest, no matter how assiduously Mussolini kept repeating his country's peaceful posture as late as April 1939. Even after Italy declared war on June 10, 1940, work on the site was kept going, now for a future world peace after victory.

These two contradictory components of the underlying ideology made the E42 project into an ever more self-centered celebration of Italian art and politics which left

no room for international diversity, although the future exhibition came to be cast as an 'Olympics' of competing cultures. The arrogance of 'Empire' enhanced the turn to the classical art of Roman pedigree in a modernized appearance. In early 1937, Mussolini appointed five architects to a 'Commission of Urbanists' charged with working out the site plan. The commission included Marcello Piacentini and Giuseppe Pagano, who were jointly designing the Italian pavilion at the Paris Expo at the time, demonstrating the corporative coexistence of traditional and modern trends in their profession. However, as the commission proceeded on its task, Piacentini prevailed over Pagano, who eventually resigned in protest. With Mussolini's backing, he used his increased authority to redesign the original site plan and to impose his more traditionalist views on the competitions for individual buildings. His was to be what exhibition commissioner Vittorio Cini called "the definitive style of our age."(265)

The 'Palace of Italian Civilization' has been called "the final chapter in the regime's quest for the superlative Fascist signature building in Rome. The register of failures or near-misses in the domain was long—the recurring ideas for a Mole Littoria, the shelved plans for the Danteum, the thwarted expansion of the Foro Mussolini, and especially the scaled-down (and relocated) Palazzo del Littorio."(266) Designed by a team of architects headed by Ernesto La Padula, it was one of the three buildings of the E42 that stood all but finished by the start of the war. A tall square block with rows of hollow arches piercing all four sides, it was meant to recall the exterior of the Colosseum. Piacentini's committee further simplified the design, topping it with an additional floor just to display a Mussolini quote in large capitals. Sculptor Publio Morbiducci created a huge, free-standing relief slab titled *History of Rome through its Public Works* to be erected near the 'Palace.' By means of an interlocking sequence of scenes adapted from the Column of Trajan, it depicted the making of key monuments from various epochs, culminating in Mussolini on horseback before the Axum obelisk—not a public work but a spoil of war.

/2.3 THE END OF POLITICAL CONFRONTATION

/2.3.1 BALANCE SHEET

When on September 1, 1939, the Depression gave way to the Second World War, the political confrontation of the arts, in so far as it related to the conflict between totalitarianism and democracy, appeared to have been decided in favor of the former, if not in terms of artistic quality, then certainly in terms of art policies intended to restore the artistic profession by making it a part of political culture. This process had unfolded differently in totalitarian and democratic states. In the three totalitarian states, traditional had triumphed over modern art, which was adapted beyond recognition in Italy, excluded from the public in the Soviet Union, and vindictively suppressed

in Germany, while in democratic France, it received some lukewarm support but no political recognition. Modern art stood divested of its allure of social dissent, its allegiance to the politics of the Left, and—with the partial exception of Fascist Italy—its aesthetic equivalency to modernization. It was no longer consistently positioned in its relationship to the government or as part of a political counterculture. It fell to individual artists to endow it with erratic, uneasy ideological connotations.

In the democratic political culture of the United States, a similar process had unfolded which was ideologically no less articulate than under the totalitarian regimes. The government center had been monumentally re-built in the classical tradition, and the emergency faced by artists on account of the Depression had been met by state art programs promoting a variety of traditional styles. Here, too, modern art was excluded from the process, but so forcefully supported by private patronage that it styled its distance from public policy as a posture of social independence. Eventually, under the impact of its National Socialist suppression, it adopted an anti-totalitarian cachet of liberty which, by the end of the decade, earned it an explicit democratic validation from the President on down. The New York World Fair of 1939, while advertising technological modernization for the world-at-large, extolled the democratic political system of the host country in a makeshift monumental environment, entirely shaped by traditional art in 'modernized' styles. If art of modern observance made a sporadic appearance, it was due to its sponsorship by private enterprise.

The Third Republic was constitutionally prevented from mustering a similar political resolve to state-manage the arts, until the two short-term Popular Front governments attempted to launch some passing programs of commission and support. State ventures of art and architecture all took traditional forms, while modern art was left to flourish or perish on the free market. The cultural complacency of successive French governments in an intractable situation of art policy matched their political vacillations in the face of the mounting war threat looming behind the deceptive German diplomacy of rapprochement, and their inability to clarify their cultural relations with Italy and the USSR in tune with their antagonistic or friendly political relations. It is telling that when it came to place a figure of France in front of the Musée National d'Art Moderne, the authorities, unable to enlist Charles Despiau, a purely classicizing sculptor, fell back on a plaster cast of Antoine Bourdelle's spear-wielding bronze *La France* from the war memorial at Montauban (see Chapter 4.3 / 2.3.1), which could be taken to personify the country's readiness for defense.

/ 2.3.2 THE WORLD EXPOSITION OF TRUCE

The Paris World Exposition of 1937 was designed on the premise of a competitive and comparative analogy of all four political systems, based on their adherence to 'modernized' versions of traditional art, a common denominator for them to

underscore their ideological diversity. It conjured up a geopolitical truce for the sake of peace, the mission it belatedly received on the watch of the Popular Front. The aerial view of the Palais de Chaillot and the German and Soviet pavilions bordering the central plaza suggested a harmonious monumental ensemble, five years before the states they represented were at war with one another. But while two wings of the Palais de Chaillot flanked the Peace Column atop the hill behind it, the two pavilions unabashedly visualized their political antagonism. The significance of these three versions of traditional art stood out all the more strikingly since most of the other pavilions, both French and foreign, featured a wide variety of styles, from the most radically modern to the most conventional *architecture parlante*. Only Le Corbusier's makeshift *Pavillon des Temps Nouveaux*, with its protest message against rearmament, called the bluff on the inherent peace delusion.

No doubt the topographical scenario of the central plaza was meant to align the two totalitarian states of Germany and the Soviet Union with one another by analogy. But it prompted the officials and architects of both states to cast the antithetical configuration as a propaganda contest which could not but evoke their mutual hostility, the premise of the Franco-Soviet pact of 1935. That it should have remained hard to decide between competitive symmetry and potential conflict, intended or perceived, is due to the common adherence of both pavilions to traditional art, no matter how differently articulated. No commentary dwelt on the military imagery of the Soviet pavilion's façade, an illustration of the defensive resolve spelled out by a Stalin quote inside. That the two pavilions were never scrutinized for clues about their governments' intentions regarding war and peace, characterizes the ideological obfuscation which had befallen traditional art. Its age-old function to articulate an *architecture parlante* with clear ideological messages was compromised.

The uncompromisingly modern Spanish Pavilion redeemed to some extent the subversive potential attached to modern art since its inception, as it disturbed the architectural peace panorama of the Paris Expo. With its contributions from three leading Spanish modern artists residing in France, it provided an attractive setting for the traditional war imagery pervading the exhibits sent from Spain. This coexistence of traditional and modern art, due to Popular Front coalition policies, made the diminutive building, ducked below the German pavilion, into one of the earliest examples of modern art as a testimony to democracy anywhere in Europe—marginalized, to be sure, because it found itself on the losing side, while its German neighbor stood triumphant. A people's war in defense of democracy as a theme of modern art, albeit only for propaganda abroad, corresponded to the worldwide popular support for the Spanish Republic to which the pavilion was intended to appeal. But while the Republic's defeat unfolded simultaneously, its premonition that the Civil War heralded a European war to come, fell short of any resonance.

/2.3.3 THE WORLD EXPOSITION OF FASCISM

Already one year before the Paris Expo, Italy had been awarded the World Exhibition projected for 1941, despite having been sanctioned for its annexation of Ethiopia a few months earlier. With brazen defiance, the Fascist regime postponed the date to 1942 to coincide with the twentieth anniversary of its 'Revolution,' as well as with the fifth anniversary of its 'Empire.' Although the president of the organizing committee, Cipriano Oppo, superintendent of the 1932 Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution, travelled to both the Paris Expo of 1937 and the New York World Fair of 1939 for comparison, he did not emulate the aesthetic diversity resulting from the prominence of foreign pavilions, but single-mindedly aimed for a celebratory display of Italian history and culture. Accordingly, the urbanistic configuration of the site, first overseen by a five-man committee including Marcello Piacentini and Giuseppe Pagano, and since 1938 by Piacentini alone, was deployed on the symmetrical rectilinear grid of ancient Roman colonial cities. It made for a self-contained duplication in miniature of the city of Rome, which no foreign pavilion was to disturb.

So convinced were Oppo and Piacentini—and, by extension, Mussolini himself—of the universal validity of the rigorously 'modernized,' stripped-down classicism which was to regulate the appearance of all buildings, that they termed it a 'style for our epoch,' in accordance with the aspirations for a universal fascist culture, a persistent theme of Fascist foreign propaganda. To pursue such a goal with diplomatic discretion vis-à-vis foreign participants was the avowed policy of the exhibition planners. It would have done away with the diversity of national contributions which made the Paris Expo of 1937 such a telling site of the political confrontation of the arts. The term 'Olympics of Cultures,' devised for the E42 somewhat later, was altogether disingenuous. The conspicuous absence of the ubiquitous war symbolism and war imagery of Roman imperial art from the Roman imperial surface of the site betrayed the promise of peace as a passing pretext for the monumental celebration of Fascist power. This pretext was still being maintained after Italy had joined the war, now updated to signify a *pax romana* after victory.

No matter how contradictory the two political propositions underlying the E42—the conquest of a colonial empire and the promotion of a peaceful world economy—its accomplishment depended on peace, certainly for the short term, and possibly for the long term if the ambition of turning Rome into the center of a fascist-dominated European culture was to be taken seriously. However, Mussolini's inextricable political alliance with Germany not only drew him into the Second World War by June 1940, but, already in October 1940, lured him into yet another colonialist foray in the Balkans and in Greece. Work on the E42, centered on an 'Altar of Peace,' was kept going through 1942, but became a cynical deception. Its premise of was that after the

expected victorious outcome of the war, the postponed world exhibition , whenever it was staged, would inaugurate a new, peaceful cooperation of nations under the aegis of Fascism. At this future point in time, no alternative political system would have to be confronted or accommodated any more. Only when this premise became untenable was work on the site finally suspended.

/ 3 THE POLITICAL MARGINALIZATION OF MODERN ART

/ 3.1 INTERNATIONAL SURVEY

/ 3.1.1 THE TOTALITARIAN CHALLENGE

At the end of the decade, modern art appeared as the loser in the cultural policy of all three totalitarian states, albeit to different degrees and for different political reasons. It fell to democratic France to allocate it a place in cultural policy, not as an alternative to traditional art, to be sure, but in a complementary coexistence. Such efforts, however, never went as far as ideologically linking it with democracy. The suppression of modern art, under way since 1932 in the Soviet Union and since 1933 in Germany, was driven by different ideologies. While Soviet art policy delegitimized the communist claims of modern artists against their own professions of conformity, German art policy denounced modern artists as subversive despite their disavowal of politics and even their profession of conformity. This argumentative discrepancy in art policy between the two leading totalitarian regimes on their geopolitical collision course was never noticed in democratic France. Compared to the notoriety of the German public persecution of modern art, its milder Soviet counterpart of mere exclusion was overlooked until 1936, perhaps because it was being implemented with much less fanfare.

For a political vindication of modern art in any more substantial terms than those of freedom, its apologists would have had to reason out this argumentative discrepancy. However, until Lev Trotsky's anti-Stalinist campaign from exile, not even the similarity was pointed out. Through the end of the decade, modern art was solely billed as anti-fascist, never as anti-communist. The Soviet policy change of 1932 presented the habitual leftist ideological alignment of modern artists in Western Europe with an intractable ideological dilemma of political partisanship. While they were no longer able to maintain their adherence to the Soviet Union as a bulwark of their avant-garde aspirations, their conservative adversaries kept branding them as Bolsheviks. Faced with the mounting German threat of a war in which the Soviet Union would be needed as an ally, democratic governments in Western Europe—apart from the two short-lived Popular Front governments of France and Spain—failed to re-assert their political will with enough ideological self-assurance to endow modern art with democratic credentials.

Some contemporary observers often perceived the pro-active concern of totalitarian governments for a majoritarian art to promote their policies as a sign of political strength, compared to the merely patronizing concern of democratic governments for a market-driven artistic culture. France's one-time effort at setting a policy for the inclusion of modern art in the 1937 Paris World Exposition was never followed up. Conservative art critics such as Waldemar George, an influential figure in numerous art commissions, even hailed the art policy of Fascist Italy, which did not suppress modern art but subordinated it beyond recognition to an aesthetics of first Fascist and then imperial grandeur, as an antidote against the perceived Bolshevik degradation of French artistic culture. As it became clear within the year between the Munich Agreements and the German-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact, the cultural disorientation of successive French governments went in sync with their lack of nerve in the face of the German war threat, and with their inability to define their relations to the other two totalitarian states with anything but expediency.

/ 3.1.2 IDEOLOGICAL DEFINITIONS

As a result of these ideological obfuscations, the Third Republic articulated no anti-totalitarian defense of modern art beyond honoring its 'independence,' which had originally meant its independence from public institutions, but now included sponsorship without political control, still without expressly founding it on the concept of political democracy. For modern art to work its way toward democratic validation required shedding its ideological association with the Left, which had been quickly waning during the Depression. Communist party organizations had to relent on their refusal of its subjective self-sufficiency as soon as they were ready to admit upper-middle-class culture to the anti-fascist coalition. However, both Popular Front governments of France and Spain were far from granting modern art an exclusive franchise on democracy on account of its autonomous aesthetics. They assigned it no more than a supporting role alongside traditional art in a political culture made up from diverse constituencies with shared political ambitions.

Thus, by the end of the decade, modern art in democratic France stood divested of any firm ideological connotation that might have made it suitable for taking a stand in the confrontation of political systems. In Breton's words of 1939, it was reduced to serving as "a carpet of flowers on a mined world,"(267) because the surrealists' political ideology did not include democracy. Modern artists such as Le Corbusier, Léger, and Freundlich continued to be cornered into defensive self-justifications in public debates, where they faced Communist objections against the political viability of their work because of its non-topical themes and recondite forms. By the end of the decade, there was no longer any uncontested modern art on the Left. It was the Surrealists who most conscientiously faced up to this contradictory ideological

obfuscation, as they forged a three-way opposition against bolshevism, 'fascism' and democracy into a non-partisan, de-facto anarchist platform which still clamored for revolution but reduced their activism to provocative self-performances, with neither political adversary nor political cause.

The positions of modern art within the cultural policies of the three overtly anti-democratic regimes of Italy, Germany, and the Soviet Union, varying between adjustment to conformity and vituperative suppression, made it hard to claim it for democracy on any substantive grounds other than freedom of expression. Germany presented the only clear-cut target for straightforward confrontation. On the other hand, the ostensibly successful efforts of those three regimes to foster a state-directed art of traditional observance, unattainable for modern art, seemed to confirm a long-held belief in France itself. That modern art could not reach a mass public made its class-imitation stand in the way of democratic assent. The two Paris shows of modern art held in 1937 were largely filled by dealers and collectors. By that time, the long-term antagonism between traditional and modern art had fallen into lockstep with the political confrontation between totalitarianism and democracy. Whereas the totalitarian choice was clear despite all differences, a democratic choice was altogether lacking. It fell to the Popular Front to give modern art a passing political prominence.

/ 3.1.3 THE ANTI-FASCIST CACHET

At the end of the decade, modern art had lost two of the ideological connotations that had accrued to it in the previous thirty years: its allure of social dissent and its resulting affinity with leftist politics. On the other hand, its ruthless oppression by the National-Socialist regime had invested it with an anti-fascist cachet that was magnified by the mounting fear of German aggression. This cachet was politically distorted, however. It ignored the accommodation of modern art in Fascist Italy as well as its ideological sidelining in the Soviet Union, and it stopped short of linking up a democratic ideology. Even when Lev Trotsky in 1936, denounced the similarity between the German and Soviet antimodern oppression, he did so merely in the name of a freedom. It was only in the United States that modern art from Europe was endowed with an express democratic significance on the foil of its National Socialist victimization. Here its public appreciation was enhanced because, by contrast to Europe, freedom of art was held to be germane to political democracy, regardless of its ideological message, even if it opted for the Left.

The anti-fascist investiture of modern art started in 1935 with the Comintern's deviation from the censure of modern art in the USSR in order to draw left-leaning modern artists in Western Europe into a class-transcending cultural front. Far from embracing modern art outright, it gave it a chance to prove its anti-fascist credentials in the attendant debates. Two years later, the German 'Degenerate Art' show of July

1937 gave the long-standing National Socialist hostility to modern art a boost of international notoriety. It endowed modern art with a martyr's role on behalf of democratic freedom, an anti-fascist designation it didn't take a leftist persuasion to adopt. Since most observers took the aesthetic inferiority of National Socialist art for granted as an inevitably negative effect of government control, the defense of modern art came to rest on the reverse assumption that artistic achievement quasi-naturally flowed from artistic freedom, a vindication of the free market principle on which modern art had thrived before the Depression.

The anti-fascist posture of modern art was a reaction to its persecution and rarely if ever turned the tables toward ideological activism. Herbert Read's invocation of the "principle [...] of the artists' freedom to expression," which was "ethical, not political,"[(269)] in his response to Hitler's attack on the New Burlington Gallery's exhibition *Twentieth-Century German Art* (see Chapter 3.2 / 3.3.3) marked the limits of that posture, at least in the public sphere. It remained a matter of individual artists' conscience.

/ 3.2 THE POPULAR FRONT'S SUPPORT OF MODERN ART

/ 3.2.1 GOVERNMENT POLICY

In both France and Spain, the art of the Popular Front was driven by artists' scarcity of work, exacerbated by the adverse impact of the Depression on the art market. Just as totalitarian governments devised supportive policies in response to such demands, left-leaning artists' unions or other groups promoted the election of governments that promised to enlarge the social scope, and the political relevancy, of contemporary artistic culture. Unlike totalitarian regimes, however, the parties, and then governments, of the Popular Front were in no position to impose a clear-cut choice of one artistic tendency over another on grounds of political suitability or ideological preference. In the process, established divisions between traditional and modern artists were overridden by shared political agendas and convictions. This coalition strategy prompted those agencies to accept modern artists and their work on account of their radical convictions and anti-fascist resolve, provided their prestige was helpful for maximizing their supporting culture. It was not so much the ideological alignment of style and cultural policy which constituted grounds for their acceptance, but their espousal of a political mission.

Moreover, the inclusion of modern alongside traditional art within the artistic culture of the Popular Front was facilitated by the Comintern's own foreign art policy, which, several years after modern art had been dislodged in the Soviet Union, was still promoting it as an unspecified revolutionary agent, in line with its leftist ideological connotations in Western Europe. In France, however, the modern art works sponsored by the Popular Front government for the Paris Expo—most notably Delaunay's

interior of the Aviation Pavilion, in addition to the 'Palais de Découverte,'—still adhered to the pre-Depression association of modern art and technical modernization, that is, a constructive aesthetics of capitalist growth, diametrically opposed to the realistic propaganda art of the Soviet planned economy. Yet the demand for realism had its own tradition in socialist or socially-conscious art of Western Europe since the late 19th century, and hence was bound to clash with the insistence on artistic autonomy on the part of modern artists who were eager to join the Popular Front movement because of their political convictions rather than because they would have been prepared to submit to a functional application of their practice.

The infusion of modern art with democratic significance resulted from three developments. First, Soviet cultural policy since 1932 deprived it of its revolutionary credentials. Second, the German 'Degenerate Art' show of 1937 victimized it as a venue of free expression. Third, the French Popular Front governments of 1936-1938 enlisted it for the promotion of its social and cultural programs. It was the Left that went as far as it could in asserting a political culture of democracy, including an artistic culture receptive to the modern tradition, even though the term democracy was never advanced in its defense. Invested with its anti-fascist credentials by default, modern art became part of a cultural policy in defense of democratic freedom, shedding its disruptive connotations. Its promotion never recommended it as a feature of a democratic culture by contrast to its totalitarian oppression, only as a French accomplishment.

/3.2.2 COMMUNIST RELUCTANCE

The Popular Front government of France could count on a fully-developed modern art scene with leftist sympathies for political support. This was the message of Picasso's picture curtain for the festive performance in celebration of its accession on July 14, 1936, although Picasso had never before participated in any of its cultural manifestations. By contrast, the Popular Front government of Spain did not find a vigorous modern art scene upon taking office, and hence had no opportunity or reason to enlist modern artists in the country for their cultural objectives. With little need to compromise, they replaced conservative art institutions with tightly institutionalized art programs of their own. Communist parties in either country, taking their cue from the cultural policy of the Comintern, favored traditional art because of its class-transcending public appeal. While in France, where the Party was not in government, its critique of modern art remained in opposition, in Spain, where it was, it contributed to modern art's diminished acceptance.

The long-standing communist controversy between traditional and modern art regarding the popular resonance of an art which claimed political relevancy was resumed under the Popular Front in France and even more so in Spain, albeit due to

the democratic nature of both their constitutional governments, in a non-exclusive environment and with no final outcome either way. In the so-called 'realism debates,' competitive antagonisms between traditional and modern artists were blurred by steady professions of a common goal. In these debates, the issue was not so much the political purpose of an art to be newly conceived, but the ideological significance of its themes and styles, always on the assumption that the government had no say in such matters. Yet, the name of these debates already suggests that 'realist' art was the standard-setting majority against which modern artists had to make their case, against Communist objections in particular. Aragon, as secretary of the 'Maison de la Culture,' remained particularly hostile to such modern masters as Le Corbusier and Léger, and his silence about Picasso signals disapproval.

The Directorate of Fine Arts of the Spanish Popular Front Government under Josep Renau was more reluctant to include modern artists in any of its domestic programs, all of which were focused on Civil War propaganda with a topical appeal. This is why Spanish realism debates and the attendant resolutions, interventions, and manifestoes inevitably ended with a preference for realism as a populist strategy. The choice of Josep Sert's and Luis Lacasa's modern design for their Pavilion at the Paris World Exposition was a propagandistic initiative aimed at an international audience. So was the enlistment of three Spanish artists—Picasso, Miró, and González—who were already established masters of modern art, and who had preferred to work in Paris rather than in Spain in order to make their careers. But the net effect of combining the works of traditional artists from Spain, who provided the bulk of the art show, with these artists, placed in prominent spots of the pavilion, added up to a demonstration of Popular Front coalition politics. It suited the pavilion's message to the effect that the Republican war effort was a defense of pluralist democracy.

/3.2.3 FRENCH ACCOMPLISHMENTS

That modern art in France was labelled 'independent' meant that it had no representation in the commissions and obligations system managed by the supra-political Fine Arts Administration of the Third Republic. It was this system that gave democratic legitimacy to the state's support of the arts, by which the Popular Front government abided, only making it more inclusive of modern art, now labelled 'art vivant.' The Ministers of Education with the greatest impact on artistic culture during the decade, Anatole de Monzie and Jean Zay, both members of the Radical Party, maintained a stable middle-class position after leftward changes of government in 1932 and 1936. Their tenure had a noticeable political impact on the independent Fine Arts Administration, providing modern artists with more opportunities than before. The acceptance of modern art in French state-sponsored public culture first emerged in 1937 with the opening of a National Museum of Modern Art, two concurrent exhibitions of modern

art at the Petit Palais and the Jeu de Paume, and the commission of modern artists for several French pavilions at the Paris World Exposition, newly added by the incoming Popular Front government.

The Musée National d'Art Moderne had been planned as early as 1934 under a conservative government. It was built in a streamlined classical style, including a profuse sculptural decor of the façade and the courtyard that featured classical mythology. The replica of the 1932 bronze statue *La France* by the late Emile-Antoine Bourdelle before the main entrance underscored the claim of French preeminence. The incongruous choice of a traditional design and imagery for a museum of modern art, after several modern architects' entries—including Le Corbusier's—had been rejected in the competition of 1934, provoked much controversy. When the Museum was opened concurrently with the Paris Expo, it did not even feature a modern art show. On the orders of Prime Minister Léon Blum himself, the inaugural exhibition featured a survey of French art since Gallo-Roman times. In the section belonging to the city of Paris, another show presented the capital's art and culture. In the part belonging to the state, an array of smaller shows featured the country house and the medieval theater. Modern art was nowhere to be seen.

The art-political scope of the Musée National d'Art Moderne had been restrained for two years by its planning before the tenure of the Popular Front. The Palais de la Découverte, on the other hand, installed in the west wing of the Grand Palais as an exhibit of the Paris Expo, was initiated by the Popular Front government under the authority of one of its members, the Nobel Prize-winning scientist Jean Perrin. On the long-standing premise of a convergence between modern art and scientific and technical modernization, Perrin enlisted a galaxy of modern artists—along with an equal number of traditional ones, to be sure—to illustrate a systematic display of scientific topics, and even added a separate show of modern art. Education Minister Zay made this show a permanent section. It was a fitting commission for modern sculptor Jacques Lipchitz to fashion the giant plaster sculpture over the entrance of the Grand Palais as a personification of human progress—and of the anti-fascist struggle, if his later recollection can be believed—, by contrast to the haphazard last-minute placing of Bourdelle's *La France* before the Musée National d'Art Moderne.

/ 3.3 MODERN ARTISTS ON THEIR OWN

/ 3.3.1 RECOIL ONTO SELF-ORIENTATION

The most salient official acceptance of modern art in democratic France—the two exhibitions in the Petit Palais and the Jeu de Paume in Paris in 1937—invested modern art with a non-political standing at the expense of ideological significance. It did not present modern art as a democratic response to its Fascist conformity, let alone its

Soviet and German denigration. This was political marginalization by default. In the disoriented public sphere of democratic politics during the last three years before the outbreak of the war, politically alert modern artists, disappointed by years of dealing with official institutions or professional associations and weary of inconclusive ideological debates, found themselves thrown back on conveying their own reflexive self-orientation vis-à-vis the mounting threat. The proliferation of an allusive imagery of conflict, danger and peril during these three years has often been summarily ascribed to this topical awareness. It has been foregrounded in recent exhibitions with suggestive titles such as *Le temps menaçant* [270] and *Kassandra.* [271] However, it remains uncertain to what extent historic references of this imagery can be verified.

It was the Surrealists, increasingly diminished in their numbers, who most deliberately, and most inconclusively, faced up to the ideological dilemma resulting from their three-way opposition against bolshevism, 'fascism,' and democracy, encapsulated in Breton's slogan *Neither your War nor your Peace*. In their exposition at the Galérie des Beaux-Arts in January 1938, they recoiled onto a provocative self-performance. The French government's refusal to come to the aid of the Republic in the Spanish Civil War provoked an accusatory or elegiac art on the part of modern artists, who sided with the unsuccessful communist opposition to this policy of non-intervention. Whenever they took up the theme, they did so on their own conviction, with no political mandate or politically focused purpose. Prompted by the experiences of Péret and Masson in Spain, they were amongst the first to perceive the Spanish Civil War as a losing cause, due just as much to the unstoppable advance of General Franco's troops as to the internecine struggles of the Republican coalition. As a response, they wallowed in a defeatist imagery derived from bullfights or shrunk into a partly psychological, partly mythical introversion.

Now the revalidation of myth, the surrealist movement's long-term ambition, served as a visual mode of horrified detachment from an accelerating historic plight whose short-term direction remained obscure. Sympathetic critics were quick to exalt the deliberate incommensurability of the mythical imagination as an apt response to "menacing times." As a mode of imagination, the mythical turn corresponded, as if in mirror reverse, to the profusion of mythology in the modernized version of traditional art prevailing in the pictorial decoration of the newly-built Musée d'Art Moderne. It countered the joyfully optimistic appeal of this imagery with an invocation of conflictive or even mortal specters. This principled pictorial confrontation extended beyond France to the art of the Fascist and National Socialist, but not the Soviet regimes. Surrealist artists countered their political assertiveness—lacking in the official French adaptations of mythology—with blurred figurations that turned the dream aesthetics of their beginnings into nightmares.

/3.3.2 THE LAST ISSUE OF *MINOTAURE*

When in early 1933 Breton joined the editorial board of the lavishly produced and richly illustrated art journal titled *Minotaure*, devoted to a composite program of art, literature, ethnography and psychoanalysis, he thereby retreated from his earlier, ideologically extremist but short-lived editorial ambitions with *Surréalisme au Service de la Révolution*, *Documents* and *Clarté*. The new journal endowed the surrealist ambition to expand human self-understanding beyond social limits with a mythical icon of half-human, half-animal existence. A drawing by Picasso on the cover of the first issue, to appear on June 1, 1933, gave the sword-wielding figure a combative attitude. Picasso's collaboration lent the enterprise the prestige of the foremost modern artist of his time. Since the winter issue of 1937, however, a dramatic sequence of cover pictures by Magritte, Ernst, Masson and Rivera transfigured the victimized misfit among the Olympian half-gods into a tragic counter-hero vis-à-vis the mythological power figures of official art in France, Italy, and Germany. By contrast to their triumphalism, it rallied modern art around the myth of a loser.

Masson's cover of the last issue, which appeared in May 1939, marked the low point of this evolution. It featured the Minotaur's skull cracked open, his left horn broken off, exposing the brick walls of the labyrinth instead of the brain. This was a standard image of tormented introspection Masson had cultivated in that year, culminating in a ghastly large-scale painting of a full figure titled *Labyrinth*. In their editorial, the editors stressed their lack of any institutional affiliation, but acknowledged the freedom of the arts guaranteed in democratic France as a minimal precondition for foreigners and exiles to join French artists in their pursuit of free expression. However, Breton did not credit democracy with this opportunity because, in his view, most artists failed to face up to the historic predicament. "It is confounding," he wrote, "to observe that art in France, at the start of 1939, appears above all keen on throwing a carpet of flowers on a mined world. [...] At the instant when Barcelona grows weak of deprivation under a hellish sky, when elsewhere the days of liberty appear to be counted, their work reflects in nothing the tragic apprehensions of this epoch [...]."[272]

Inside the issue, a special insert conveyed the recollections and conclusions Breton had brought back from his meetings with Trotsky and Rivera at Coyoacán the year before. It was bound within an extra set of covers featuring a continuous two-page image by Rivera, which extolled the inviolate Minotaur safely at rest inside the impenetrable brick walls of his labyrinth, surrounded by his victims' skulls and bones (see Chapter 4.2/3.3.2). In his texts, Breton nostalgically waxed about the revolutionary culture of Mexico where Rivera's public muralism had thrived as a politically operative art, endowing him with the credentials of a revolutionary artist *par excellence*. Rivera's current retreat to easel paintings of plants and landscapes devoid of any topicality

signaled a political disaffection Breton shared. Although a photograph depicted the three participants of the Coyoacán encounter as a group in friendly conversation, their manifesto was nowhere mentioned. But it must have been due to Masson's lone membership in the FIARI that Breton extolled him, in his article inside, as "the authentic artist and the authentic revolutionary," no matter how gloomy his cover design.

/ 3.3.3 DALÍ, MASSON, PICASSO

In early 1936, Salvador Dalí painted a large canvas entitled *Soft Construction with Boiled Beans*. On October 15, 1936, the date a color reproduction was printed in the ninth issue of *Minotaure*, he added *Premonition of Civil War* to the title. The painting shows a disassembled, reconfigured androgynous body tearing at itself with a clenched fist—the communist salute—and trampling on its own severed waist. Dalí painted this picture of sexually charged self-torment and self-mutilation as a specimen of his self-styled 'paranoiac-critical' method intended to discern the psychic origins of sexual deviation. The added subtitle identified it as a non-partisan denunciation of the internecine self-destruction by the Spanish people in the incipient Civil War. Dalí's refusal of political judgment, entailing an unspecific historic pessimism, is consistent with the wide-spread recoil of modern artists onto fantasies of horror during the last three years before the outbreak of World War II. By contrast to traditional artists, they had no more ideology to lean on.

Also in the summer of 1936, André Masson adapted the headless nude with a skull for the sex, the emblem of an "orphic and nietzschean" secret society he had founded together with Georges Bataille and others, to the topicality of the Spanish Civil War. With hammer and sickle filling in for the missing head, brandishing a sword and a detonating bomb, the figure tramples on a solid swastika and a Christian cross. With this emblematic deviation from the politically neutral, unarmed standard version of the *Acéphale*, Masson expressed a passing allegiance to the embattled Republic, which for a time had even prompted him to enlist in a Catalan militia. Soon, however, disillusioned by its double jeopardy at the hands of the nationalist insurgents and the government's deadly infighting, he returned to Paris. It was an incongruous ploy to dress up the incarnation of a self-fashioned alternative to historical and political experience as a combat hero for the military turn of political confrontation. Two years later, Masson, in his disfigured personification of the *Labyrinth*, fashioned a more appropriate icon for the hopeless introspection to which modern art had been reduced.

The farthest this kind of introspective imagery offered by modern artists could advance toward political topicality was the auditorium wall of the Spanish Pavilion at the Paris Expo, where Pablo Picasso was given a license to reassemble the ingredients of his habitual imagery of sex, bullfights, and the Minotaur under the large-letter label 'GUERNICA' to make it represent a war crime. Picasso had first deployed the full range

of this imagery in his etching *Minotauromachie* of 1935 for a complex scene of sexual conflict. Merely by inserting the fragmented figure of a fallen warrior with a broken sword he re-focused this ensemble onto the war theme in the expressive mood of a defeatist lament.

It did not take long for Picasso to be called on the political contradictions inherent in his enterprise. In the British journal *The Spectator* of late summer and fall 1937, Anthony Blunt and Herbert Read waged an instant debate about *Guernica*, which they had seen on their visits to the Paris Expo. In the August 7 issue, Blunt wrote: "Fundamentally [*Guernica*] is the same as Picasso's bull-fight scenes. It is [...] the expression of a private brain-storm which gives no evidence that Picasso has realized the political significance of Guernica." He denounced the mural as an example of the subjective introspection detaching modern art from historical significance.

In the following issue of *The Spectator* of October 15, Herbert Read answered Blunt's diatribe with a principled rejoinder. "Here is the best kind of evidence of the close cooperation and mutual understanding which exists between the artist and the democratic government of his native country. [...] Hundreds of thousands of people have seen [*Guernica*] and, as I can testify from personal observation, accepted it with the respect and wonder which all great works of art inspire." Thus Read grafted the ideology of an art for the people, ascendant at this point in time, onto the emerging democratic validation of modern art. However, there is no record of any public resonance *Guernica* may have had at the Paris Expo. Its glamorization in a special issue of the *Cahiers d'Art* for the occasion was never matched by any comment in other art journals, let alone in the general press. It is not until 1939, when it was on display in a travelling exhibition in support of a relief effort for Spanish refugees, that it started to acquire its current celebrity as an anti-war fanal.