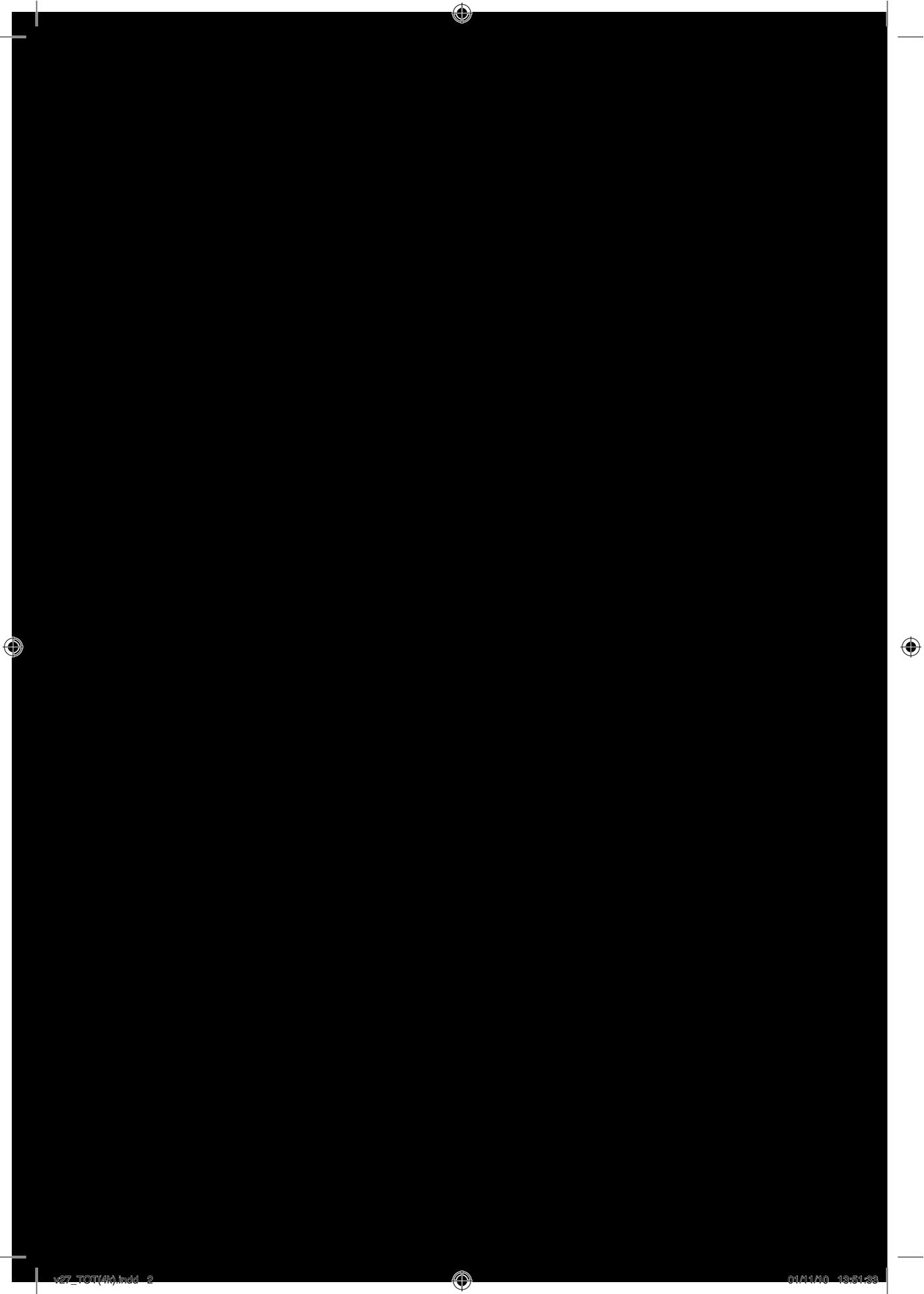


## Totalitarian Art and Modernity



Edited by Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen & Jacob Wamberg

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# TOTALITARIAN ART AND MODERNITY

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## INTRODUCTION

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MIKKEL BOLT RASMUSSEN · JACOB WAMBERG

In capitalist societies of the last two decades, we have witnessed a vast expansion of the category of art, not least including the recurrence of the avant-garde notion of 'art into life'. Backed up by analytical labels like 'relational aesthetics' challenging the autonomy of art, different art practices have engaged the social and political space outside art museums and galleries. At the same time, art history, having widened into a general study of 'visual culture', has softened the barriers between elitist art and popular culture, and between aesthetics and politics, and has explored art in broader cultural contexts, if not visual phenomena without specific aesthetic labels.

Nonetheless, a survey of general contemporary literature on 20th-century art history reveals that art made under totalitarian regimes – notably Nazi Germany, fascist Italy and the communist Soviet Union – is still conspicuously absent, just as it is in the collections of Western art museums, including those of the former Eastern Bloc countries. In this negative presence, and also in the literature which does treat totalitarian art, it seems to be assumed that somehow totalitarian visual culture does not fulfil the normative requirements of the category of 'art', not even political art, and is therefore more fruitfully expelled to the duller area of 'historical documents' of politically suspect regimes.

One recent example of this exclusion from art history is *Art since 1900*, a comprehensive survey written by scholars associated with the dominant American art history journal *October*: Rosalind Krauss, Yves-Alain Bois, Benjamin Buchloh and Hal Foster.<sup>1</sup> In this book of over 700 pages, fewer than five pages are devoted to art made in fascist Italy, Stalinist Russia and Nazi Germany. Compared to the extensive historical treatment of all kinds of other aspects of life in totalitarian regimes, the lack of serious studies of their art production is striking, pointing to a problematic understanding of art as somehow endowed with special qualities incompatible with undemocratic political systems. Thus, the campaigns against modern avant-garde art which took place in the 1930s in the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany are often presented as the ultimate proof of the opposition between art and totalitarianism. When this opposition is confirmed, the analysis stops and a more detailed investigation into the art and culture of totalitarian regimes allegedly remains unnecessary. On the other hand, when totalitarian art is in fact inserted in interesting cultural contexts, this typically takes place outside art museums – for instance, the innovative exhibition at Berlin's Deutsches Histor-

isches Museum in 2007 juxtaposing the art movements of the USSR, Nazi Germany, fascist Italy and the US in the period 1930-45.<sup>2</sup>

Remarkably, this non-inclusion of totalitarian art in standard Western art surveys cannot be explained away as just the result of a 'modernist' attitude, since, again, both contemporary art practice and art historiography have been widely pre-occupied with social, political and contextual concerns. And, indeed, standard art history does not seem to have any problems examining art of strongly non-democratic regimes of earlier periods, such as those of the Assyrians, Byzantium, the Renaissance, or even the 19th-century Hapsburg Empire. In glorifying the absolutist regime of Marie de' Medici, Rubens may present the modern viewer with no more problems of legitimacy regarding the category of 'art' than did Phidias in representing the slave-based 'democracy' of classical Athens. But somehow there seems to be a *terminus ante quem* for art smoothly providing a definite iconographical message from within the dominant power, be it political or religious or both (in totalitarian systems the barriers certainly seem to be porous). More precisely, after the spread of democratic ideals in capitalist cultures since the Enlightenment, the categories of hegemonic political message and art inside the same work become increasingly uneasy bedfellows. This by no means signifies that explicit political messages as such are now aesthetically illegitimate in art, only that they are marginalised to art works produced from oppositional stances - i.e. with subversive messages vis-à-vis the dominant political power - such as the left-wing positions of Gustave Courbet, Käte Kollwitz, John Heartfield, Barbara Kruger and the Situationists, and, to a seemingly lesser degree, the right-wing positions of Wagner and the Futurists.

When political, and especially religious, messages are backed by a hegemonic power or simply convey a positively edifying idea, powerful or not, they seem to be on a collision course with 'true' art, perverting it to that genre which the American critic Clement Greenberg perceived as the anti-pole to avant-garde art: kitsch.<sup>3</sup> Remarkably, Greenberg saw kitsch as a phenomenon which thrived both in the naturalistic popular mass culture of capitalist societies and in the equally naturalistic propaganda culture of totalitarian systems; and in this judgement he was in agreement with the Frankfurt School theoreticians Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, who despised the capitalist culture industry and its propagation of false consciousness, considering it just another offspring of the rationalist

culture that created Auschwitz.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps the contemporary art institution and the art historical discipline are still marked by a modernist sensibility, after all?

In any case, this anthology intends to question and challenge the mostly unspecified assumptions and practices separating totalitarian art from other kinds of recent Western art, revealing some of the mechanisms sustaining the separation. Besides offering close comparisons of different kinds of totalitarian art and testing the validity and scope of this category, the book aims to (re)insert totalitarian art in a theoretical space in which it can be analysed together with the artistic movements surrounding it in the less totalitarian states – the historical avant-gardes, classical modernism, and the more conservative neo-classical art forms – as well as with earlier artistic movements such as vitalism and heroising realism. For instance, obvious common ground between totalitarian art and capitalist avant-garde art is that both revolt against the bourgeois notion of autonomous art which contemplates life at a passive distance, pursuing instead the shared goal of reintegrating art into everyday life. So what is it exactly that separates them?

This problem is crucial inasmuch as political and artistic revolutionary movements were closely intermingled for long periods of time, especially in the 1920s (cf. Futurism-fascism, Bauhaus-socialism, Suprematism-Bolshevism), opening up the possibility that avant-garde art in fact paved the way for Hitler's theatrical art and Stalin's choreography of power. Conversely, the official art of capitalist societies from 1920 to 1950 displayed similarities to totalitarian art, leading to the question of whether similarities in artistic language necessarily indicate similarities in state organisation. If so, did capitalist societies of this period have a quasi-totalitarian structure, or, rather, do totalitarian states form a more significant part of modern 'progressive' culture than is generally admitted?

The forerunners of totalitarian art are at stake in the introductory part of this book: 'Genealogies'. One indisputable aspect of totalitarian art is its pretensions of transgressing the autonomous bourgeois art work and making art part of everyday life – for example, in the form of architectural items, posters, films, parades and sport cavalcades. In this way, it is supposed to both reflect the revolutionary qualities of this life and, through its example, be able to influence those parts of life which are still under development towards the glorious future. Indeed, as an extreme consequence, the qualities hitherto restricted

to art should spread to society as a whole, thereby transforming the totalitarian state itself into a huge work of art, a *Gesamtkunstwerk*.

As Anders V. Munch notes in his contribution, 'Redemption in Totality. Cultural Utopias of Late Romanticism and Crossroads of Art and Politics: Wagner, Behrens, Fidus, Hitler', because of these transgressive ambitions, a common ancestor of both the avant-gardes and totalitarianism is the music dramas and philosophy of Wagner and their off-shoots in the 'life reform' movements in the latter half of the 19th century, including that of William Morris. Wagner himself started out as a utopian socialist, taking part in the Dresden uprising of 1849, but later on he restricted his dis-alienating ambitions to the art work itself, which should regenerate lost cultural values through its all-encompassing synaesthetic workings. Although this shift is often taken as a move towards an extreme conservatism which could facilitate only the sort of revolution encompassed by the Nazis (led characteristically by an artist *manqué*), Munch shows that Wagnerism had in fact considerable impact on the modernist movements of the early 20th century. By showing that even a 'progressive' artist like the pro-industrial architect Peter Behrens to a great extent trod common ground with vitalist anti-urbanists such as the now-forgotten Fidus, Munch demonstrates how unpredictable the barriers are between Wagnerian cultivators of total art, technological utopians, rural nostalgians and totalitarian implementers of art into life.

One element of totalitarian culture and art which is shown to open up for genealogies reaching far beyond the strictly totalitarian sphere is the heroisation of work, a feature just as prominent in fascist and communist regimes. The heroisation of work again hovers ambiguously between futurist embrace of technology and archaising ruralism, fetishising instrumental artefacts simultaneously with raw muscle power and by this means re-evoking the militant youth culture of classical antiquity. Its ambition of dis-alienating the workers from the means of production as well as from nature's bosom from which these means derive is, however, contrasted by a reality in which the hero is, rather, transformed to a victim of work. The ironic nadir of this reality, the totalitarian speciality of the concentration camp, thus functions as a grotesque caricature of the revolution-made-permanent of totalitarian society as a whole, its 'Arbeit macht frei' converting a marginalised enemy into a prototypical society member.

In Jacob Wamberg's lengthy contribution, 'Wounded Working Heroes: Seeing Millet and van Gogh through the Cleft Lens of Total-

itarianism (Adding Reflections from Kiefer and Baselitz)', the fore-runners of these discontents of the heroisation of work are traced back to what is presumably their 19th-century beginnings in art: the works of Jean-François Millet and his close follower van Gogh. In contrast to the exclusion of later totalitarian visual culture, however, Millet and van Gogh expose the dark *unheimlichkeit* of the heroisation of work – an uncanniness which furthermore re-emerges when the German post-war artists Anselm Kiefer and Georg Baselitz deconstruct the heroisation of rural life and its suppressed brutalities. Wamberg also reveals some of the genealogies in the history of ideas pertaining to the heroisation of work, demonstrating, for instance, how Thomas Carlyle's proto-fascist ideas were not only projected onto a blank slate when the Nazi sympathiser Heidegger read van Gogh through Ernst Jünger's Carlylean lens, but were in fact intended into paint by van Gogh himself.

But in order to expose such genealogies of totalitarian visual culture, we need, of course, an idea of totalitarianism as such – which is not at all a pre-determined phenomenon. On the contrary, as Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen explores in 'Approaching Totalitarianism and Totalitarian Art', introducing the section labelled 'Reception', the originally fascist – and positive – notion of the totalitarian state, in which all aspects of social life were integrated into the political sphere, became a contested category in the Cold War period. Because the Cold War bundled together fascist, Nazi and communist regimes, its left-wing critics considered it a political instrument through which liberal theoreticians such as Hannah Arendt presented Western capitalist democracies as the optimal form of society, declaring any kind of left-wing criticism of these democracies potentially fascist. However, following inter-war radical leftists such as Karl Korsch, Bolt Rasmussen does not think this makes the notion of totalitarianism as such spurious; rather, in accordance with Giorgio Agamben's ideas, he posits it as a counter-revolutionary tendency in all modern systems, including the so-called democracies: a state-of-emergency excluding undesirable humans from the state, reducing them to bare life in refugee or prison camps. Only through this shifted scale of grey tones, Bolt Rasmussen claims, can we understand how much genuinely revolutionary potential, not least in avant-garde art, was actually blossoming in Italy, Germany and Russia, before it was liquidated or at least subdued by counter-revolutions freezing into totalitarian regimes.

Perhaps because the Italian fascist regime was in fact the least 'totalitarian' one, compared to the thoroughly regulated version Mussolini wished for, it allowed this potential to have the greatest ramifications. Thus, according to Marla Stone's 'The Turn to Culture in Fascist Historical Studies', at the same time as historians are removing the barrier between pre-fascist and fascist when analysing the Futurist fetish of speed, violence and technology, many studies are showing how cleverly the fascist regime made use of diverse kinds of avant-gardism, from Futurism itself to expressionism and constructivism. These insights should not lead to a revisionist stance, putting fascism and resistance on the same moral level, but they do make the picture of what counts as avant-garde and, more broadly, as modern culture, more blurred.

Matters get especially complicated when artworks commissioned by totalitarian regimes are somehow supposed to be part of the heritage of their post-totalitarian followers, such as is the case with monuments of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) after the German unification, analysed in Kristine Nielsen's 'Whatever Happened to Ernst Barlach? East German Political Monuments and the Art of Resistance'. One strategy is to convert such monuments into 'art', i.e. declare them to be sufficiently autonomous as to transcend their former political framework. This transcendence can even be judged to work retroactively, as exemplified by Sibylle Bergemann's GDR-commissioned photographs of the genesis of Engelhardt's Marx and Engels monument in Berlin: their unfinished states in her photographs, the monument hovering horizontally in mid-air in some of them, remind post-1989 viewers of the later dismantling of communist monuments. Even though Nielsen points out that Bergemann and other East German artists earnestly referred to the Weimar Expressionist sculptor Ernst Barlach, an artist officially accepted by the GDR, such references are, following the German unification, overlooked or seen as ironic, to prevent the GDR and post-GDR senses of modernity from collapsing into each other.

What, indeed, becomes of modern values in the thoroughly regulated systems of Nazism and, especially, communism? To their own citizens, of course, the Soviet and Nazi regimes intended to portray themselves as the true possessors of modernity, in striking contrast to the decadent bourgeois cultures of Western capitalism. As explained in the section 'Totalitarian society visualised', spectacular forums for such self-portrayals were huge exhibitions like the *Great German Art*

*Exhibition* in Munich in 1937 (analysed by Sandra Esslinger in 'Veiled Modernity in National Socialist Museum Practices'), and the *All-Union Agricultural Exhibition*, staged in Moscow two years later (analysed by K. Andrea Rusnock in 'The Art of Collectivisation: The 1939 All-Union Agricultural Exhibition').

These exhibitions signalled progress primarily through the uniform image of strength, vitality and diligence which they distilled from the masses of their nations. Whereas the Stalinist mega-show made public the alleged success of communist agriculture – the one founded on collectivisation, five-year plans, scientific principles, and the implementation of modern technologies – the Nazi exhibition aimed to build up a more general image of the German *Volk*, stressing its superiority through pictures of prototypical warriors and labourers, healthy housewives and primordial German landscapes. To contemporary analysts, the neo-classical language of both the pictures of these exhibitions and the architecture framing them could easily be written off as purely conservative in practice. Especially the German case provokes this judgment, as it staged itself in specific contrast to what later became the embodiment of Western progress, the *Degenerate Art Exhibition*, with its examples of allegedly decadent art from expressionism to cubism.

And yet both exhibitions made use of what would also, by capitalist standards, count as the most modern exhibition techniques, including controlled light and mass-produced catalogues. Perhaps, as Esslinger remarks about the German case, the distance is not so great, after all, to the nationalist evolutionist narratives staged in the white cubes of capitalist modernist museums.

In the case of Nazism, at least, Paul Jaskot makes the related point that specifically capitalist economic concerns are still to be found in the underlying rationale of Nazi monumental buildings. In his 'Totalitarian Model or Fascist Exception? The Political Economy of Hitler's State Architecture', Jaskot first notes a striking over-all convergence of aesthetic and economic forces in the shaping of this architecture, oriented as it was towards the classical building materials: stone drapery around a core of masonry. These materials, with appropriate links to both classical antiquity and home-grown German architecture, were recommended by Hitler himself in *Mein Kampf*, but their promotion was later reinforced by the military industry's need for steel, which discouraged modern-style building with concrete around steel armatures. And with the mobilisation of

large-scale slave labour for quarrying in the concentration camps, specific capitalist enterprises with the SS were set up for the building of monumental stone architecture such as Wilhelm Kreis's Soldiers Hall on Speer's north-south axis of Berlin.

In the last section of the book, 'Totalitarian and/or modernist art?', the focus shifts from exhibitions and architecture to paintings. The emphasis is on exploring how absolute the boundaries were separating pictorial art produced under democratic and totalitarian conditions, respectively. Judging from the Soviet painter Aleksandr Deineka's 1934-35 visit to the United States, analysed by Christina Kiaer in 'Modern Soviet Art Meets America, 1935', the differences were not profound here either. Probably because both nations regarded themselves as young countries struggling for freedom, and the United States had not yet embraced European avant-garde art, American critics were surprisingly friendly towards Deineka's art and the more general exhibition of Soviet art which soon followed in Philadelphia. Also, Deineka expressed admiration for American realists like Thomas Hard Benton, and himself depicted US metropolitan settings, beach life, fashion and motorways, complete with billboards and abandoned cars. The undertones of alienation which are possible to detect re-emerge, on the other hand, as a general questioning of modern life in Deineka's post-American works, contrasting somewhat with the Stalinist programme of Socialist Realism famously presented at the Soviet Writers' Congress, which also took place in 1934.

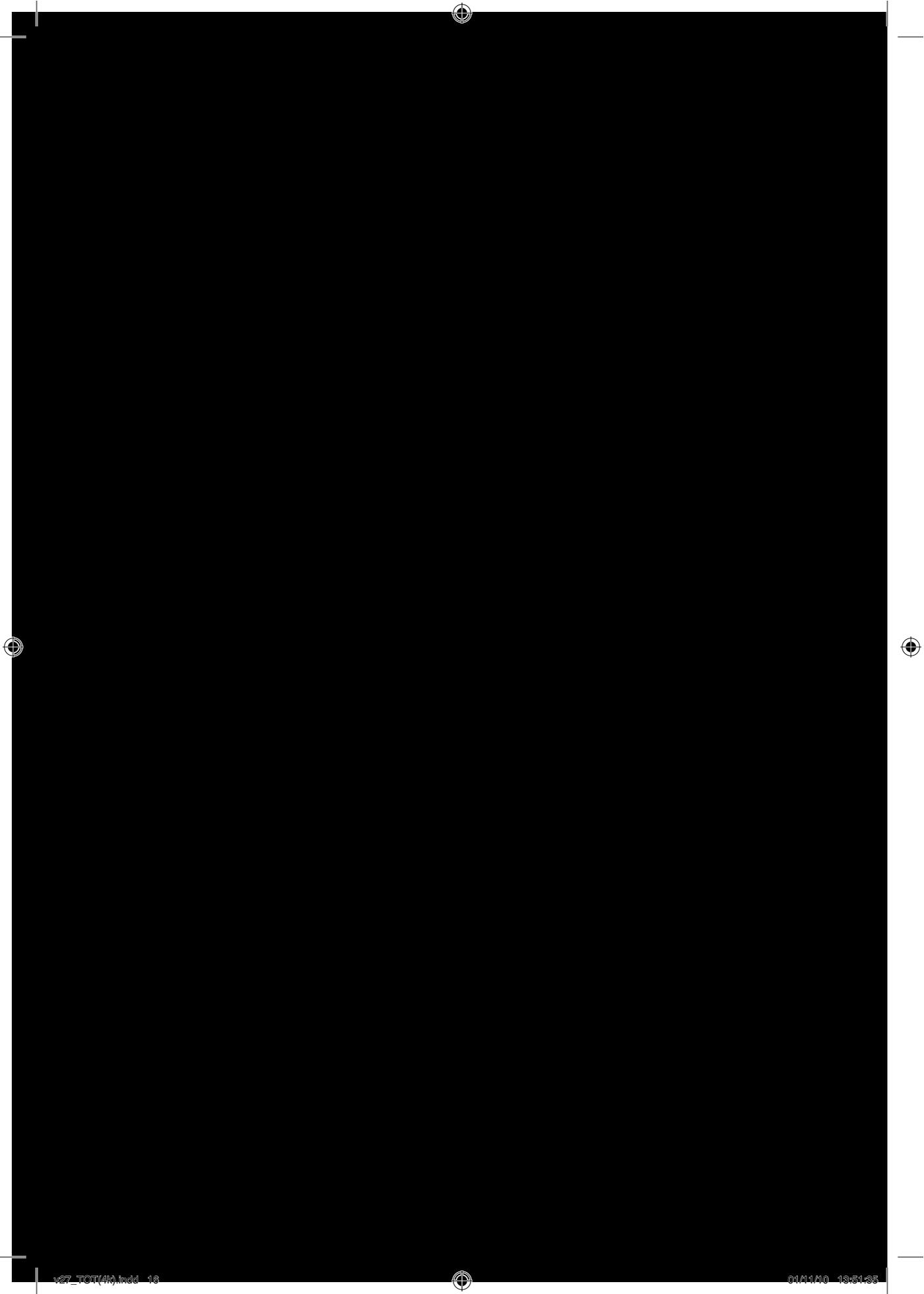
Similar pockets of un-totalised modernity are detected by Jørn Guldberg in the art world of the German Democratic Republic ('Legacy, Heritage or History? A Study of Artistic Agency in the Art Scene of the GDR, 1949-1989 and beyond'). In spite of the system's attempt to regulate the production and reception of art down to the smallest detail, two cases demonstrate alternative stances: on the one hand, the indifference of Bernard Kretzschmar, whose hibernated modernism was tolerated because of its vague and accordingly harmless iconography; on the other hand, the ambivalence of Wolfgang Mattheuer, whose critical questioning of the surveillance, stagnation and industrial rape of communism was left in its pictorial encryption, because translating it into words would transpose the critical stance to the translator himself. Ironically, Mattheuer began losing that faith in the system he had, in fact, kept since its establishment, as its control of the artists decreased starting in the 1970s. For, in his

own words: 'When we are no longer told to supply pictures of harmony, then pictures of protest and conflict also become invalid.'

In the book's final contribution, Olaf Peters's 'Aesthetic Solipsism: The Artist and Politics in Max Beckmann 1927-1938', the perspective shifts once again towards totalitarian experiences across the political spheres. Although later adopted into the modernist canon of autonomous form experimentation, Beckmann himself only actively pursued this un-political space in the years following the Nazi conquest and his subsequent position as an émigré in Holland. While still disillusioned by the relativist values and mass culture of the Weimar republic, Beckmann presented a vision of the artist as leader guiding the common people to a destiny as human gods. In this paradoxically aristocratic Bolshevism, we find eerie premonitions of Hitler's artist-turned-politician – a reason why Beckmann soon gave it up to become anti-totalitarian. And yet, in the overall linking of aesthetic transcendentalism and politics there are also parallels to Greenberg's high-modernist utopia of the elitist artist guiding the masses, an idea likewise framed in Trotskyism.

### NOTES

- 1 Rosalind Krauss, Yves-Alain Bois, Benjamin Buchloh and Hal Foster, *Art Since 1900: Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism* (Thames & Hudson; London, 2005).
- 2 Hans-Jörg Czech and Nikola Doll (eds.), *Kunst und Propaganda im Streit der Nationen 1930-1945* (Deutsches Historisches Museum Berlin; Berlin, 2007).
- 3 'Avant-Garde and Kitsch' [1939], in *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, ed. John O'Brian (University of Chicago Press; Chicago and London, 1993), vol. 1, pp. 5-22.
- 4 Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford University Press; Stanford, 2002; German 1st edn. 1947).



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# GENEALOGIES

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# 1 REDEMPTION IN TOTALITY

## Cultural utopias of late romanticism and crossroads of art and politics: Wagner, Behrens, Fidus, Hitler

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ANDERS V. MUNCH

### INTRODUCTION

The totalitarian regimes of both Hitler and Stalin had an ambiguous relationship with modernity. The avant-garde was oppressed, yet the state-controlled, totalitarian-minded art and architecture manifested a certain dependence on the modern idiom. On the stage of world history the front lines between fascism, communism and the avant-garde gradually became heavily demarcated, but if we go back in history to when the movements took shape, there were many connections among them. It almost seems as though the boundaries were drawn haphazardly. One look at Mussolini's connection to Futurism and Rationalistic architecture in Italy shows that the animosity between the avant-garde and the populist dictatorship was not a matter of course.

I will attempt to adhere to this complexity and follow the historical connecting lines back in time to when the elements were mixed and the conditions for totalitarian art created. I will not discuss reasons for the later developments, only provide some conditions that I think should be addressed if we are to understand the development of totalitarian art and the mixing of art and politics. Thus, we must return to the view of culture in the second half of the 19th century, when art and politics were mixed in a speculative vision of the artistic redemption of modern man and a new spirit of community. I will start with Richard Wagner and the vision behind his music dramas. My background for including him is my current work on a major research project concerning the idea of the Gesamtkunstwerk as formulated by Wagner and its later significance in the development of modern art forms.<sup>1</sup>

In Wagner we find many of the ingredients whose mixture we would like to understand. He started as a revolutionary in the Dresden uprising of 1849, and the works he wrote on art theory in the years after he was exiled after the defeat of the uprising also expressed his utopian socialism. This was the foundation of his great music dramas and their realisation as music festivals in Bayreuth. Over time, however, he changed his goal from revolution to a regeneration of lost cultural values. As we know, he even came to stand for radical viewpoints that the extreme right could use later on. As a person Wagner thus depicts the entire spectrum in which we're working here. The easiest thing to do may be to say that he turned out to be a deserter and betrayed the revolutionary cause, but then we don't capture the influence that his radical view of art had on later devel-

opments. It is a considerable challenge to see a continuity from the revolutionary to the regenerative Wagner, and the political scientist Udo Bermbach succeeded in this in *Der Wahn des Gesamtkunstwerks* from 1994. In the older Wagner we can still see a kind of socialism, but it was served up with populism, anti-Semitism and vegetarianism. This almost sounds like the concrete recipe for Hitler, but I am not going to make a simple causal inference, for we rediscover these ingredients throughout modern culture from 1850 to the racism and health ideology of today. Wagner can hardly be the instigator of the whole state of affairs, but he acted out modernity to a remarkable degree and reacted to the new conditions of thinking and of life according to patterns we see repeated later. Friedrich Nietzsche produces a very precise diagnosis of Wagner in *Der Fall Wagner*, a diagnosis that also explains his own Wagnerian obsession: 'Wagner resumes modernity. It doesn't help; one must first be Wagnerian [...].'<sup>2</sup>

These words constitute the point of view on which my entire outline of the historical conditions for totalitarian art is based. We may not be able to gush over Wagner's art, but we must at least understand those who were moved by the Wagnerian cultural vision of redemptive, monumental art that could unite the people. Pathologically yet symptomatically, 'The case of Wagner' offers a unique opportunity to see the speculative, ideological elements within a context. It was not only Hitler who could draw on these ideas. Many modern artists both inside and outside of Germany also reflected further on Wagner's vision of a Gesamtkunstwerk as the artwork of the future. These elements could actually lead to anything. There are in any case several decisive traces of Wagner. If one sees a straight line running from Wagner to Hitler's theatrical and demagogical staging of the Third Reich, one must at the same time see just as direct connecting lines to modernism and central figures like Peter Behrens (1868-1940) and Walter Gropius, Wassily Kandinsky and Kurt Schwitters. Wagner encompasses socialism and conservative cultural criticism, the avant-garde and mass culture. One must always see both modernity and reaction in him. My work centres on the linkage to modern art by way of the idea of the Gesamtkunstwerk, but it is important for me to take this opportunity to relate this to the connection to the Third Reich.

The ambiguity in Wagner can, I think, help us illuminate totalitarian art generally as a historical phenomenon, but in this paper

I will only follow his concrete traces in Germany. With Hitler it is also significant that he could see himself as an artist in his construction of the German people, and this understanding of art is one of the patterns that Nazism follows. I shall return to this in my conclusion, but in the meantime we should keep in view the aspects of the late-romantic understanding of art that open up the political vision of a new culture, a new sense of community.

### WAGNER'S TWO TRACKS

First I will point out the track that leads directly from Wagner to Hitler. In Bayreuth, Wagner had gathered a circle of third-rate thinkers and writers around him. He had wanted a house philosopher for a long time: first he courted Arthur Schopenhauer to no avail; then came Nietzsche, but he disappeared again; and finally he just had a diverse group of candidates. After their master's death in 1883, they constituted the circle that expressed itself with his authority in the journal *Bayreuther Blätter*. However, there was no utopian socialism left here: Arthur de Gobineau's racial theories and Paul de Lagarde's conservative cultural criticism set the entire agenda. Wagner's widow Cosima used the circle to maintain the interest in festivals. In spite of his English ancestry, Houston Stewart Chamberlain, marrying into the family in 1908, took the role as German philosopher and wrote on the basis of a racist and national-chauvinistic viewpoint. The Nazis could explicitly use Chamberlain and others from the Bayreuth circle, and Hitler made pilgrimages to Bayreuth, just as he did to Weimar, where Nietzsche's sister reigned.

Whereas Wagner's offspring in Bayreuth desperately stuck to his own productions and at the same time cemented the image of the Germanic, anti-modern master, in Europe there was a different interest in making very modern productions of the music dramas. Precisely out of fascination for Wagner, the Swiss Adolph Appia created a new abstract and symbolic scenography that became the foundation of modern theatre. In art, Wagner was a crucial modern figure. To be sure, we might have an image of the young Hitler during his years in Vienna, among the standees in the opera evening after evening, where he may have gotten his overdose of Wagner. But at the same time I can mention the young Charles-Édouard Jeanneret, later known as Le Corbusier, who for several months in 1909 did the same thing.<sup>3</sup> He was on a study trip, but the music world took all his attention away from architecture. Adolf Loos would be

another modernist among the audience. This artistic interest probably created many receptive readers of the publications of the Bayreuth circle, readers who did not see until later the chasm that was opening up between the modern and the anti-modern aspects of Wagner.

If we turn to Wagner himself, from the beginning it was his goal to create by means of art a social community that surmounted all the egotistical particular interests, the division of labour, and the alienation that generally split up society. The Germanic was not a goal in itself, but rather belonged to the popular mythology he used to create the people's own common work. His analysis of the social crisis was progressive, but in time he focused increasingly on the evils that constantly made the sense of community impossible and were apparently in his way and in the way of the realisation of his work. In general terms, the problem was urban culture with its atomisation of values and liberalistic dilution of shared interests. With increasing bitterness he believed he could see this decadent, liberal city life represented by scheming Jews - without being able to recognise the pettiness in himself. It was a very widespread interpretation, but best known in Lagarde's conservative cultural criticism. The countermove was a construction of original, national and rural virtues.

This opposition between city and country life is known all the way up to the present day. The critique of city life and of the split is justified as part of modern thinking, but its tone became shrill, and in the 1890s it became a populist, anti-Semitic movement, the 'völkische' parties. This movement, which was one of the direct conditions for Nazism, sought demagogically to monopolise the critique of modern materialism, or the urban way of life, but the critique was of course relevant to everyone, and later historians should not accept this simple opposition when looking at the period. Artists in particular tried to create ideals and spiritual values. Many could be passionately fond of rural, original ideals in their progressive cultural criticism without ending up in a 'völkisch' position - an important and striking example is William Morris in England. In the novel *News from Nowhere* from 1890, he dreams of a future society without money or conflicts, based on handicraft and agriculture.

Wagner, who can be compared to Morris<sup>4</sup> as a political artist who was critical of culture, never depicted a rural utopia in his works. Neither was it the city he depicted, but he wished to create a com-

mon myth for modern man. He wanted modern society to be purified by a common experience, a merging and redemption of all interests in a festival for the whole nation. Everyone, regardless of their way of life and social class, should be swept along in the grand common work in which the art forms are united, all interests merge, and actors and audiences unite in their common experience. This is not about daily life, not about city or country, but rather the moment of redemption, the festival in which everyone acknowledges general, human values as pivotal. The experience of the totality is decisive, and Wagner uses all available means to influence the senses, feelings and thoughts as a whole. The influence goes from the purely physiological impulse to the conceptual content. In calculating the effect, he is extremely modern. Nietzsche thinks that no-one demonstrates the labyrinth of the modern psyche better than Wagner. The senses should be fixed and transformed in repetitions and an unbreakable identity between word, sound, gesture and action. The total effect does not find its equal until later in film, and the optimisation and unification of the effect on the audience anticipates the modern culture industry.

This great, advanced, artistic apparatus belongs to modern culture, far from the rural utopias. Wagner was above all incredibly modern for his times and topical far up into modernism. Blue-eyed heroic figures may have been at the forefront, but they were merely actants that perished in a complex, nihilistic world order. In his writings on art, the *Zürcher Schriften*, the 'völkische' was, just like anti-Semitism, secondary in respect to the ambition to redeem modern man artistically and politically. But there is no doubt that in his art Wagner was a seducer to a degree that political demagogues could but envy. With his early opera on the Roman popular tribune *Rienzi*, it might seem as though he considered himself for that role, but *Rienzi* of course perished. With totality as the goal of all artistic effects, and with the unification of the experience and the perpetual repetition of content, Wagner's works almost seemed to be the prototype of totalitarian art on the conditions of modern culture. He insists on his own conception of the people's common interest and of true human nature without making room for individual variations. In that sense one might say that his art is not democratic, although he in fact designed a democratic auditorium without boxes or class divisions. But what is totalitarian art? So far I have used this term without asking whether it makes any sense.

If we are referring to the art connected to and used by totalitarian regimes, it is historically significant. But can we in principle speak of art that in itself is totalitarian? Wagner was all alone with his revolution, and the music dramas were not connected to any exercise of power. Not until long after his death was he compromised by the Nazis' use of him. Still, could totalitarianism be inherent in the very idea of the Gesamtkunstwerk since it aims to grasp and shape everything? Bazon Brock has sought to distinguish between the concepts of Gesamtkunstwerk, total art and totalitarian art.<sup>5</sup> These art forms are oriented toward influencing reality as a whole, but in different registers, different realities. The Gesamtkunstwerk seeks to realise as many of the aspects of reality as can be contained in the form of the work by uniting all art forms and all artistic effects. It is thus tied to the work. Total art seeks to burst the limitations of the form of the work and become an activity identical to self-expression as reality. It is thus tied to the artist or the actors and has its limitation in their life practice. Totalitarian art also seeks to surround and influence all of reality and concrete life practice, but it has its goal in the masses as the susceptible reality. The whole of the work or of self-expression is not a goal in itself, for this can also stand in the way of affecting the masses. The final word has not been said on this matter, but I believe that this differentiation is a good place to begin. Even though I will not acquit Wagner of having dreams of power, I do not think that we can call his works or the very idea of the Gesamtkunstwerk totalitarian.

It may be said with some justice that with its architecture, uniforms, propaganda and choreographed mass demonstrations, Hitler's staging of the Third Reich was the greatest realisation of a Gesamtkunstwerk, but this is still only one of the tracks stemming from Wagner. The other one is all the modern art forms that break open the limits of the fine arts and seek to redeem a reality in the act of transgression. It may be said with all the more reason that many of them honour the dream of the Gesamtkunstwerk, Wagnerism spread to the visual arts at the end of the 19th century. Part of early modernism directly referred to Wagner as a constant source of inspiration. There were in particular a number of visual artists, such as Henry van de Velde and Behrens, who wished to liberate art from the gilt frames and therefore did commercial art and practical designing and ended up in total design and architecture. It was actually this same track that led Kandinsky, Kasimir Malevich and Piet Mondrian to abstrac-

tion: Kandinsky's abstraction should be viewed in connection with his abstract stage compositions, Malevich's with both suprematist stagings and proposals of industrial design, and Mondrian's with De Stijl architecture.

At a very early stage - as early as Baudelaire - Wagnerism spread extensively in France and Belgium, where it had an influence on symbolism. In Vienna it became both artistically and politically important, a development which W.J. McGrath traces in his study *Dionysian Art and Populist Politics in Austria* from 1974. This book is important in showing how Gustav Mahler, Sigmund Freud, and one of the fathers of social democracy, Viktor Adler, could be decisively inspired by Wagner's culture-critical visions; and although they were Jews, how they could belong to the core of the movement, which did not take the populist track until the 1890s, with Georg von Schönerer's pan-German nationalism and Karl Lueger's municipal government in Vienna. It is crucial to track the exact point at which the waters part; for example, here in Vienna we have an important starting point for both modern culture and thinking and the inflamed environment that influenced Hitler.

## BEHRENS AND INDUSTRIAL CULTURE

In order to follow the development in art in the 20th century I will on the one hand take a look at Behrens, who developed the Wagnerian impulse into a modern form of architecture, and on the other at the graphic artist Fidus, who stood for life reform and Aryan mysticism, but without being acknowledged by the Nazis. These are two entirely antithetical figures, each reflecting historical developments. As I will demonstrate, they stand for big industry and the earthbound people, respectively; and in spite of the contrast, these were themes that merged in totalitarian art. Behrens was originally a painter in Munich, but in the artists' colony in Darmstadt in 1901 he built and furnished his own house, which became a Gesamtkunstwerk of harmonious decorations and tableware and textiles of his own design. The heart of the house was the quasi-sacred music room (ill. 1.1), and all the abstract decorations were conceived as the rhythm of music through a joint composition.

His vision stretched further to include a festival hall in Darmstadt, where the people could take part in a common work that included poetry, drama and music. The wording in the publication *Feste des Lebens und der Kunst* from 1900 is an outright renewal of Wagner.



**1.1.** Peter Behrens, Music Room, Haus Behrens (1901), The Artists' Colony Mathildehöhe, Darmstadt.

However, it did not go further than the scene for the community's opening exhibition in 1901. There were many dreams like this - about festivals and the building of temples - which we will also see in Fidus, but what is interesting about Behrens is that his cultural vision can in fact be followed in his later work with the industry.

When Behrens later becomes the chief architect for the electricity concern AEG in 1908, his declared goal is to use the industry's resources to develop a new culture. In this way he confirms the industry's capitalistic social order, and thus there is no revolutionary goal but rather the hope of reversing the forces in order to develop new, contemporary design and new cultural dignity after the decadence of the 19th century. This is the idea behind his lecture entitled *Kunst und Technik* from 1910. By committing to big, effective buildings and to mass production, he hopes to be able to develop new monumental forms that can outline an 'industrial culture' with its own spiritual content. The Turbine Factory from 1909 is reminiscent of the Greek temple with its pompous gables, and of the Christian cathedral with its light, towering glass walls; but at the same time it was a rational building with modern, purely functional material forms (ill. 1.2). The factory building was primarily a workplace, but

in its external, monumental form it sought to form a symbol for the foundation of industrial culture. In this desire to create a cultural symbol there was thus a connecting line from Jugendstil decorations in Darmstadt to commercial art and product design in AEG. As in his Jugendstil, Behrens sought an identity in the form, an interest that ranged from commercial art and product design to the architectural form of the factories; an example is his AEG logo on the Turbine Factory. If we can speak of a Gesamtkunstwerk in this respect, it was a distributive form in which an idiom was diffused in society through advertisements, industrial items and power plants. And this became the project later embraced at the Bauhaus.

This 'Work' was very wide-ranging, thoroughly calculated, and had all of culture as its goal, but we cannot call it totalitarian. We rediscover it in the 'corporate identity' that depicts the product brands of today and is more important than the products themselves. But the totalitarian regimes could of course take advantage of such an effective means of communication with a clear graphic line in the propaganda and corporate identity in the military corps and the entire state. The alliance with big industry and modern technology could assume a cultural shape here. Thus, the new monumentality

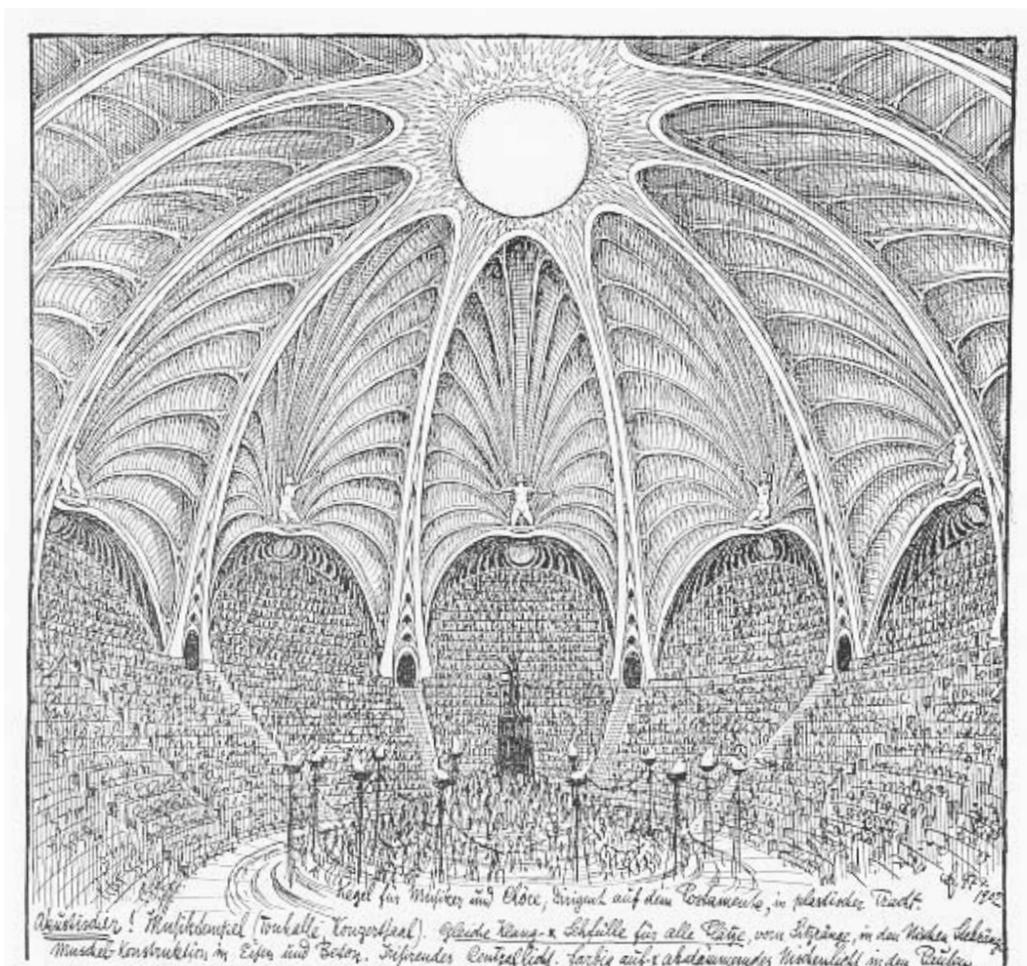


**1.2.** Peter Behrens, Turbine Factory (1909), AEG, Berlin.

that Behrens wished to unite with the functional material forms could also, as in the German Embassy in St Petersburg in 1911-13, apply to the megalomaniac classicism for which Hitler developed a taste. In the interwar years Behrens grappled with both expressionism's and functionalism's international style, but it was merciful that he died in 1940, before becoming tempted to build his new culture together with Albert Speer.

### FIDUS AND THE LIFE REFORMS

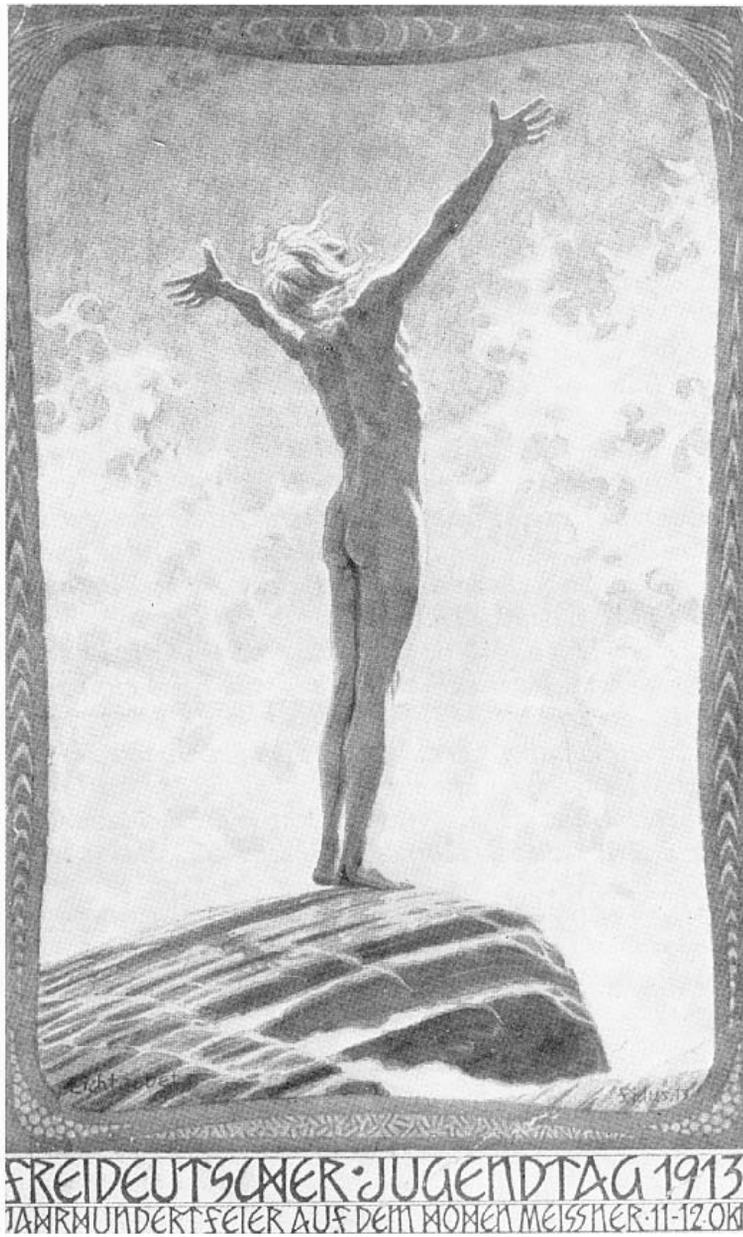
Quite a different career can be studied with Hugo Höppener (1868-1948), one of Behrens's contemporaries, who became known as the artist Fidus.<sup>6</sup> He also started out as a visual artist whose illustrations for trend-setting journals like *Pan* had an influence on Jugendstil in Munich. When the Jugendstil faded after 1900, artists like Behrens sought other areas of self-expression for their grand visions. Fidus had visions that were just as grand, and yet he continued as an illustrator for alternative journals. From his earliest youth at the end of the 1880s he wore reform clothing and sought the simplicity of nature through his food and lifestyle. The festival halls were only one of the kinds of monumental buildings he drew as symbols of a new culture and a new undetermined religion. He saw himself as a temple artist but never found builders for his new sacred spaces, which ranged from concert halls and mystical temples to sports arenas and crematoriums. With these architectural fantasies we are somewhere in between Wagner's festival halls and Hitler's gigantic stadium for mass meetings and sports festivals. When Rudolf Steiner drew his Goetheanum himself, Fidus could with some justice be disappointed about not being sent for, for he held a central position in the environment of theosophical speculations and reforms in human nature upon which the Steiner movement was based. The Temple of the Earth was drawn as early as 1895, while the sketch of a tone hall is from 1902 (ill. 1.3) and shows the entire auditorium - audience and architecture - transported by the music. As Jugendstil artists, Behrens and Fidus created icons for the continued Wagnerian wave: the wood cut *The Kiss* from 1898 by Behrens, and the motif *Prayer of Light*, to which Fidus kept returning, here in watercolour in 1913 (ill. 1.4). Both motifs have been reproduced an infinite number of times. Whereas *The Kiss* shows in the movement of the hair the intoxication and disintegration of the individual in love and desire and the blind power of life, something which was a central theme in



1.3. Fidus, *Acoustic Music Temple* (1902), feather drawing.

Wagner, *Prayer of Light* follows the path embarked on by the older Wagner. The naked blond man also surrenders himself to life and nature by worshipping the sun, but here nature is charged with spirituality. We nevertheless get no sense of what he realises in this revelation: we do not share his vision, but are left with his body as an ideal for nature, nudism, health, gymnastics and race. The exaggerated spiritual strength is directed back into the body, which must subsequently jerk about in various exercises, therapies and routines.

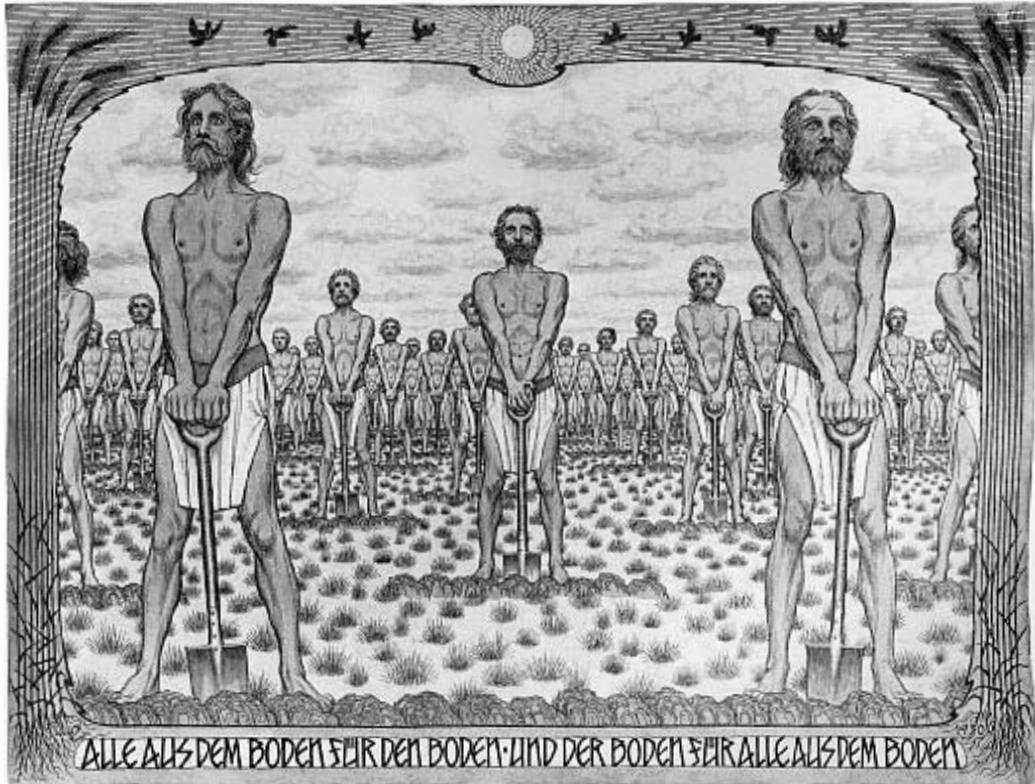
Back in the 19th century the ideas of the reform movement corresponded to those of the socialists, inasmuch as their critique of



14. Fidus, *Prayer of Light* (5<sup>th</sup> version, 1913), postcard.

culture targeted alienation and inequality, and their desire was to change society. Both Wagner and Morris are clear examples of this. The vision of garden cities is an example of a common interest. Fidus also drew posters for International Workers Day around 1900. But the interests split when the parties took shape, and the reform-seeking souls fluttered away.<sup>7</sup> Then movements and journals for a conservative revolution appeared with the aim of saving culture from both liberalistic modernity and the socialistic takeover. As in Vienna, the polarisation was not there from the beginning, and we should not overlook the correspondences and the many mixed middle positions that were not attenuated until later. Fidus himself drew an illustration of the parting of the ways of communism, land reform and capitalism. The latter leads out over the edge into decadence; and of the other two alternatives, communism leads to the inhabitable peaks of idealism, while land reform opens a new Promised Land. From the perspective of social history, it is interesting to find out who followed the 'völkische' reform thoughts. It was not an uprising of the rural populations, involving instead a trapped middle class from the city that wished to escape. Like Fidus, most of them got no farther than the suburbs of Berlin.

The land reform represented the illusory nature reserve in which one could seek compensation for modern society's childhood diseases. None of Fidus's scenarios could be realised outright, even though he was in fact very concrete in his depiction. The woman and man from 1910 encompass his entire dream of a festival hall and of nudity and life in the country, but if we consider the climate of Brandenburg and the endless fields, the clothing and the little spade are not adequate. However, the spade is more picturesque than the plough, which is required for the cultivation of the soil. It might stem from the realistic painting, in which the motif is the rural proletariat who do the dirty work, while the plough belongs to the farmer who possesses the land. The spade here seems mostly to belong in the garden, and suggests the city dweller's dream of getting a garden. Fidus no doubt also thought that agriculture should be like cultivating a paradisaical garden, a sustainable organic whole. Later, with *Spade Parade* from 1930, there is enough manpower but the dense phalanx of cultivators of the soil is stylised into the mass as ornament (ill. 1.5). Considered alone, the effort of the individual is futile, but this is an army of men loyal to the German soil and they can raise a new, healthy culture. The spade can also refer to building



1.5. Fidus, *Spade Parade* (1930), feather drawing.

activities and facilities through which the 'spade soldiers' build and fortify Germany. The idea behind *The Spade Parade* corresponds to the political agenda of totalitarianism.

Even though Fidus was a dissident and isolated both artistically and politically, he was a characteristic figure of this period, where the extremes set the agenda. His works are only a step away from the political field where the cultural vision was to be realised. In my opinion, there are characteristics of late Romanticism in the thought that if we draw, depict and stage this idea then we are almost there. For Wagner it was primarily a question of 'realisation'. When the effect was complete it was also real. Fidus did not have a festival hall erected, but he was able to reform his own life and fill it with symbols of the sun, runes and other Viking kitsch. His forced esotericism compensates for the societal unity he is unable to realise.

## HITLER AND GERMANY AS AN ARTWORK

Fidus appears to comprise the essential ingredients of the form that Hitler would assume later, especially considering that Hitler himself was a rejected artist and had taken the step toward politics that in this tradition seems so short. As early as World War I, Fidus had created illustrations for what would become the mythology of the Third Reich; but when it was staged politically he could not be used. He painted *The Head of the Führer*, in 1941, and the work was purchased – but otherwise he had burned out and never had a renaissance. Although in Fidus we have all the ingredients of an apparently crystal-clear totalitarian artist, he never got the opportunity to develop this identity politically. In the eyes of posterity he rather looks like a parody – perhaps even a parody of Hitler as an artist.

It is obvious that Hitler could not use a visionary artist for his project when he himself played the role of the visionary artistic genius and the brilliant architect who created and controlled a new Germany. His total power was legitimised as the creative power of regeneration. No objections were tolerated before the work was complete. Otto Karl Werckmeister and Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen have both written important articles (on Hitler's self-conception as an artist, and the crucial role played by art in the self-conception of Nazism as a whole respectively), and I will not seek to repeat or supplement their analyses.<sup>8</sup> I would simply like to look into the views of art and culture apparently implied by totalitarian art. The Nazis took advantage of and strengthened a general interest in art in the hope of creating new cultural values upon which to build society. Art had long been regarded and debated as the symbol for the fate of culture. Since the middle of the 19th century complaints had been made about a general crisis in style that many also believed was rooted in modern society. The entire wave of handicraft and design was an attempt to create new decorations and a dignified idiom for a new time. Behrens's vision of a new culture is typical, only he chooses industry as the locomotive for regeneration. The cultural expectations for art and architecture were so high that it was impossible to meet them.

These expectations were blazing in the young Hitler when he tried his hand as an artist in Vienna. He displayed only very limited artistic skill, but for this very reason he may perhaps be considered an exponent of a general, widespread view of art. We must bear in mind that he did not have any sense of the modern art in Vienna and Munich, of Kokoschka, Kandinsky or the many others who sought

to give modern answers to the crisis in art and culture. He painted postcard motifs such as Ringstraße in Vienna. We must also remember that it is not until he is politically active after World War I that he develops a radical consequence of the influence of art on culture. Not before then does he apparently find his medium, his language, where his expectations can be expressed even though this occurs outside art. The fact that the pretensions for art are only fulfilled outside art is evident in many of the modern art forms, particularly in outright anti-art such as Dada. But the dream of art transgressing itself and jumping out of the gilt frames is found in Jugendstil and further back in Morris and Wagner. The aim was redemption in a totality, a reality that had an effect on art.

The staging of the Third Reich should be the redemption in a totality that can be compared to the transgression of all fine arts. As mentioned previously, creating a people and establishing a society through different artistic effects can be considered the most wide-ranging realisation of a Gesamtkunstwerk. Hitler himself drew designs for the architecture that created symbols, monuments and backdrops to unite the people, both theatres and fortifications. Industrial design supplemented total design (Hitler's rough sketches for furniture and the Kraft-durch-Freude (later Volks) Wagen), but contributed in particular through graphic art to symbols, posters, and finally to the uniforms of the military corps - in short, to a corporate identity with powerful advertising value for the regime, according to his own sketches for the swastika. It was an advertising feat to unite the effectiveness of big industry and modern technology with the people's roots in nature and history, one that went beyond Behrens and Fidus. The propaganda machine of course also drew on theatricality and on music in processions and mass meetings. The musical intoxication, which was an artistic ideal, was a composite part of the perpetual movement and mobilisation of the masses, and is rendered in the propaganda film *Triumph des Willens*.

These artistic effects are of course scattered and do not refer back to the work of art as a whole, for only the new reality should, as it were, remain. The focus and the intensity arise in the presence of Der Führer as the creator and redeemer of this whole. According to Brock's distinction, we might consider whether or not this is total art on the basis of the significance of the artist's self-expression. Hitler reformed and staged his own life as a spiritual regimentation; but his self-expression only made sense in front of the masses, for whom he

sacrificed himself and to whom he abandoned himself in his grand speeches. It is in the practice of politics and the influencing of the masses that the effects are linked. The staging of the Third Reich did not make sense without the masses, and it was above all a totalitarian practice.

I have suggested that there were plenty of effects and much inspiration for the totalitarian regimes to borrow from the late-romantic visions of culture, but in so doing I have not indicated a cause or a causal connection, for we cannot conceive of modernism without these visions either. We ought to condemn and expose any kind of totalitarianism; that is obvious. However, we should not simply believe that it is easy to delimit phenomena like totalitarian art or the view of art behind it, for many of the ideas behind it also had an influence on modern art. When neglecting the visions of culture and the historical thinking of late Romanticism that was used by the totalitarian regimes, we also touch on ways of thinking that are vital conditions for modern thinking as a whole.

## NOTES

- 1 Doctoral dissertation: *Fra Bayreuth til Bauhaus. Gesamtkunstwerk 'et og de moderne kunstformer* (From Bayreuth to Bauhaus. The Total Work of Art and Modern Art Forms), unpublished. For a short introduction, see 'The Gesamtkunstwerk as Modern Concept of Art', *SITE*, vol. 9–10, Stockholm, 2004.
- 2 'Wagner resümiert die Modernität. Es hilft nichts; man muß erst Wagnerianer sein [...]'. Friedrich W. Nietzsche, *Der Fall Wagner* [1888], from idem., *Sämtliche Werke: Kritische Studienausgabe*, eds. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (De Gruyter; Berlin 1988 [1967–77]), vol. 6, p. 12.
- 3 According to H. Allen Brooks, *Le Corbusier's Formative Years: Charles-Edouard Jeanneret at La Chaux-de-Fonds* (University of Chicago Press; Chicago, 1997).
- 4 Carl E. Schorske compares them in his article 'The Quest for the Grail: Wagner and Morris', in Kurt H. Wolff and Barrington Moore, Jr. et al. (eds.), *The Critical Spirit: Essays in honor of Herbert Marcuse* (Beacon Press; Boston, 1967); and I compare their roles myself from the perspective of art history, in 'Design as Gesamtkunstwerk: Historical Transformations of a Vision from Wagner and Morris to Verner Panton', *Scandinavian Journal of Design History* (Rhodos International Science and Art Publishers; Copenhagen, 2001), vol. 11.
- 5 Bazon Brock, 'Der Hang zum Gesamtkunstwerk', in the exhibition catalogue, *Der Hang zum Gesamtkunstwerk: europäische utopien seit 1800*, Kunsthaus, Zürich et al., 1983.
- 6 My reference is Janos Frecot, Johann Fr. Geist and Diethart Kerbs, *Fidus 1868–1948: zur ästhetischen Praxis bürgerlicher Fluchtbewegungen* (Rogner & Bernhard; Munich, 1972).
- 7 Professor Beat Wyss, Stuttgart, discussed Morris and Fidus in this perspective in his lectures at the Department of Art History, Aarhus University, March 1999.
- 8 Otto Karl Werckmeister, 'Hitler the Artist', *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 23, no. 2, 1997; and Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen, 'Kunsthørens æstetiske visioner og Nazismens totale kunst', *Kultur & Klasse*, no. 91, 2001.

JACOB WAMBERG

## INTRODUCTION:

## THE HEROISATION OF WORK - AND ITS DISCONTENTS

In 'The Origin of the Work of Art' (1935-36, revised 1960), a van Gogh painting of a pair of old shoes (ill. 2.1) famously serves to illustrate Martin Heidegger's idea of the organic relationship between the working peasant woman, her equipment, and the soil on which she works:

From the dark opening of the worn insides of the shoes the toilsome tread of the worker stares forth. In the stiffly rugged heaviness of the shoes there is the accumulated tenacity of her slow trudge through the far-spreading and ever-uniform furrows of the field swept by a raw wind. On the leather lie the dampness and richness of the soil. Under the soles slides the loneliness of the field-path as evening falls. In the shoes vibrates the silent call of the earth, its quiet gift of the ripening grain and its unexplained self-refusal in the fallow desolation of the wintry field. This equipment is pervaded by uncomplaining anxiety as to the certainty of bread, the wordless joy of having once more withstood want, the trembling before the impending childbed and shivering at the surrounding menace of death. This equipment belongs to the *earth*, and it is protected in the *world* of the peasant woman.<sup>1</sup> [Heidegger's italics]



2.1. Vincent van Gogh, *Old Shoes* (1886), oil on canvas. Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum.



2.2. Werner Peiner, *German Soil* (1933), oil on canvas.

As has become empirically well supported in later decades, this rural vision, which Heidegger first presented in lectures in Freiburg and Frankfurt in 1935 and 1936, is not politically innocent, but in some crucial ways borders on, if not melts into, the Nazi nationalist agenda and its accompanying heroisation of work and strength.<sup>2</sup> Through features such as the shoes' cave-like opening, rugged heaviness and soily richness, and furthermore through the bonding of the agricultural cycle with birth and death, the shoes are turned into property of the earth and its 'silent call', thus reminding us of the Nazi *Blut-und-Boden* relationship between the soil and its inhabitants – an idea which Heidegger actually embraced in these years and had promoted as rector of Freiburg University in 1933-34. Presenting the shoes as work equipment belonging to the earth, Heidegger evokes an organic relationship that is close to the Nazi conviction that work, tenacious and hard, is a vitalist force stemming from nature. Although catalysed by van Gogh, Heidegger's vision thus also invites comparisons with contemporary National Socialist depictions of peasant culture and field work: take, for instance, Werner Peiner's *German Soil* (1933; ill. 2.2) whose agonizingly perspectival pattern of densely packed linear furrows under a darkening yet sharply lit sky

recalls Heidegger's 'far-spreading and ever-uniform furrows of the field swept by a raw wind.'

But how are we now to handle the actual content of Heidegger's ideological framing: a work by a painter whose influence indeed peaked in Germany in the years after World War I?<sup>3</sup> While it is comforting to assume that Heidegger's choice is exclusively a matter of reception history - which says a lot about himself and the roots of Nazism, but not much about van Gogh - here, however, I shall propose that Heidegger and van Gogh treat a common theme to a certain degree. In van Gogh, and even more in the father figure, Jean-François Millet, whom he so often copied, we also meet a veneration for, indeed an identification with, the hard-working peasant labouring in close relation with the soil - an almost animistic bond in which Heidegger's 'silent call of the earth' finds haunting parallels in Millet's expression 'cry of the earth' or in van Gogh's idea of Millet being the 'voice of the wheat'.<sup>4</sup>

This study thus seeks a common ideological framework which, in spite of all the differences, binds together Millet and van Gogh with National Socialist culture as well as with totalitarian culture in general. I will term this framework the *heroisation of work*, thereby suggesting that the activity of work is seen as a noble struggle demanding strength and revolutionary power. Implicit in the notion is also a vitalist idea indicating that the revolutionary power ultimately stems from nature, with which the human being, accordingly, forms a strong alliance. Identifying this framework and finding philosophical exponents of it in thinkers such as Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881), the German right-wing writer Ernst Jünger and even Marx - Carlyle being read approvingly by van Gogh, the Nazis and probably Jünger; Jünger by Heidegger; and Marx generally coupling work, nature and revolution - does not, however, indicate that it is given similar visual expression by Millet-van Gogh and the artists of communist and fascist regimes (or even those of certain strands of capitalism like the Mexican muralists). On the contrary, it will be my contention here that as the very first artists to articulate the heroisation of work in Western visual culture, Millet and van Gogh address this revolutionary project with a strangely prophetic ambiguity, partly converting the victorious working hero into a tortured victim, a degraded martyr of work. So in later totalitarian cultures when we encounter a will to fulfil in real life what before amounted only to representations of the heroisation of work, we meet a displaced version of this ambiguity:

a schizophrenic schism in which official visual culture heroises work as bliss almost without shadows, whereas life practice is permeated by these shadows. This dark permeation, also hinted at in Heidegger, reaches an ironic nadir in the concentration camp, in which work – in spite of it being promoted as a liberating force (cf. notably the National Socialist 'Arbeit macht frei') – functions as a punishment, turning the human being into the degraded animal which, like a bad omen, was only hinted at in Millet and van Gogh. Especially in the rural scenes of Millet, an insistent *unheimlich* atmosphere makes the present viewer feel that an all-too-familiar horror is, with a phrase borrowed from Hal Foster, returning from the future.<sup>5</sup>

Mirroring Millet and van Gogh from the other side of the historical axis of totalitarianism, as it were – not sensing revolutionary horrors as mere omens of the future, but revisiting these horrors *post festum* – I will also include the artistic meditations of totalitarian culture made by the German postwar artists Anselm Kiefer (b. 1945) and Georg Baselitz (b. 1938) since the 1960s. As has already been amply demonstrated, Kiefer looks specifically at the German past through the cleft lens of National Socialist totalitarianism. But this project also unveils more general trends of vitalist alliances to the soil, invoking once more, through Heidegger, the fields and skies of Millet and van Gogh, and exposing more thoroughly than has hitherto been realised the roads leading from the vitalist heroisation of work to the concentration camp. Whereas Kiefer's vision is directed against the Ur-German landscapes and architectural interiors, in his early work Baselitz deconstructs the heroic figure of the worker-soldier known from East Bloc Socialist Realist painting. Here, the wounds felt in Millet-van Gogh, but suppressed in totalitarian visual cultures, re-emerge and make these *Neue Typs* once more martyrs – wounded heroes – of an abortive revolution. Christian references such as the cross and stigmata, and old-fashioned rural symbols such as wheelbarrows, ploughs and clogs point further back in history, specifically to the thematic repertoire of Millet and van Gogh again.

With these trans-chronological moves my aim is to deconstruct the boundaries which have hitherto bracketed off totalitarianism into a space of its own, comfortably isolated from other chronological and geographical parts of culture. If we accept that the past can never be understood as virgin territory but is, as Hans-Georg Gadamer confirms,<sup>6</sup> always infiltrated by our later historical horizon,

we must specifically accept that totalitarian experiences are part of this horizon and consequently might cast their shadows on certain earlier incidences. These experiences do so, not because they necessarily comprise the only outcome of the past, but because they are part of this past's potential – a potential that can only be exposed through the strand of it which was actualised. This strategy of art historiography is in principle not different from the strategies used by Robert Rosenblum, Geoffrey Batchen or Hal Foster when establishing genealogies for abstract art, photography and the neo-avant-gardes, respectively. For all three writers, the challenge is to expose features in early movements according to principles found in later movements of which the predecessors – romanticism, late 18th-century culture and historical avant-gardes – could know nothing. Rosenblum refers to 'disquieting progeny' and 'a tradition [...] that could bridge'; Batchen to a 'latent *historical* force', a 'desire' which is 'first consummated' at a later historical moment; Foster to a Freudian 'deferred action', a 'complex relation between premonition and reconstruction', and a circling movement which 'returns [the avant-garde] from the future, repositioned by innovative art in the present'.<sup>7</sup> Thus, in a syncretistic blending of the three authors with Gadamer, just as Millet and van Gogh could be said to unveil a latent historical force – a dark tradition, premonition, or even desire, first consummated in the disquieting progeny of totalitarianism – so, conversely, the *unheimlichkeit* of Millet's paintings might be construed as an effect of their return from the totalitarian horizon of the future, a deferred action later reconstructed in the innovative art of Kiefer and Baselitz.

#### **MODERNITY AND THE HEROISATION OF WORK: SOME PATHS IN THE HISTORY OF IDEAS**

Although I aim to trace genealogies which bind together the heroisation of work represented by totalitarian art with both forerunners in the 19th century and descendants after World War II, I by no means believe that totalitarianism is a radicalisation, let alone a necessary consequence, of modernity, as has been suggested by, among others, Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, Jean-François Lyotard and Giorgio Agamben. According to Horkheimer and Adorno, fascist barbarianism is a direct outcome of Enlightenment rationalism, which turns human beings into objects to be manipulated<sup>8</sup> – a feat legitimised, following Lyotard, through the Enlightenment's grand

narratives of progress. If we are to believe Agamben, the state of exception from the law which is the concentration camp is thus not to be positioned on the periphery of modernity but is rather its very paradigm, so 'we are all virtually *homines sacri*', i.e. outlaws reduced to bare life, infinitely manipulable by the sovereign power.<sup>9</sup>

As I understand it, however, modern rationalisation and narratives of progress are no more responsible for totalitarian catastrophes than a kitchen knife is guilty of a murder committed with it. Thus, the concentration camp is not paradigmatic of modernity, but rather of totalitarian leftovers in otherwise democratic societies. I will argue that both fascist and communist totalitarianism emerge as an archaising strand of modernity staged as a progressive revolution overthrowing modernity's main class, the bourgeoisie and its parliamentary system. An important part of this archaising tendency consists in heroisation, a revival of a classicising warrior ethos which is precisely *not* modern. For as Alexandre Kojève has indicated in his readings of Hegel, modernity could be considered the spreading of a slave-like ethos: not recognition through suppression upheld by violence, as yet still in the feudal systems, but recognition through the activity of work, as manifested in post-medieval democracies.<sup>10</sup> Max Weber can confirm that an accompanying ingredient of post-medieval capitalism and its spiritual background, Protestantism, is thus a new ethic in which human beings gain dignity through sublimating activities - work - rather than through noble heritage and violent deeds.<sup>11</sup> Whereas work was considered a calling from God - a *Beruf* - in the late Middle Ages, later, with the urban secularisation taking place from the fifteenth century onwards, it became a common duty, undramatically providing dignity for everyone pursuing it in the everyday life of the capitalist nation-states.

However, with the arrival of industrialisation in the 19th century this everyday dignity was threatened by a phenomenon perhaps accompanying modernity from its very beginnings but now reaching a critical limit: that of *alienation*. With the new factory machines, an increasingly specialised division of labour, and a capitalist market breaking all bonds between maker and customer, the worker was isolated from the different parts of the work process: the instruments, the product and the user. At a deeper level, this alienation could be characterised as the human being's separation from nature, the individual thus being caged in a Weberian 'steel-hard house' of outer goods which stunts his self-realisation in the world.<sup>12</sup>

It is to this more general alienation from nature that the different kinds of heroisation, and more precisely heroic vitalism, would seem to pose a solution. As Eric Bentley defines the term, heroic vitalism does not designate a formulated coherent belief; rather it marks a set of trans-ideological movements which see society itself as a vital organism. These are represented by thinkers as different as Carlyle, Nietzsche, Stefan George, D.H. Lawrence and also, I will postulate here, Marx, Jünger, Heidegger, and countless followers of fascism and communism.<sup>13</sup> Through this organic thinking heroic vitalism reactualises classical world views, or their perpetuation in the Middle Ages and Renaissance, according to which society takes part in an ideal and organic cosmic order. Yet, contrary to ancient cosmologies which place this order outside the terrestrial realm – which can therefore only be a fainter mirror image of it – heroic vitalism displaces this order to a future reality which society as a whole can fulfil if knowledge of the cosmic order is transformed into power. Still, since the power needed to grasp this allegedly obtainable organic cosmic order is an impatient one, which in a revolutionary fashion should be directed against the industrial alienation, commercial vulgarity and parliamentary weakness of present democratic societies, the vitalist movement can precisely be designated as heroic.

An important element of this heroism, which points further to roots in classical political and aesthetic culture, is the cult of youth. Bentley puts it in the following way:

Their envy of the Greeks and the Romans has not been happy in its results. Some have written glibly that Heroic vitalism is a break with the Graeco-Roman tradition, but, in truth, Heroic vitalism owes more to Greece and Rome, or, more precisely, to the classical education of many of its adherents, than do most other philosophies. [...] The idealization of youth, a perennial characteristic of Hellenism and an important aspect of Nietzsche, George, Lawrence, and the rest, is one of the most morbid products of regressive fantasy. The idealization of youth, outcropping in a hundred youth movements, is an attempt to find sufficiency and inspiration in the sporting life. It is highbrow boy-scoutism.<sup>14</sup>

That this vitalist recreation of a classicistic heroic youth amounts, indeed, to an extremely morbid product of regressive fantasy is amply confirmed in the totalitarian regimes, not least Nazism, which, according to Hitler, invests a huge amount of energy in creating a new *Volk*, 'stronger and more beautiful': 'And from this strength and this beauty comes a new sense of life. In this respect humanity has never approached so near to the classical world as today.'<sup>15</sup>

An obvious example of this classicising heroism is Nietzsche's idea of the *Übermensch*, which perhaps has had an equally powerful influence in the communist and National Socialist regimes, metamorphosing in the former to the idea of the *New Man* in the 1920s, and in the latter to the concept of the *Herrenvolk*, which raises itself above the sick morality of the slaves.<sup>16</sup> In the originally unpublished preface to the *Birth of Tragedy* (1873), addressed to Wagner, Nietzsche thus dreams of a future man who will destroy the bad habits of millennia:

The hero of the future will be a man of tragic awareness. The light of Grecian joyousness will be on his brow, the glory with which the rebirth of antiquity – hitherto lingering – will be inaugurated, the rebirth in Germany of the Hellenic world.<sup>17</sup>

Even if the Nietzschean variant of classicising heroic vitalism aims to dissolve the modern alienation from nature, it does not exactly cover the heroism we are looking for here, because in spite of all common scepticism toward the vulgarities of urban commercial life, Nietzsche is in fact so thoroughly neo-classical and elitist that he bypasses the painful paradox of modern heroism: the focus on work. This, however, we find foregrounded in a heroising philosophy which, in turn, may be almost as important for Soviet communism as for the Italian and German cultures leading up to fascism: that of Carlyle.<sup>18</sup> Carlyle was shaped by German irrationalist philosophies, especially that of Fichte, and was seen by Heinrich von Treitschke, a contemporary rightwing anti-Semite historian, as the only Englishman who fully understood the Germans. This understanding was obviously reciprocal, for a compilation of Carlyle's ideas, *Arbeiten und nicht verzweifeln* (*Work and Not Dispair*), was later hugely influential in Germany, quickly selling 141,000 copies on its publication around 1904 and reaching 300,000 copies by 1931. For Carlyle, mechanistic science and its machines alienated the worker from nature, and therefore he sought a more organic relationship which could outdo the machine and make intuition triumph over logic.<sup>19</sup> He found this organic relationship in work itself, as this activity was in direct contact with the vital forces of nature through human thoughts and will. Indeed, as one can read in *Arbeiten und nicht verzweifeln*: 'Work is life. Of the innermost heart of the worker a God-given force arises, the most holy, celestial essence of life that is breathed into him by almighty God.'<sup>20</sup> Because of this divine, natural force there is knight-

ship in work, just as its performer becomes a hero: 'A whole world of heroes [...] that's what we desire!'<sup>21</sup>

This heroism of the worker brings him in close alliance with the soldier, and, to be sure, Carlyle thought of all work equipment, from hammer to writing feather, as weapons. Conversely, a battlefield could be considered the quintessence of work, a compression in one hour of years of significance.<sup>22</sup> What made Carlyle ambivalent in relation to the later totalitarian uses of his ideas but closer to Heidegger and artists such as Millet and van Gogh was, however, that this heroisation of work did not relieve it from being painful and pervaded by suffering and trouble, since, contrary to especially communist propaganda, human life never was and never can be happy.<sup>23</sup> More unproblematically in tune with totalitarianism was Carlyle's fierce anti-democratism. As stated in *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History*, a book that was recommended school reading for many years even in the United States, Carlyle did not consider that heroism was so pervasive that the masses no longer needed to be guided and disciplined by Great Men. According to Carlyle, such men had been given a divine right to govern and should in truth be the object of worship.<sup>24</sup> No wonder that Bertrand Russell, in his surprisingly clear-sighted genealogy of fascism from 1935, could ask the following about Carlyle: 'Is there one word in all this to which Hitler would not subscribe?'<sup>25</sup>

Although nothing exact is known concerning Carlyle's impact on Jünger, it was most likely significant.<sup>26</sup> At least, in Jünger a series of key Carlylean ideas are further developed: work as a natural life force, the heroism of work and its alliance with power and war, the bourgeoisie as decadent and weak, and work as agony. In Jünger's *Der Arbeiter (The Worker, 1932)*, work is conceived, again, as a universal vital force that pervades everything: thoughts, heart, daily and nightly life, love, art, ritual, war: 'work is the swinging of atoms and the power that moves stars and solar systems.'<sup>27</sup> To borrow Jünger's term from as early as 1930, the goal of work is 'total mobilisation' ('*die totale Mobilmachung*'), a powerful transformation of life into energy that creates associations to the mobilisation of the masses in contemporary totalitarian systems.<sup>28</sup> With this power-related idea of work, an aspect of cultivation is fused into Nietzsche's otherwise virginal will-to-power, likewise a natural force,<sup>29</sup> and therefore Jünger's concept of work is also astonishingly martial. Because war is marked by the pain of implementation in the same way, war is the

true medium of modern work. In this total mobilisation that violently destroys anything resisting it, the worker becomes a soldier, the mass an army, and society a strict military hierarchy.<sup>30</sup> Like Carlyle, Jünger thus considers the worker allied with dangerous and extraordinary forces: 'a wilder and more innocent nature', 'sources [...] in which the magic unity of spirit and blood is embedded.' In contrast, the bourgeois, pursuing safety, seeks 'to deny what is dangerous and seal up the life space'.<sup>31</sup>

Jünger's friend Heidegger is likewise concerned with the primary forces of nature channelled into the cultural sphere by means of work and arms. In 'The Origin of the Work of Art', he grounds cultures in race and soil, especially the Germans in a specifically German natural environment. This happens in a both martial and utilitarian way through his references to the historical *Volk* with its fatal occurrences such as victory and defeat, blessing and curse, mastery and serfdom. Similarly, in a seminar in the winter of 1933-34, he specified, 'So [...] *nature* becomes manifest as the space for a people, as landscape and home country [*Heimat*], as ground [*Boden*] and soil', and: 'The more liberated the nature is that unfolds, the more magnificent and subdued is the formgiving [*gestaltende*] power of the true *technology* that makes her subservient' [Heidegger's italics].<sup>32</sup>

Thus construing a bridge between technology, work and uninhibited nature, it is not surprising that Heidegger became strongly inspired by Jünger's reinterpretation of Nietzsche's will-to-power as work. In the winter of 1939-40, just after the outbreak of World War II, he made an exegesis of *Der Arbeiter* for a small circle of university teachers.<sup>33</sup> As Heidegger explains in the *Festschrift* for Jünger on his 60<sup>th</sup> birthday in 1955, Jünger had understood and experienced the new and special condition that work constitutes what Heidegger terms 'the total character of the real's reality'. According to Heidegger, Jünger's idea of the *Gestalt* - the power of ordering - makes technology the means through which the worker's *Gestalt* mobilises the world.<sup>34</sup> The collapse of the Nazi regime did not weaken Heidegger's enthusiasm for *Der Arbeiter*, and when the two went out walking on a forest path in the late 1940s, Heidegger encouraged Jünger to reissue the book unchanged. Obsessed as he was with German primordial nature, Heidegger allegedly chose for this proposal a juncture in which a *Holzweg*, a path leading to a felling place, forked, thereby, one may assume, suggesting that forest work is a natural will-to-power. Nonetheless Jünger hesitated, not because of the book's

content, but rather because he was waiting for ‘the right moment for republishing’.<sup>35</sup>

In this selection of 19th- and early 20th-century philosophers who heroise work and consider it a vital force which may dissolve the alienating wall separating man from nature – a wall maintained by a decadent capitalist bourgeoisie – we should not, of course, miss one of the main sources of communist totalitarianisms: Marx. Sceptics would perhaps object that Marx has far too matter-of-fact and urban an understanding of work and the economic processes surrounding it to be connected to vitalism and heroism. But at least regarding vitalism it should be observed that Marx describes the modern worker’s alienation from the objects on which he works in terms of a lost bond with nature, one which would be regained through the socialist revolution:

Nature is the *un-organic body* of the human being, namely, nature insofar as she is not the human body herself. The human being *lives* from nature, that is: nature is his *body*, with which he, in order not to die, must remain in a continual process. That the physical and spiritual life of the human being is connected to nature has no other meaning than that nature is connected with herself, as the human being is part of nature.<sup>36</sup> [Marx’s italics]

However, with the institution of private property and its climax in the capitalist production mode, the human being is wrested from this natural body, which is now taken over by alienated human rather than divine foreign powers. By this means the human being loses his specifically human characteristic, namely the capacity to work, i.e. to elaborate his natural surroundings as a goal in itself: a free, conscious activity. For in the alienated work process, work changes from being a life activity in its own right (*praxis*) to being merely a means to shape human existence (*poiesis*). As a consequence, the human being is only free in the performance of his animal functions such as eating, drinking and begetting, whereas in his human functions he has been reduced to an animal.<sup>37</sup>

This Marxian description, based on a wish to re-establish a self-fulfilling *praxis* instead of an alienated, animal-like *poiesis*, is in remarkable continuity with classical, especially Aristotelian, philosophy. In Greece, to be sure, *praxis* is fulfilled through leisure – a state of being giving you time to philosophise, govern or fight, because slaves, creatures destined like animals to serve you through their *poiesis*,

turn an infertile nature into an immediately accessible one: the primordial Golden Age regained for the master through the slave as nature's bond.<sup>38</sup> Although Marx, shifting the master's role from slave-owner to capitalist, surprisingly agrees with this understanding of *poiesis* - namely as a specialised, animal-like belabouring of things which are not for the producer's own use - he still believes it is somehow possible in modern industrial society to break through the wall separating producer and user and ennoble this belabouring itself by transforming it into *praxis*. The former alienated slave is thus turned into a nature-embracing master whose work is his life's very mission. With this Marxian idea of work recreating the original exchange with nature, and by this means being uplifted to life itself, we are close to the vitalist ideas of Carlyle, Jünger and Heidegger, who likewise identify work with life and see it as a natural force. In fact, due to his antagonism against alienated labour and his general concern for the proletariat, Carlyle heavily influenced Marx's partner Frederic Engels in his writing of the *Condition of the Working Class in England* (1845) and is cited frequently, albeit somewhat sceptically, in this work.<sup>39</sup>

But does Marx actually heroise work, seeing it as a potent activity which is parallel to and can be fused with noble violence? Although Marx promotes revolution, or the forceful upheaval of old society, he seems to be ambivalent and mostly silent as regards the use of violence, hoping that the socialist order will spread in a spontaneous way.<sup>40</sup> Violence seems to be a deplorable but nevertheless unavoidable fact when historical evolution moves towards a more progressive stage. Observing with frustration that the legitimate violence used during the Paris Commune in 1871 had not been sufficient, Marx thus recommends that the coming communist society should be 'energetic in its use of force', and take 'all necessary steps' to subdue its opponents: 'When our turn comes, we shall make no excuses for the terror'.<sup>41</sup> Indeed: 'Violence is the midwife of every old society pregnant with a new one. It is in itself an economic potency.'<sup>42</sup> So, although Marx does not fuse work and violence into one heroic activity, as do Carlyle, Jünger and also Heidegger, the martial element nevertheless intervenes in the sphere of labour - here, societal birth labour as well as economic labour - and, accordingly, the way is at least partially paved for the unashamed heroism encountered in all the totalitarian regimes based on Marx's ideas.

### THE CLEFT LENS: TOTALITARIANISM AND THE HEROISATION OF WORK

Heroising work is a method of making technology organic. Through the worker's muscle power, his equipment becomes an extension of his body – a prosthesis that is in a Heideggerian sense *Zuhanden* ('ready-to-hand') rather than *Vorhanden* ('present-at-hand')<sup>43</sup> – turning him into a cyborg, a hybrid of machine and organism. Because of this amalgamation of body and technology and the collective mobile mass that results, Lewis Mumford's observation that totalitarian systems are megamachines which ruthlessly subordinate all parts of society to their stiff mechanics<sup>44</sup> is only half true: they are just as much megaorganisms subduing all societal members to their insoluble organic mass. These cyborigian megaorganisms are furthermore overheated, feverishly excluding and crushing all elements not considered part of the body. This fever, the totalitarian heroism, could be understood as a slowed-down war, a yet unfinished revolution which, in spite of its superiority compared to other societies, is still in the agonising process of becoming more perfect.

This frozen war-like state comprises perhaps the most important reason for the huge split between theory and practice, between official ideology and everyday reality, found in totalitarian states. The war-like ethos of constantly striving toward victory demands a huge propaganda apparatus which can motivate the members of society to totally absorb themselves in the ideals of the revolution. However, because this ethos is feverishly eager to separate the true heroes from those who cannot live up to the ideals, a schism develops: what from inside ideology is considered a heroic battle between a huge 'us' and a peripheral 'them', appears from outside as a strongly hierarchic system in which the 'us' has diminished to an elitist top suppressing a 'them' which grows into an increasing proportion of the members of the society in question. This shift of viewing angle turning the ongoing popular revolution into a paranoid society fighting its own members evidently also influences the dominant feeling of totalitarian society: it is pervaded not so much by heroism as by the darker qualities of war: those of terror and victimisation. As Hannah Arendt states, 'terror is no longer used as a means to terminate and frighten opponents, but as an instrument to rule masses of people who are perfectly obedient.' Indeed, 'terror [...] is the very essence of its government.'<sup>45</sup> From my perspective, focusing on work, it is noteworthy that work is also densely inscribed in this reversal,

changing status from work-as-self-fulfilment, *praxis*, to work-as-punishment, *poiesis*, with a nadir in the totalitarian dark site *par excellence*: the concentration camp.

As regards the view from *within* totalitarian ideology, one could first state that whether everyone in society strives to optimise production in the fields or factories or fight against the enemies of the system, their activity is a heroic battle, a war to gain control over the world's recalcitrant forces. In continuity with Carlyle's, Jünger's and to a certain degree Marx's descriptions of the convergence of war and work, totalitarian visual culture thus overflows with images of the heroic worker and the labouring soldier. As stated in a review in the journal *Kunst im Dritten Reich* (1943):

The workman, denigrated to homeless proletarian in Marxism, has in our people's *Lebensraum* become a soldier of technology who forges the weapons for the fighting front. In him, as in peasants and soldiers, are incarnated the best substance of our race.<sup>46</sup>

Thus, when muscular and youthful protagonists harvest in corn fields, swing hammers in factories, carry weapons to war or perform sport in countless communist and fascist posters, paintings and films, everything they do is to be understood as heroic activities in which the overcoming of difficult tasks appears as the essence of a good communal life (ills. 2.3 and 2.4). Although the heroic body language in which these activities are draped derives from a culture – that of classicism – which reserved it for non-work activities like war and sport, reserving work to slaves, it is combined with work here, too, which is somehow revolutionarily transformed from animal-like *poiesis* to superhuman *praxis*.

Such images in the Soviet Union were disseminated under the heading 'Socialist Realism' because the ideal world they represented was said to comprise either the already existing reality or an imminently attainable future reality for which they thus provided instruction. As one of the chief ideologues, Maxim Gorky, put it, art should hold a magnifying mirror in front of the Soviet People's eyes in order to show them their future heroic form.<sup>47</sup> In his essay 'On the Hero and the Crowd' from the 1920s, Gorky contrasted the pessimist hero of the 19th century with that of folklore and myth and stated: 'We are all born heroes and live as such. And when the majority understands this, life will become thoroughly heroic.' Indeed: 'Our real, living hero, man, who creates socialist culture, is more exalted



**2.3.** *Work, Freedom, Bread* (1930s), Nazi magazine cover.

and grander than the heroes of our tales and novels.' Starting with the Stakhanovite movement, named after a mine worker who allegedly broke all records, this will to spread heroes in real life provided all disciplines - forestry, tilling, tractor driving, milking etc. - with a model working hero to emulate, thereby facilitating the creation of New Man.<sup>48</sup>

As stated above, for both communist and fascist systems, the heroisation of work aims at overcoming the barrier between nature and culture, the organic and the technological. By turning his instruments into existential prolongations of his body, the worker enters into an organic relationship with the material he is elaborating. But the ways in which this organic harmony is pursued have different accents: communism, with its outer materialistic interests, seeks it

futuristically; fascism, with its veneration for essential values like blood and soil, does so nostalgically. In communist ideology, notably that of the Soviet Union between the 1930s and 1950s, technology is thus emphatically welcomed, so that technological elements like factories, construction sites and tractors are common ingredients of visual culture; whereas landscape paintings in which cultivation is not dominant are rarely seen. Likewise, transforming the pre-modern identification of woman and nature, the typical Soviet



**2.4.** Aleksandr Deineka, *To Work, to Build and Not to Complain* (1933), Soviet poster.



**2.5.** Elk Eber, *The Last Handgrenade* (1941), oil on canvas.

image of woman is one in which she is shown active, either in a working situation (agricultural, industrial or military), doing heroic sport, or as a mother, her own body having a functional use. In contrast, in fascist ideology, especially Nazism, mechanical technology is more ambivalently received. For instance, while Nazi visual culture does include images of factories, construction sites and motorways,<sup>49</sup> images invoking nature more directly are preferred, either in the form of agricultural scenes - marked by more traditional technologies in this context<sup>50</sup> - or as proper landscape paintings. Similarly, Nazi culture rarely presents images of active females, but either relegates women to a passive mother role in the household or converts them into erotic nudes in domestic or mythological settings. Especially in the latter, woman retains some of that virginal quality which was also connected with the nature portrayed in Nazi landscape paint-

ing. All common heroisation apart, then, Soviet visual culture accentuates mechanistic realism, its Nazi counterpart being steely romanticism.

Whether dealing with Nazi or Soviet visual culture, however, one seeks mostly in vain for costs pertaining to the revolutionary project, notably the costs encountered in real-life practice. Although the commitment to the collective's ideals, not least as personified in its leader, should be unconditional and therefore occasionally might turn the hero into a martyr, portrayals of battle scenes mostly show its protagonists with whole and unbroken bodies, with amounts of blood and wounds respecting classical decorum. When the German artist – and favourite of Hitler – Elk Eber, for instance, depicts *The Last Handgrenade* (1941), a war situation ushering in immediate martyrdom, he still chooses to portray the dirt-covered soldier as master of the situation, with strong arms releasing the grenade and eyes staring hopefully into a victorious future (ill. 2.5). Likewise, in depictions of work, peasants, foresters and industrial workers always appear in full control rather than being worn, crippled or wounded. This heroism is still at the forefront even in German depictions of the traditionally hardest work form, quarrying, the workers being portrayed as their own masters, and in Erich Mercker's *Marble for the Reich Chancellery* (ill. 2.6) even wearing traditional clothes. Although Berthold Hinz is right in observing that this quarrying was in reality often done as forced labour in the framework of the concentration camps (cf. ill. 8.3), he mistakenly leaps from idealism to documentation when he claims that such paintings were made for the sake of 'deterrence and warning': clearly these works were meant to be positively edifying.<sup>51</sup> Even in unequivocal portrayals of enemies of the state – a lesser mission of visual culture restricted mostly to the margins of war painting and to posters or caricature – these enemies, in spite of any caricatured diminishment or deformation, retain their bodily integrity and keep a safe distance to the horrors of real war, prison or concentration camp.

Evidently this depiction of totalitarian society from within ideology is markedly different from those pictures which can be gained from *without*. Whether visualised heroisation of work motivated a portion of society or not, working in real totalitarian culture was at best little more than drab and prosaic, at worst the closest human beings ever got to hell on earth. This last possibility, the concentration camp, could in fact be considered a strangely logical reversion



**2.6.** Erich Mercker, *Marble for the Reich Chancellery* (1940), oil on canvas. Milwaukee (WI), Milwaukee School of Engineering.

of the heroisation of work found in visual culture, a dystopian reality hiding in the shadows of utopian stage screens. For just as work and war converge in the heroisation of work, so they do in the concentration camp, a place governed by the non-rules of a martial state of emergency and in which human beings work themselves to death. In contrast to the prison, a stable institution administered at least in principle according to the stable laws of a civil society, the camp is a provisional settlement established by societies in a more or less openly war-like state, either war against outer enemies or that kind of inner war which is the unfinished revolution of totalitarianism. Accordingly, prisoners in the concentration camp are never considered society members with well-defined rights; rather they are mar-

ginalised prisoners of war and therefore treated as representatives of an absolute otherness: unworthy beings close to animals, or in the words of Agamben, beings reduced to bare life.<sup>52</sup>

The most well-known instance of an official ideology affirming this otherwise general practical outcome of the concentration camp is of course National Socialism, with its categorisation of Jews, Slavs, gypsies, homosexuals and the handicapped as *untermenschen*. But, in fact, all the prisoners in the Soviet camps were also constantly addressed as enemies, forbidden to call each other 'comrade' or to look at the portrait of Stalin.<sup>53</sup> Nevertheless, in an unresolved paradox, the concentration camp never seems to lose its educational mission, so that its strict working discipline and militaristic order should appear as somehow prototypical for social life outside the camp. Most illustratively, this could be the utopian work-camp life into which Heidegger, the rector of Freiburg University, so much desired to turn German science that he established a few actual camps, one of them close to his own wooden hut (*Hütte*) in 1933. In a letter dated 16 October he approved of its wonderfully tough selective quality: 'For eight days I had the first camp in Todtnauberg - I have learned *much*. In the middle of the camp time I had to dispatch 20 people - who didn't fit in. Such a camp is a *great trial* - for everyone - and dangerous [Heidegger's italics]'.<sup>54</sup> The most ironic symptom of this general totalitarian desire for militaristic work was, evidently, the notorious 'Arbeit mach frei' adorning the entrance portals of so many German concentration camps, but also in the Soviet Union countless similar slogans were painted all over Gulag barracks or proclaimed through loudspeakers, saying things like 'We give all our strength to work' or 'Labour in the USSR - it is a thing of honesty, of glory, of valour and heroism'.<sup>55</sup>

So, whether framed from inside or outside ideology, the martial working order of the concentration camp gains paradigmatic value in relation to totalitarian society as such.<sup>56</sup> From inside ideology, when the camp inmate is not marginalised as an incorrigible enemy of the state, he appears as a future working hero whose potential is strengthened by a martial order which is only quantitatively different from that of the rest of society.<sup>57</sup> From outside ideology he appears as a victim of terror whose identity is likewise only quantitatively different from the terrorist order governing society as such. Thus, again, depending on the viewing angle, superhuman working hero and crippled animal-like slave are intimately connected, threatening to

collapse into each other when the marginalised other turns out to possess a bigger part of reality than is admitted in official ideology. This imminent collapse becomes of course especially logical when remembering that the innermost mission of the totalitarian hero, work, is paradoxically identical to what was seen in antiquity, the prototypical mirror of totalitarianism, as degrading and therefore reserved for the slaves.

On a more general level, this totalitarian interdependence of master and slave may be elaborated with ideas from the philosophy of religion observing the convergence of the highest and lowest fringes of society: René Girard's observation of the scapegoat being either king or slave,<sup>58</sup> Bataille's idea of the heterogeneous domain as encompassed by elites and proletarians,<sup>59</sup> or Agamben's observation that the sovereign is intimately connected with his counter-image, the *homo sacer* or outlaw, who may be killed but not sacrificed. This latter figure, the *homo sacer*, embodies an indistinct zone between nature and culture, constituting the bare life of which the sovereign has absolute control, and accordingly, *homo sacer* is often – for instance, in Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan* – found metamorphosing into an animal shape, especially a wolf-man.<sup>60</sup> However, as Agamben indicates, it might also be the sovereign himself who turns into a wolf, a transformation seen, for instance, in Plato's *Republic*, in which it is asked whether a leader of the mob who 'does not know how to abstain from the blood of his tribe' should be 'killed by his enemies or become a tyrant and be transformed from a man into a wolf'.<sup>61</sup> In fact, such a dissipation of man and beast was actively pursued by the Nazis, who not only degraded concentration camp prisoners into animals but desired to become wild beasts themselves. Hitler often compared himself to a wolf and wished for 'a violent, domineering, fearless, and ferocious upcoming generation. It must be able to bear pain. It must show no signs of weakness or tenderness. The free and magnificent predator must once again glint from their eyes.'<sup>62</sup> Although the Nazis considered themselves to have moved farthest away from the ape level which was still close to the lower races or other *untermenschen*, one writer of popular biology nevertheless stated that 'The animal kingdom is the model for the organic state of National Socialism'.<sup>63</sup>

Even though Agamben is absolutely right in identifying the concentration camp's paradigmatic status in relation to a totalising political system, one being founded on a war-like state of emergency,

I will still object to his idea that the concentration camp is the 'biopolitical paradigm of the modern', i.e. that the state regularisation of our natural life - biopolitics - has extended so far that even contemporary democratic society is to be compared to a camp without limits.<sup>64</sup> I will instead maintain that the concentration camp derives not from civic modernity but rather from that specifically war-venerating and heroising backlash variant of modernity which is totalitarianism. If, for instance, milder versions of the concentration camp resurface in Western contemporary culture in the form of terrorist detentions or asylum centres, it is because Western democracy is still haunted by certain totalitarian and anti-modern strands - deriving from theocratic thinking or veneration for ancient heroism, or both - not because modernity was born rotten.

As the strongest manifestation of the unresolved paradoxes of totalitarian society, the concentration camp had to be hidden from official visual culture. Although one finds many instances of licence to violence in communist ideology - for instance, Lenin, Trotsky and Bucharin's idea that forced labour is allowed during 'war communism'<sup>65</sup> - large measures were taken to keep the actual practice of Gulag violence hidden from view. Even in Nazi Germany, which was more extroverted about the necessary use of violence than its Soviet counterpart, and which started out with prototypical concentration camps for public display such as Oranienburg und Dachau, the camps became a secret as soon as they multiplied and became implemented more radically in both the German economy and politics of suppression.<sup>66</sup> In his speech to 92 SS officers in the castle of Posen on 4 October 1943, Himmler, the former industrialist chicken farmer, remarked how Germans remained decent, though hard, after having endured the typical camp sight of a hundred, five hundred or a thousand corpses lying together. And yet this was allegedly a page of German history which was 'never written and never would be written', as if there was still something about the concentration camps which, if they became publicly known, would somehow challenge this image of decency.<sup>67</sup>

But does this concealment of the worst violence indicate that it was somehow an accident, an unforeseen circumstance of the implementation of totalitarian rule? Or was it, on the contrary, deeply embedded in the revolutionary project, an inevitable consequence of its realisation which was only kept secret for pragmatic reasons? While a strong case could be made for the latter option in the case

of Nazi Germany, opinions diverge famously in the case of the Soviet Union. Here, however, I will opt for the view that the very idea of revolution and its historical sibling, heroism, are unthinkable without violence. Revolution implies impatience with contemporary rules of government and an attendant right to violently upset these rules. When a society seeks to implement revolutionary ideals, violence will be institutionalised as well.<sup>68</sup> As regards that part of the revolutionary project which was in fact common to fascism and communism, the heroisation of work, with historical hindsight it is clear that violence was necessary precisely because the goal, the disalienation of work in relation to nature, was in fact far beyond reach with the means obtainable in the industrial society of those times. It is only with the far more complex technological methods which have become available in our post-industrial society that we can begin more reasonably to dream of having our work disalienated from nature. The huge irony, even tragedy, of the project of the heroisation of work is that the worker only becomes disalienated from nature in the 'natural' state of being which is bare life – that is to say, the animal state where instrumental violence has deprived him of his subjectivity.

### THE DISCONTENTS I: MILLET

By tracing the theme of the heroisation of work backwards in time to its pictorial beginnings in Millet and van Gogh, I hope now to find some evidence that the deeply repressive side of totalitarian culture is not some accident that only emerges suddenly with the mature institutionalisation of totalitarian society, but that it is imbedded in the revolutionary heroisation of work from the outset. The difference is, then, that in the beginning the dark side is more densely written together with the heroism, and this on an imaginary level, whereas later on it is displaced to a schism in society between official propaganda and an ever-felt but not officially discussed everyday life infiltrated with work-as-punishment.

Images of workers, and perhaps especially peasants, seem to be a mark of the industrial revolution and its social tensions whenever they occur.<sup>69</sup> In the second half of the 19th century, the response wavered between different kinds of realism: romanticising (Jules Breton, Josef Israëls), harsh (Jules Bastien-Lepage, Julien Dupré) or – and this was new – heroising (Millet, Léon-Auguste Lhermitte, van Gogh). In the painters of the third kind, in whom classicism, how-

ever transformed, runs as a dark undercurrent, the confrontation with industrial culture led to a peculiar mixture of more or less vague hopes for a socialist future and nostalgic longings for the pre-industrial past.<sup>70</sup> In a way parallel to Carlyle's and Marx's contemporary desires to reverse the alienation of labour, these artists looked to the countryside to find an area in which society could re-institute a pre-industrial harmony with nature, if not invoke a Christian redemption: 'our aim is walking with God - the opposite of living in the midst of the doings of the big cities', van Gogh exclaimed.<sup>71</sup> For '[...] *the Brabant of one's dreams*, reality almost comes very near it sometimes [van Gogh's emphasis].<sup>72</sup> Just as Millet heroised the peasants, van Gogh found in Millet a Father figure (*le père, le grand-père, le père p. ex.*) who gave the younger generation the answer to all their artistic questions: 'They started a peasant's and a labourer's figure as a 'genre', but at present, with Millet the great master as a leader, this is the very core of modern art, and will remain so.'<sup>73</sup> With this choice of modern core another route was taken than the Greenbergian one leading from Manet to modernism: a route leading either to socially interfering avant-gardes or to totalitarian art.

However, in the actual pictures painted by Millet and van Gogh, which is my focus of interest here, the signals sent are each in their own way remarkably ambivalent, as if the regained rustic past has already been so infiltrated with the industrial present that utopia casts dystopian shadows. Even in Millet's rural universe, which mostly avoids modern agricultural technologies, the viewer gets hints of certain incurable industrial scars. Because of their typical day labourer job, the three female *Gleaners* (1857), for instance, may be seen as members of a new rural proletariat resulting from larger industrial farms, an example of which is seen at the far right of the flat landscape; even a pro-democratic writer like Paul de Saint-Victor was offended by their harsh realism and called them 'The Three Fates of Poverty'.<sup>74</sup> We sense that this industrialism worried van Gogh as well when, for instance, his friend the painter Anton van Rappard sent him a report from the Dutch province of Drenthe, and van Gogh replied in December 1881 that it reminded him of something like North Brabant when he was a boy:

But since then that part of Brabant [...] has changed enormously in consequence of agricultural developments and the establishment of industries. [...] Since then there have come beet-sugar factories, railways, agricultural developments of the heath, etc., which are infinitely less picturesque.<sup>75</sup>

In fact, as a modern viewer, confronting in particular Millet's universe, I am struck by a certain ominous quality amounting to what the Germans call *unheimlichkeit*. What is going on among these silent workers ploughing, sowing, reaping, gleaning, sawing, praying, resting and herding animals in a predominantly flat, open landscape? It is as if they are not just repeating what they have always been doing, but are awaiting something to come, a revolution or an apocalypse, or both. Their hauntingly silent and mostly barren countryside seems submerged in an atmosphere of latent violence. Take, for instance, Millet's *The Sower* (c. 1849-50; ill. 2.7), an oversized figure whose energetic movements, muscular legs and Belvederic torso hovering over the landscape from a low viewing angle clearly signal a heroism created through the activity of physical work. This impression of a peasant rising towards victory through his formerly so modest activities is intensified to threatening and martial heights through the strange light of the scene, which lets the background with a ploughing colleague bathe in a whitish light from a setting (or rising?) sun, but which places the foreground with the sloping hillside and its inhabitant, the sower himself, in deep shadow. This darkness culminates in the shadow cast from the sower's rustic hat, which blurs his eyes and gives an impression of anonymous, threatening power. And yet in this blurring of identity a frightening ambiguity thrives, as if this anonymous power has taken over the identity of the sower too. Indeed, if we look closer at his poor clothes, the flock of black ravens picking seed corn in his track, and not least at the brownish, earthy colours which cover both the naked soil and his body, we receive other signals than heroic ones: ambivalent and painful ones pointing to the possibility that this man is not the master of the situation but rather its victim, a crippled, poor and suppressed worker. In the midst of heroic strides forward towards a revolutionary future, an omen of some kind of violent martyrdom seems to lurk.

Gadamer remarked that a truly hermeneutic interpretation consists in the merging of two horizons - that of the past and that of the present - and in deciphering this peculiar ambivalence, amounting to an ominous *unheimlichkeit*, the modern viewer cannot forget what has happened since in the heroisation of work. Memories of countless idealised agricultural workers of totalitarian visual culture thus blend with images of their suppressed other, the *homines sacri* of the concentration camps, and both project themselves backwards onto



**2.7.** Jean-François Millet, *The Sower* (c. 1849-50), oil on canvas. Boston, Museum of Fine Arts.

that ominous, forward-looking space of Millet, who of course could know of neither, but who nonetheless exposed the heroisation of work with such apocalyptic forebodings that one senses its glooming discontents. If we can learn anything from the establishment of such a genealogy, it is that in Millet, an artist with a powerful sensibility, the heroisation of work is inextricably linked with suffering and omens of violence. Only later, when totalitarian societies in fact seek to institutionalise the heroisation of work as a foundation for their realised revolutions, was the hypocritical cleft established between the idealised world of the heroisation of work (official visual

culture) and the grim world of work-as-punishment (real practice with a nadir in the concentration camp). Freud defined *unheimlichkeit* as the unexpected turning back of something too well known but long suppressed.<sup>76</sup> In the case of Millet, then, the too well known, but long suppressed, comprises these experiences from totalitarian cultures which have been bracketed off into a historical space which is purely their own for a long time, but which now turn unexpectedly back from the future and project their presence into the ominous atmosphere of Millet's pictures.

That this reading of Millet is not even exclusively a matter of a post-totalitarian perspective can be corroborated by considering some of Millet's reception history. For example, when a version of *The Sower* was exhibited at the Salon in the winter of 1850-1851, it was immediately considered a celebration of the New Man – the concept later institutionalised in Soviet culture. *The Sower* turned the peasant into a hero and showed him as a force to be reckoned with, at a time when male peasants actually acquired the right to vote.<sup>77</sup> The critic F. Sabatier-Ungher, a follower of the Utopian socialist Charles Fourier, thus remarked in the 'Salon de 1851' published in *La Démocratie Pacifique*: 'His [the Sower's] gesture has a Michel-angelesque energy and his tone a strange power [...]; he is a Florentine construction [...]. He is the modern *Demos*.'<sup>78</sup> In this remark we already notice the one recurring ingredient of the heroisation of work: the neo-classical cult of the idealised body. And it can in fact be documented that Millet, despite his peasant upbringing, always based his figures on studies of nude figures in the academic tradition. Characteristically, he claimed as his prototypes, whom he patriarchally termed *les forts*, Poussin, Mantegna, Michelangelo and Rembrandt, the first three of whom – and emphatically the first and third – were artists in the classical tradition.<sup>79</sup> Nevertheless the critics also noticed that this classical quality of Millet's figures was fused with a highly painful concept of work, reminding us of the shadows of later totalitarian developments. Just before the above-cited passage, Sabatier-Ungher makes the following remarks:

Come poor laborer, sow your seed, throw out to the soil your fistfuls of grain! The soil is fertile and will bear fruit, but next year as this, you will be poor and you will work by the sweat of your brow, because men have so well arranged things that work is a malediction, the work which will be the only real pleasure of intelligent beings in a regenerated society.<sup>80</sup>

These observations on the worker's poverty and his dependence on an earth with everchangeable fertility are reminiscent of Heidegger's description of the imaginary peasant owner of van Gogh's shoes, notably the 'quiet gift of the ripening grain and [the earth's] unexplained self-refusal in the fallow desolation of the wintry field'. Although Sabatier-Ungher even emphasises that 'work is a malediction' with biblical pathos, this is nevertheless framed within a revolutionary socialist vision of a 'regenerated society' in which work becomes 'the only real pleasure of intelligent beings'. At the same time, Sabatier-Ungher's phrasing of the sower throwing his grain 'out to the soil' evokes an image of sacrifice to the earth, an idea made explicit by the moderate critic Théophile Gautier in 1855: 'but the gesture with which the poor workman threw out the sacred wheat into the furrow was so beautiful that Triptolemus guided by Ceres on some Greek *bas-relief* could not have had more majesty'. Gautier remarked similarly on another Millet painting, *The Peasant Grafting a Tree* (Salon 1855, now in a private collection in the United States), 'The man [...] seems to be accomplishing some rite of a mystic ceremony and to be the obscure priest of a rural divinity.'<sup>81</sup> In these times of the rising industrial exploitation of the earth, however, it seems as if the sacrifice the earth needs in order to compensate for this cynical use of its body is no less than a sacrifice of the workers themselves.

These highly ambivalent notions of peasant work, vacillating between heroism and deep suffering and framed within biblical, pagan cultic and socialist notions, seem to be fairly close to Millet's own ideas of his work. In a letter to his friend Alfred Sensier from Barbizon, the most extensive statement of Millet's position, he linked the depiction of tough rural work with humanity, unhappiness, poetry and socialism:

But finally, these first [rustic motives] suit my temperament best, for I must confess, at the risk of being taken again for a socialist, that it is the treatment of the human condition that touches me most in art [...]. In the cultivated places, although at times in regions hardly at all tillable, you see figures spading, hoeing. You see one, from time to time, straighten up his back [...] and wipe his forehead with the back of the hand. 'You will eat your bread by the sweat of your brow.' Is that the gay, jolly work which certain people would have you believe? It is nonetheless there that I find the true humanity, the great poetry.<sup>82</sup>

To be sure, in statements like this Millet expressed a profound pessimism concerning the human condition, and by all evidence he was not a friend of the socialist movement and its belief in bettering the human condition through revolution – the 1848 and 1871 versions of which disappointed him to an increasing degree.<sup>83</sup> Nevertheless, his attitude here seems deeply ambivalent, quite similar to his attitude to religion: Herbert declares him to be an agnostic, although most of the critics, in accordance with his upbringing, consider him profoundly religious.<sup>84</sup> Pissarro, a committed follower of the anarchist communist movement headed by Pierre Kropotkin, was disappointed by Millet the believer, too, but nevertheless wrote: ‘He was a bit too biblical. Another of those blind men, leaders or followers who, unconscious of the march of modern ideas, defend the ideas without knowing it despite themselves.’<sup>85</sup> True, Millet defended revolutionary ideas unconsciously, such as through the heroic tendencies of his working figures, but just as unconsciously this revolutionary heroism pointed towards a work malediction far worse than in the era when it was just identified with the human condition.

One of the hoeing figures of the cultivated places hardly at all tillable was later painted by Millet in the horrific *Man with a Hoe* (c. 1860–62; ill. 2.8). Here, in a desolate landscape with burning fields in the right background, a rough-looking and impoverished worker is leaning heavily against a spade while staring from shadowy, clear-cut orbits, his expression fusing pain, desperation and exhaustion bordering on apathy. To the critic Jules Castagnery, this image signalled biblical hope in the midst of eternal pain. It represented ‘The woeful Christ of the peasant’s eternal tillage’ who brings the curse of Adam into the promise of the New Testament. For Paul de Saint-Victor, however, we must search for a long time before finding this man:

Such types aren’t common, even at the asylum at Bicêtre. Imagine a monster without a skull, his eyes extinguished, the grin of an idiot, planted crookedly like a scarecrow in the middle of the field. There is no gleam of human intelligence in this animal. Has he just come from work? or from murdering?

Hope has been suppressed by an impression of proletarian work opening up for all sorts of degrading phenomena: not only losing one’s intelligence (in striking contrast to Sabatier-Ungher’s above-mentioned remark about work being ‘the only real pleasure of intel-



**2.8.** Jean-François Millet, *Man with a Hoe* (c. 1860-62), oil on canvas. Los Angeles, The J. Paul Getty Museum.

ligent beings in a regenerated society'), but murdering, becoming an animal, a monster, if not death itself. So we see once more that if work, as in the heroisation of work, is fused with violence, this violence turns inward upon its own performer, transforming him into a *homo sacer*.

But then again, this image was not only about eternal suppression: it gave rise to apocalyptic connotations clad in the language of socialist revolution. When it came to the United States in the late 19th century it acquired national fame as an expression of democratic sensibility through the words of the socialist poet Edwin Markham. His poetic paraphrase of the painting, 'The Man with the Hoe', published by the San Francisco *Sunday Examiner* in 1899, was recited by three generations of American school children:

Bowed by the weight of centuries he leans  
 Upon his hoe and gazes on the ground,  
 The emptiness of ages in his face  
 And on his back the burdens of the world.  
 [...]
   
 How will it be with kingdoms and with kings  
 With those who shaped him to the thing he is –  
 When this dumb Terror shall rise to judge the world,  
 After the silence of the centuries?<sup>86</sup>

The ekphrasis predicts, then, that this suppressed worker will rise at some point from his bowed position and confront his suppressers, who have turned him into a thing and whom he has silently tolerated through the centuries. However, it seems highly unlikely that this revolutionary confrontation will turn into a socialist utopia, as the person who is going to perform the world judgement is called a 'dumb Terror'. This poem marvellously captures the haunting ambiguity of Millet's revolutionary omens by not only hinting that the revolution will turn into terror – as indeed occurred for the many 20th-century revolutions that turned into totalitarianism – but also stating that this terror is built into the very figure of the suppressed worker rising, so that heroising former victims of terror only generates more terror.

Such terror was faced by Millet himself during the revolution of 1871, the Paris Commune, which he considered a catastrophe: 'Isn't it rather horrible what these misérables have done in Paris! These are monstrosities without precedent. In comparison, the Vandals were conservators.' So: 'One could call our age the age of the great massacre.'<sup>87</sup> In spite of Millet's denigration of the destructive energies of revolution, he could, with characteristic ambiguity, resort to this very imagery of apocalyptic destruction when illustrating the sovereignty of thought as a creative force. Thus, a year before, in a discussion with the radical critic Théophile Thoré about what qualifies a work of art, Millet and his Barbizon colleague, Théodore Rousseau, would not accept the too factually minded critic's belief in the subject's importance. And accordingly, in order to show that any subject could be turned into a grand artwork, Millet strangely invoked a menacing prophet, mediating God's voice and graphically describing such coming disasters, with 'cockchafers and grasshoppers, my great army, etc.'

that one had never imagined a greater devastation of the earth. And I asked him if the menace appeared greater to him if, instead of the cockchafers, the prophet had spoken of war chariots of some king; for this devastation is so great, so complete, that it extends to everything. The Earth, it is bared! Scream, labourers, for the harvest of the fields is perished! And the wild donkeys and all the beasts have cried, because there was no more grass! Watch then the goal of devastation greatly accomplished, and the imagination is astonished.<sup>88</sup>

That Millet should find the strongest parallel to artistic creativity in this suggestion of divine world destruction brought about by armies of insects, a sublime terror devastating the nutritional ground of the rural labourers, is perhaps not so strange after all. For, considering the typically apocalyptic world of Millet's paintings – sovereign visions of wounded working heroes roaming around on the bare earth – it is not such a great leap to sensing an 'age of the great massacre' here. If so, only the humble origin of the apocalypse has shifted from armies of insects to the workers themselves. This, then, may be a warning of the perverse intermingling of artistic creativity and revolutionary self-destruction which would be refracted in the cleft lenses of the 20th century totalitarianisms, from Stalin the choreographer to Hitler the sculptor of mass. No wonder that in the immediate aftermath of the 1848 revolution Millet could portray *Liberty* (ill. 2.9) as a wrathful woman with a sword, walking across the king's body while dragging a starved female cadaver with her left hand.<sup>89</sup> This female obviously belongs to the enemies of revolution, but characteristically she is not vanquished through the sword but through famine, a characteristic side effect of the 1848 Revolution, affecting even Millet himself – and one which was to ensue from many future revolutions.

## THE DISCONTENTS II: VAN GOGH (AND MILLET)

This ambiguity of the revolutionary prospect of the rising workers' movement is also found in Millet's ardent disciple van Gogh and made explicit in van Gogh's letters. In a letter to his brother Theo, van Gogh mentions a painting of a woman made before his reading of Zola's naturalist novel *Germinal* (1885), which made a big impression on him and from which he therefore paraphrases extensively:



2.9. Jean-François Millet, *Liberty* (c. 1848), charcoal drawing.

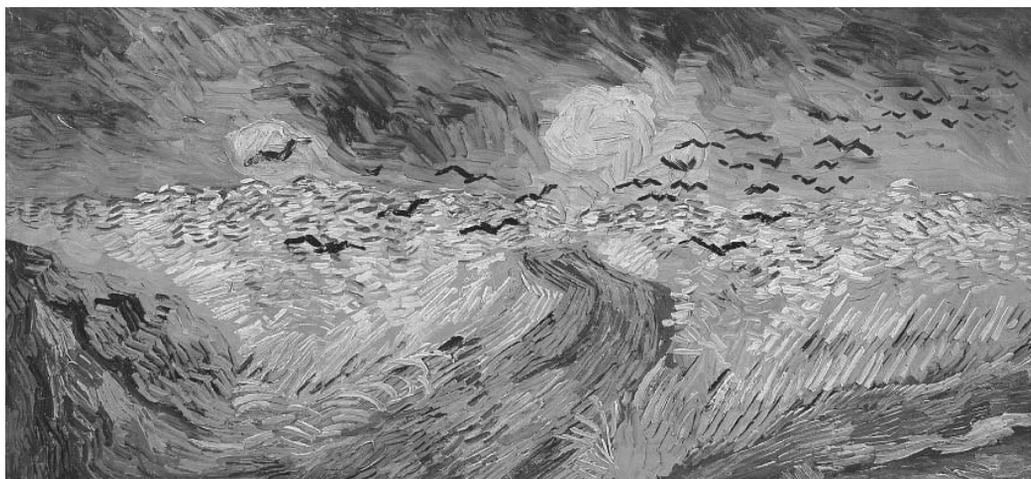
You will find a variation among them – profile – a background of: ‘the flat plain of sugar-beet fields under the starless night, dark and thick like ink.’ Standing out against this, the head of a hercheuse or sclôneuse with an expression as of a lowing cow, a person from: ‘the countryside was pregnant with a race of men who grew, a black avenging army, germinating in the furrows, increasing for the harvest of future ages, and this germination would soon burst the earth’. But that last expression is, I think, better in the study which I have signed, and which I made *before* I read it, so *without thinking of Germinal*, simply a peasant coming home from planting potatoes, all covered with the dust of the field. [van Gogh’s emphasis]<sup>90</sup>

Although Zola would eventually turn into a socialist, *Germinal*, which revolves around a coal miner strike, is likewise marked by an ambivalent attitude to the revolutionary project. This is not least felt in van Gogh's paraphrase, the prophetic last sentence of the book, which turns the sprouting metaphor of the novel's title, derived from the first spring month of the French revolutionary calendar, into a modern version of the ancient myth of Cadmus sowing dragon's teeth which grow into a horde of armed men. Instead of Markham-Millet's dumb terror rising to judge the world, and more in tune with Millet's natural army of insects, Zola's avenging black army – of which van Gogh posits his own peasants as representatives – literally grows forth from the furrows soon to burst the earth. The threatening tone of this revolutionary image of autochthonic worker-warriors, transcending their subterranean mine prison to new growth, is given a directly macabre timbre by also fusing with the ancient image of death as harvester, indicating that the 'harvest of future ages' will be felled by death: as Chronos-Death eats his own children, so Revolution, forcefully accelerated history, consummates its worker-warriors in acts of terrorist sacrifices to that earth which procreated them. This pessimistic view of revolution is stressed in another Zola paraphrase from the same van Gogh letter, in which the manager of the Montsou mines, M. Hennebeau, while the coal miners are striking outside his house, has masochistic fantasies about being one of the brutish workers who obeyed him:

Ah! live like a beast, having no possessions of his own, flattening the corn with the ugliest, dirtiest female coal trammer, and being able to find contentment in it. How stupid those hollow dreams of the revolutionaries were, they would increase the unhappiness of the earth, someday they would howl with despair when they had left behind the *easy satisfaction of their instincts* by raising them to the *unappeased suffering of the passions*. [van Gogh's emphasis]<sup>91</sup>

As in the visions of Millet and van Gogh, then, the workers are seen as beings close to nature, beasts living only to satisfy their instincts. And Revolution will not change this meanness, only amplify it into intensified suffering marked by unrest.

To be sure, van Gogh typically paints countrysides which seem much more fertile than the barren ones of his predecessor Millet – in fact almost manically so, with their screaming green and yellow cornfields, blossoming apple trees and sunflowers, and wriggling cypresses. Yet, some of his landscapes also seem haunted by bad



**2.10.** Vincent van Gogh, *Wheat Field with Crows* (1890), oil on canvas. Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum.

omens which are tempting to combine with apocalyptic visions of revolutionary forces growing forth from the furrows. Especially van Gogh's famous late painting (ill. 2.10) of the winding path disappearing into a sprouting wheat field seems appropriate here. In contrast to so many later communist depictions of wheat fields (ill. 2.11) in which huge amounts of happy yellow are spilled to conceal the shadowy costs of revolution, this wheat field by van Gogh is overarched by a blue-black thunderous sky, with an ominous flock of black crows hovering over the wheat stalks. In van Gogh's own words, paintings like this one represent 'the health and restorative forces that I see in the country'; however, in the same breath he describes their subjects ambivalently as 'vast fields of wheat under troubled skies, and I did not need to go out of my way to try to express sadness and extreme loneliness.'<sup>92</sup> Indeed, something evil seems to be lurking over these overly fertile fields, and I will suggest that this evil should be seen as the apocalyptic costs resulting from the heroisation of work.

Seeing the empty path winding into the field, one is particularly reminded of Heidegger's reading of van Gogh's shoes '[u]nder [whose] soles slides the loneliness of the field-path as evening falls. In the shoes vibrates the silent call of the earth, its quiet gift of the ripening grain and its unexplained self-refusal in the fallow desolation of the wintry field.' Here, however, the call of the earth would seem to have turned from silence into a scream, reminding us of Heidegger's note to Karl Löwith in 1923:

For years a saying of van Gogh has obsessed me: “I feel with all my powers that the history of man is like wheat: if one is not planted in the earth to flourish, come what may, one will be ground up for bread.” Woe to him who is not pulverized.<sup>93</sup>

Thus, van Gogh’s thunderous wheat field would seem to scream for the sacrifice of the workers in accordance with his own desire re-circulated by Heidegger: that men should fulfil their destiny by becoming harvested and pulverised like wheat stalks.

In what resembles an attempt to maintain some kind of balance, van Gogh seems to have transferred all his heroic energy to a deliriously blossoming countryside, while its inhabitants have broken down most of the academically derived heroism of Millet and display only the simple, rough and animal-like tendencies mentioned in Markham’s poem. In fact, in the early 20th century, van Gogh’s peasants were seen as parodies of Millet’s well-proportioned bodies.<sup>94</sup> As Griselda Pollock acutely remarks, van Gogh paints this roughness zigzagging between sympathetic identification and a menacing otherness in which the peasants are turned into dumb beasts: ‘Why



**2.11.** Sergei Gerasimov, *A Collective Farm Festival* (1937), oil on canvas. Moscow, Tretyakov Gallery.

are the workers with whom the artist sat day after day presented as creatures from so alien a world, threatening to come forward but relocated by the manipulation of paint on canvas as merely performing their tasks as part of nature?'<sup>95</sup> No less than van Gogh, in fact, Millet posited the peasants in intimate connection with the soil they worked: 'I admit only with difficulty that one can separate the peasant from Nature. He is in some way an integral part of it, like a tree, or ox. [...] From the artistic point of view he finds himself simply the most elevated point in a system that begins with the vegetable and ends with him.'<sup>96</sup> Pre-Darwinian as it is, this radical inscription of the peasant into the organic world of plants and animals gives the modern onlooker uneasy reminiscences of the Nazis' later forced act of disalienation: on the one hand stigmatising their enemies as *Untermenschen*, and on the other identifying themselves with wild beasts. In his eagerness to classify the peasants as part of nature, van Gogh was similarly guided by a worrying cocktail of racism and class discrimination. For example, in Brussels he read a book on Johann Kaspar Lavater and Franz Joseph Gall's phrenology, which designated the African Negro as 'a totally unintelligent man' because he had a flat nose and big lips.<sup>97</sup> Adapting such observations to European peasants, with a strange mixture of denigration and adoration, in 1884 van Gogh looked for models with 'rough, flat faces with low foreheads and thick lips, not sharp, but full and Millet-like'.<sup>98</sup> After harvesting the fruit of these studies, *The Potato Eaters* (1885; ill. 2.12), which was originally planned as part of a series derived from Millet's diurnal cycle, van Gogh explained:

I have tried to emphasize that those people, eating their potatoes in the lamplight, have dug the earth with those very hands which they put in the dish, and so it speaks of *manual labour*, and how they have honestly *earned* their food. I have wanted to give the impression of a way of life quite different from us civilized people. [...] I personally am convinced I get better results by painting them in their roughness than by giving them a conventional charm. [...] If a peasant picture smells of bacon, smoke, potato steam – all right, that's not unhealthy; if a stable smells of dung [...]; if the field has an odour of ripe corn or potatoes [...] or manure – that's healthy, especially for city people. Such pictures may *teach them something*. [van Gogh's emphasis]<sup>99</sup>

By stressing that the peasants' hands move directly from the earth and into the dish of potatoes, van Gogh suggests an organic connectedness of earth, manual labour and nourishment that stands in dia-



**2.12.** Vincent van Gogh, *The Potato Eaters* (1885), oil on canvas. Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum.

metric contrast to the civilised and alienated way of life. If this dream of a disalienated, earth-founded labour now reminds the reader-viewer not only of Marx with his ‘Nature [as] the *un-organic body* of the human being’, but also specifically of the proto-fascistic Carlyle, it is not accidental. For in fact, as Griselda Pollock partially indicates, it draws heavily on van Gogh’s reading of Carlyle’s *Sartor Resartus* (1833-34) and its veneration for the work-worn craftsman who ‘with earth-created tools modestly conquers the world and turns it into the possession of man.’ This worker with horny, bent hands and a dirt-smearred face with weather-beaten features is in turn heroically described as a soldier who is worn out because he has fought our battles. In fact, when he is fused with that other type Carlyle adores, the worker of the spirit, he is turned into the peasant-saint who leads the way to Nazareth. That *The Potato Eaters* is partly modelled on this holy Carlylean worker-hero could be seen not only from the similarities between him and the painting’s rough inhabitants – paint-

ed, as they said about Millet's figures, 'with the earth which they sow'<sup>100</sup> – but also from Carlyle's statement that Heaven's glory originates from the most humble creatures of the earth, as a light that shines in a huge darkness: a trigger, perhaps, of van Gogh's radiant paraffin lamp. Furthermore, Carlyle says of these 'Poor-Slaves' that they are 'worshippers of Hertha, or the Earth: for they dig and affectionately work continually in her bosom [...]. All Poor-Slaves are Rhizophagous (or Root-eaters) [...]. Their universal sustenance is the root named Potato [...]'.<sup>101</sup> To cement the connection to van Gogh, Carlyle ends up describing a domestic scene in which a 'Poor-Slave Household' of eleven sit around 'a large oaken Board [...] to receive the contents of their Pot of Potatoes.'<sup>102</sup> No wonder van Gogh could heroically place Carlyle among the many people – including realist writers such as Harriet Beecher Stowe and George Eliot – who stood 'at the head of modern civilisation'.<sup>103</sup>

Having established this link from van Gogh's honest and rough peasants to Carlyle's saintly worker-hero labouring in the earth and using earth-created utensils, it does not seem to take a big leap to reach Heidegger's disalienating reading of van Gogh's shoes, mentioned in the introduction, including Heidegger's exclamation that 'This equipment belongs to the *earth*, and it is protected in the *world* of the peasant woman.' In fact, seen from the perspective of Carlyle, Heidegger does not so much conjure up an alien view, exclusively coming from a later essentialist discourse infiltrated by Nazi *Blut-und-Boden* ideas, and project this view back onto an innocent material; rather he re-exposes the vitalist trend of heroising work and linking it to nature already intended by van Gogh and whose Carlylean ballast reached Heidegger via Jünger.

Although both Millet and van Gogh represented the peasants as beings close to nature's bosom, thereby giving them an aura of otherness in relation to their urban onlookers, both artists also heavily identified with the peasants and sought to transform their own identity as an artist into that of a worker. According to van Gogh, 'one must paint the peasants as being one of them, as feeling, thinking as they do.'<sup>104</sup> This may have proved easiest for Millet, who would always boast of his peasant upbringing: 'My programme is work, because every man is vowed to the suffering of the body. *You shall live by the sweat of your brow* [...]: an eternal destiny which will not change [Millet's emphasis].'<sup>105</sup> Just as Millet's peasants themselves suffer when fighting through this physical labour, Millet claimed

that 'Art is not a picnic. It is a battle, a wheelwork that crushes [...]. Pain is, perhaps, that which makes the artists express themselves most strongly.'<sup>106</sup> These martial and torturous associations appeared not least in the many instances when Millet, in an idiosyncratically racist manner, described himself as working like one or more Negroes.<sup>107</sup> We should also observe that van Gogh's prolificness came about through an almost inhuman effort which mimicked the worker-martyrs he so adored, and one may ask oneself if his suicide in a ripe cornfield at Auvers-sur-Oise, committed at the point of complete exhaustion, was somehow a sacrifice to that earth to which all workers allegedly belonged. By pulverising himself, wheat-like, in this way, his work could become Eucharistic bread for his alienated urban viewers.

Because of this fundamental identification with the workers, we must consider with a certain degree of scepticism Meyer Schapiro's attempt to disqualify Heidegger's van Gogh interpretation. According to Schapiro, there is no evidence for Heidegger's claim that the old pair of shoes van Gogh painted actually belonged to a peasant. Instead, Schapiro prefers to see them as van Gogh's own, thereby considering the painting as a kind of self-portrait.<sup>108</sup> However, even if Schapiro is right, exactly because van Gogh identified so closely with the peasants and workers, the act of painting his own worn-down shoes would still count as portraying a pair of 'worker's shoes'. In fact, his *grand-père* Millet often gave his masculine admirers a small pencil sketch of a pair of peasant clogs, telling them in this way that he was truly a peasant. So van Gogh's series of shoe pairs may certainly be seen as a monumentalised appropriation of this kind of self-portrayal.<sup>109</sup>

A general point in Heidegger's 'The Origin of the Work of Art' is that the artwork is part of 'createdness', in contrast to the equipment's readiness: whereas the thing of use is marked by reliability and habit and therefore glides into oblivion when used (for instance, the peasant's shoes), the artwork lets truth happen because it posits the usual being in a state of unusual unconcealedness, *aletheia* (for instance, van Gogh's painting of the peasant's shoes).<sup>110</sup> Part of this 'happening of truth' is what Heidegger terms *unheimlich*, a dialectical quality which, not unlike Freud's notion, occurs when the familiar, reliable and safe is displaced to new circumstances.<sup>111</sup> Dismembered as they are from their usual context, standing alone on the floor with their dark hollows gaping open, van Gogh's shoes



**2.13.** Vincent van Gogh, *Three Pairs of Shoes* (1886-87), oil on canvas. Cambridge (Mass.), Harvard Art Museum/Fogg Art Museum, Bequest from the Collection of Maurice Wertheim, Class of 1906. 1951.66. Photo: David Mathews © President and Fellows of Harvard College.

certainly possess such an *unheimlichkeit*. Taking into account that the above-mentioned doubt of their belonging has been driven to extremes by the Jewish philosopher Derrida, who even questions whether the shoes belong together at all and furthermore suggests Schapiro's doubt as caused by his own identity as a nomadic, urban Jew,<sup>112</sup> one perceives perhaps a further *unheimlichkeit* that also turns back from the future. From this horizon, the near future of Heidegger's 1935-36 reading, van Gogh's lonely shoes seem to multiply (ill. 2.13) and become mountains of abandoned shoes (ill. 2.14), hyper-nomadised leftovers of that terror regime which turned the heroisation of work into a death industry. By industrially re-cycling these leftovers which primarily belonged to urban nomadic Jews, allegedly decadent idlers, the Nazis hoped to re-convert uselessness to use; although by so doing, nature turned into the most extreme example of *Bestand*, that passive repository for industry's exploitive equipment, *Ge-Stell*, which Heidegger, from the post-war position in 1949,

described as a prime danger of civilisation and, in fact, himself fleetingly compared to the Nazi death industry:

Farming is now motorised nutritional industry, in essence the same as the fabrication of corpses in gas chambers and death camps [*Vernichtungslagern*], the same as the blockade and starving of countries, the same as the fabrication of hydrogen bombs.<sup>113</sup>

Since the fabrication of corpses was the unacknowledged outcome of Heidegger's own rustic dream – the danger of his beloved work-camp life having become infinite – could one imagine a more ironic example of Heideggerian truth happening as *unheimlich* unconcealedness than these mountains of shoes, the shadows of otherness collapsing into Heidegger's sought-for presence?

The idea that this multiplication of shoes signifies not only a paranoiac return from the future but also a deferred action becomes clear from one of Heidegger's seminars from the winter of 1933-34, *Heraclitus' Verdict: The Fight as Being's Character*. In words eerily matching the impending Nazi extermination programme against the Jews, Heidegger emphasises how important it is for a people's well-being to identify and eliminate an enemy that threatens the being-there of this people, even if the enemy is invented: 'And it could



**2.14.** Piles of shoes from victims, photograph. Oświęcim (Auschwitz), Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau.

appear that there is no enemy. Then the prime requirement is to find the enemy, place him in the light or even first to create him, so that this resistance against the enemy happens and being-there does not become blunt.' As '[t]he enemy could have fastened in the innermost roots of the being-there of a people', it is crucial to keep up the constant readiness 'and initiate [...] the attack with the goal of the total extinction [*völligen Vernichtung*].'<sup>114</sup> So Auschwitz's mountains of shoes, the outcome of the total extinction of the enemy wished for by Heidegger, are indeed not far away. They are a testimony to a movement which would go infinitely far in creating this enemy – a race of urban idlers, which should be extinguished so that the soil, to which van Gogh's shoes allegedly belonged, could remain pure and its people avoid becoming blunt. Nonetheless, when Heidegger made his explicit post-war linkage of agricultural soil and extinction of humans, the latter no longer served as purification through sacrifice of the former; rather soil and humans had both been transformed into an anonymous reserve for the cynical machinery of industrial modernity.

This future-informed *unheimlichkeit* invading van Gogh's shoes through Heidegger's reflections casts perhaps its longest shadows if we also bring into the discussion Millet's images of shepherds. In these images, mostly pastels, in which lonesome shepherds walk or stand among their flocks of sheep or cows, their bodies veiled in long cloaks and their faces hidden in shadows, the silent atmosphere seems vibrant again with a latent threat. Take the pastel *Flight of Crows* (c. 1866; ill. 2.15), in which the cowherd turns away from the viewer in order to see a flock of crows flying up from the barren field.<sup>115</sup> Standing there completely veiled and leaning on her stick, with the crows rising behind a row of naked autumn trees, their black silhouettes first standing out against the setting sun, then disappearing in the dark clouds, she appears to be watching an omen of evil. Indeed, with her skull-like head-veil, she herself metamorphoses into an image of death. The crows here resemble hellish smoke coming, Bosch fashion, from the dark earth, while the row of trees gives a feeling of containment, as if they were a fence of some kind. This fence-like quality, often characteristic of Millet's autumn trees, crystallises into fact in the eerie *Sheepfold by Moonlight* (c. 1856; ill. 2.16).<sup>116</sup> In this work, the black silhouette of the shepherd rises from the moonlit grid of the paddock, his right hand raising a menacing stick over the sheep whose mass of bodies shine dimly against the low



**2.15.** Jean-François Millet, *Flight of Crows* (c. 1866), pastel and black conté crayon on blue-grey paper. Pittsburgh, The Frick Art and Historical Center.

moon; in the words of Sensier, this is ‘a bizarre and awesome world’. Indeed, Sensier acutely describes this shepherd as ‘a being of prey to the evil spells of the night.’<sup>117</sup> Such scenes make it understandable that Millet could describe his experiences of the field and forest as ‘dreamy, a sad dream, though painfully pleasurable’, and that at the end of the day he could return from the forest crushed by its stillness and greatness, if not directly scared.<sup>118</sup>

Of course, the shepherd has a long tradition in Western art as a benevolent figure, nurturing and caring for his flock. In metaphoric language turning the flock into an anthropomorphic crowd, the Mesopotamian or Israelite king was the shepherd for his people; Christ was the good shepherd for humankind; and the priest became the pastor for his congregation.<sup>119</sup> Taking into account that Millet’s images are generally permeated by Christian significance and that

his idea of peasants collapsed the animal-human distinction, it is indeed plausible that his shepherds refer to this tradition. But in Millet's images the shepherds do not appear as unequivocally benevolent; rather there seems to lurk a threat that, haunted by the 'evil spells of the night', their role of guard will take over and turn them into tyrannical suppressors, wolves who violently force their flock behind fencing wire before slaughtering them. This is clearly what happened in the *Sheepfold by Moonlight*, where the sheep acquires connotations of sacrifice, displacing the memory of Christ from the shepherd to the sacrificial lamb.

Legitimising this reading in terms of future developments, we could first note that the shepherd's shadow cast from the head gear and erasing the contours of his eyes just as in the *Sower* later became an important part of military iconography. This shadow under a helmet or peaked cap which emphasises the terroristic anonymity of power is evident in numerous images of German soldiers from World



**2.16.** Jean-François Millet, *Sheepfold by Moonlight* (c. 1856), black conté crayon on buff paper. Baltimore, The Walters Art Gallery.



**2.17.** Albin Egger-Lienz, *Two Shepherds at Rest* (c. 1918), oil on canvas. Lienz, Museum der Stadt Lienz, Schloß Bruck.

War I to Nazism. A transitional stage between pastoral-peasant and militaristic power may be found in Albin Egger-Lienz, a heroising painter of rural Austria whom the Nazis saw as forerunner of their own image culture and whose *Heimat* paintings of peasant work culture otherwise look like a brutalised version of Millet.<sup>120</sup> In Egger-Lienz's *Two Shepherds at Rest* (c. 1918; ill. 2.17), for example, two outstretched, Michelangelesque shepherds let their powerful sticks rest on their legs while their faces are menacingly hidden in the sharp shadow from their sun-beaten hats.

If we expose this genealogy more fully, Millet's shepherds thus represent in embryo Agamben's platonic leaders of the mob who cannot abstain from the blood of their tribe and therefore turn into wolves. Accordingly, one of these leaders, Goebbels, described the Nazi delegates to the German Reichstag in 1928 in these words: 'we come as enemies! Like a wolf tearing into the flock of sheep, that is



**2.18.** Hungarian Jews in Auschwitz II-Birkenau before the selection for the gas chambers (1944), photograph.

how we come!’<sup>121</sup> To Millet’s vision are thus added uncanny images from the Third Reich in which SS guards violently force their enemies behind the barbed wire of concentration and death camps (ill. 2.18). Their nakedness in death, the industrial manner of their slaughtering, and of course the cattle trucks in which they are transported, mimicking the animal transport system developing since the 1860s, all point to the prisoners’ status as cattle.<sup>122</sup> This status is not only pragmatic but also interwoven with layers of significance blurring the distinction between self and other. In the Nazi propaganda movie *The Eternal Jew* (1940), directed by Fritz Hippler, for example, Jews are shown as torturers of animals before bucolic scenes with lambs relaxing take over. And Julius Streicher, the editor of the infamous anti-Semitic journal *Der Stürmer*, allegedly pointed to passages in the Talmud stating that ‘All who are not Jews are animals. They are livestock in human form. Against them everything is allowed.’ This image of Jews converting their enemies into animals did not prevent Streicher, as a Franconian party official in 1933, from himself ordering 250 Jewish businessmen in Nuremberg to work like cattle by pulling up grass with their teeth, and by this means turning them into those *homines sacri* into whom the Jews allegedly changed their enemies. As the ultimate sign of Streicher’s – and the totalitarian forerunners’ – complete confusion regarding self and

other, hero and victim, before his execution Streicher, allegedly partially Jewish himself, asked the Nuremberg tribunal if he might be a Jewish citizen.<sup>123</sup> This bond between executioner and victim in Nazism and totalitarian culture as such could also be inferred from the Jewish side, for according to a Jewish tradition referred to by Isaac Bashevis Singer, ‘the souls of the dead were reincarnated in cattle and fowl and [...] when the slaughterer killed them with a kosher knife and said the blessing with fervor, this served to purify these souls.’<sup>124</sup>

These disturbing images identifying humans with cattle and blurring the distinction between self and other all derive, of course, from a later epoch of which Millet could know nothing. However, in his shepherd images we do find apocalyptic forebodings and embryonic warnings of protective leadership changing into evil, tyranny and slaughter, and of animal farming mutating into industrial cynicism. And 20th-century totalitarianism provides us with the most obvious cases of this badness transforming from virtuality to actuality, an exhaustion of potential which cannot be obliterated from the modern viewer’s memory, and in this manner exposing certain bad omens of Millet’s images which would otherwise go unnoticed.

### THE DISCONTENTS III: BASELITZ AND KIEFER

If Millet and van Gogh exhibited the misgivings of tendencies whose actual fulfilment lay ahead of their present horizon, Baselitz and Kiefer conversely exhibit the *trauerarbeit* of factual occurrences already fully consummated, some of them lying far back in time, others still being perpetuated in the present of the artists. However, in spite of these divergent chronological positions in relation to the same cultural phenomenon – totalitarianism – I hope to show that certain thematic trends are urgent to both pairs of artists, and, moreover, that both Baselitz and Kiefer not only deal with the shadows of totalitarianism, but also refer to the universe of Millet and van Gogh, thereby making explicit the genealogy I am attempting to elucidate.

As neo-expressionist figurative painters, Baselitz and Kiefer are among the first German post-war artists to grapple distinctly with totalitarian experiences: starting in the early 1960s, Baselitz has commented on communism as it survived in the Soviet Union and East Germany, the country of his youth; and starting in the late 1960s, Kiefer has digested the National Socialist past. Furthermore, both Baselitz and Kiefer seem so involved with these experiences that

their artistic projects lose a great deal of force after they both underwent basic thematic shifts: Baselitz moving on to his well-known 'upside-down' universe already from 1969; Kiefer moving on to old civilisation and Chinese imagery after 1991. However, perhaps reflecting the particular strands of totalitarianism that each focused on, Baselitz's images, no matter how amorphous, are basically figurative, whereas Kiefer's, bordering self-consciously on iconoclasm, exhibit a multivalent landscape space excluding proper figures. In this space, *unheimlich* reminders of the recent and deep past are evoked, not through explicit symbols but through deliberately vague signifiers that nonetheless, in a mirror reversal of Millet and van Gogh, seem infected by collective memories. Kiefer himself remarks, 'Such an experience, such a knowledge determines our viewing angle on things. We see railway tracks somewhere and think of Auschwitz.'<sup>125</sup> In spite of their divergent attitudes to figures, we observe in both Baselitz's and Kiefer's pictures a peculiar, almost cyborgian merging of the human body, nature and artefacts which perhaps comments on the basic space of totalitarianism and its forerunners: one in which humans and their work are allegedly disalienated from nature. Furthermore, in a manner specifically recalling Millet and van Gogh, both artists are marked by an obsession of self-identification with the themes suggested.

The thematic trend in Baselitz and Kiefer pertaining perhaps most directly to totalitarianism is the hero. Recollecting the revolutionary way in which Millet's *The Sower* was termed the New Man and of how communism later attempted to institutionalise this figure, in 1965-1966 Baselitz painted a series of hero paintings called *The New Type* (*Der Neue Typ*), a title attached explicitly to a few of them (ill. 2.19).<sup>126</sup> These heroes are obviously critical elaborations of the kind of worker-soldier propagated in totalitarian systems. Later, in his comments, Baselitz refers especially to the Soviet variant for which he even feels a certain veneration, but otherwise he emphasises their presence in other East Bloc states, in Nazi Germany, and even in Mexico, America and France of the 1930s.<sup>127</sup> However, in Baselitz's depictions, and not unlike the premonitions of Millet and van Gogh, these heroes emerge as victims of the violent power they themselves represent: in comparison with the amorphous bio-mass and fragmented bodies Baselitz started painting in the early 1960s, works reminiscent of Otto Dix's war imagery, the heroes appear as just vaguely more coherent agglomerations of flesh - for instance, their



**2.19.** Georg Baselitz, *The New Type* (1965), oil on canvas. Stuttgart, Froehlich Collection.

feet swollen, their hands stigmatised and caught in trap-like devices – wandering among body fragments and burning rubble, the remains of some devastating war. The façade of totalitarianism verbally breaks down in these depictions as the fascist body loses control, beyond the reach of the heroes' all-too-small and feminine-looking heads. The uniforms of the heroes, which normally present a whole and polished surface, shrink into rags and fuse with the expanding, vulnerable flesh. This expansion includes erect penises, unprotected masculine power, and androgynous breasts, all signs of a dissolving gender identity. What we are confronted with here is, in Lisa Saltz-

man's words, 'a masculinity in ruins', a depiction of what is left when the paternal authority dissolves, which is shown with particular emphasis in the row of dismembered and monstrous bodies in *Picture for the Fathers* (1965; ill. 2.20). Obviously, totalitarian culture is alluded to, for in this culture a paternal authority is characteristically secured in the aging father figure around whom a cult is built and whose ideals are allegedly carried out by heroic citizens, his perennially youthful sons.

Taking into account Carl Jung's observation that heroisation is by definition juvenile, if not infantile, and that human maturity is only reached when heroisation is overcome,<sup>128</sup> Baselitz's hero paintings could nevertheless also be conceived as more general statements, portraying the widespread break-down of masculine authority happening in Western states in the lengthy aftermath of World War II. In fact, just two years before Baselitz's hero series, the German psychoanalyst Alexander Mitscherlich published his *Society without the Father* (1963), a book stating similarly that Western society, due to industrialisation and war, was losing its paternal authorities and undergoing an oedipal, or rather anti-oedipal, identity crisis.<sup>129</sup> That for Baselitz this loss of paternal authorities included his own role as an artist could be inferred from the fact that some of his wounded heroes – for instance, the *Blocked Painter* (1965) – have a palette and brushes in their hand, thereby bringing even the van Goghian *grand-père* and Milletian *les forts* types into the sphere of wounded heroes. Indeed, perhaps Baselitz's painting lost its nerve after 1969 because by then he himself had appropriated the authoritarian figure he had deconstructed earlier.<sup>130</sup> Greenberg-fashion, he would now claim that the upside-down manoeuvre was a trick to ensure that his 'relationship to the object is arbitrary.'<sup>131</sup> And for his public persona he would adopt a dress code, including a shaven head, gold rings and black leather coat, which hauntingly recalled totalitarian military authorities.

But, of course, especially significant in relation to a genealogy of totalitarianism in visual art, Baselitz's hero paintings are not only about fallen military and artistic authorities: their heroism is bound up with work, rural work. Recurrent pictograms encircling the wounded heroes are thus rustic symbols harking back unmistakably to the universe of Millet and van Gogh: ploughs, wheelbarrows, harrows, and, particularly explicit, flocks of crows and detached pairs of old shoes. Instead of focusing on more modern agricultural



**2.20.** Georg Baselitz, *Picture for the Fathers* (1965), oil on canvas. Cologne and New York, Courtesy Michael Werner Gallery.

implements known from Eastern Bloc Socialist Realist images - tractors, combine harvesters, silos - Baselitz emphasises the point I have tried to foreground earlier: that the heroism of work culminating in totalitarianism has significant forerunners in Millet and van Gogh, because these artists give omens of the same dark side of the revolutionary project which Baselitz now explores in retrospect. In fact, in Baselitz we sense the same mixture of modern and mythically Christian which characterises the paintings of Millet and van Gogh. Not only do several of the heroes spread out their arms and expose the stigmata of their big, clumsy hands, as if the wounded working hero replays the martyrdom of Christ; but in some paintings either a Michelangesque divine hand or the hand of a hero named *The Shepherd* carry forth assemblages of culture in which burning houses mingle with ploughs, indicating a biblical Fall in which war

and work are two sides of the same civilisational coin. In the recurrent Baselitz hero, *The Shepherd*, one is specifically reminded of Millet's shepherd figure metamorphosing into the evil guard of totalitarianism.<sup>132</sup>

If we now turn to Kiefer's concept of the hero, we will find that it, too, has a related affinity to the universe of Millet and van Gogh. For example, in 1963, as a symptom that van Gogh counted among Kiefer's early artistic heroes (together with Rodin and Rilke), Kiefer won a student travel stipend for an essay in which he suggested exploring the different geographical locations earlier explored and painted by van Gogh.<sup>133</sup> However, when Kiefer went on a journey of self-discovery in Switzerland, France and Italy in 1969, the mental location he occupied was not that of van Gogh but that of a Nazi – a shift again implying the totalitarian forebodings of van Gogh. In the photographs from the book projects *Heroic Symbols (Heroische Sinnbilder, 1969)* and *For Genet (1969)* and their rearrangement in *Occupations (Besetzungen, 1975)*, a seventeen-page spread for the Cologne avant-garde journal *Interfunktionen*, Kiefer is thus seen posing in different locations – everyday or historically significant sites – raising his hand in a Hitler salute.<sup>134</sup> Even if Kiefer seems to re-perform the occupational ambitions of the Nazis, the way the conquering gestures are completely alienated from the sites in these photographs makes them pathetic, if not ridiculous, and in this manner relieves some of the burdens of the past.

When Kiefer begins to explore the more monumental formats of painting from 1973 onwards, however, the presence of the human figure is mostly excluded, substituted by written names, allegorical symbols, inserted formulaic portraits, or more vaguely anthropomorphic connotations hovering in the heavily sign-loaded interior spaces or landscapes.<sup>135</sup> The heroic figures alluded to in these spaces are mostly 'great' figures from the German mythological, philosophical, literary or military past – from Hermann to heroes from Wagner's operas to Heidegger – and as such they present a more Romantic and 'Nietzschean', even National Socialist version of the hero than that of Baselitz, with his explicit references to rustic work. However, even more than Baselitz, Kiefer projects his own ego into these heroic spaces, again in the form of an easel, hovering over the landscapes, or by way of his own studio, an attic of a former school building at Hornbach, which constitutes the matrix for his indefinable wooden *Heimat* interiors.<sup>136</sup>



**2.21.** Anselm Kiefer, *Cockchafer Fly (Maikäfer flieg, 1974)*, oil on burlap. Berlin, Nationalgalerie im Hamburger Bahnhof, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Sammlung Marx/162. bpk / Nationalgalerie im Hamburger Bahnhof, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Sammlung Marx.

Although a critical commentary on the heroisation of work is mostly absent from Kiefer's universe of names, it seems all the more to be subtly alluded to in these landscapes and architectural interiors. One kind of space for such a commentary is the fields which are once more posited in the grey totalitarian area between work and war. Their perspectival patterns of characteristically desolate furrows and high-lying horizons are often overlaid with symbolic markers – handwriting, pictures, real materials like sand or straw, or, more abstractly, titles – connoting destruction of some kind, typically a devastation shifting vaguely between war, artistic creation and the agricultural cycle's own processes. The recurrent idea of burning earth (*'verbrannte Erde'*), for example, clearly suggests agricultural field burning for the purpose of refertilisation in pre-industrial societies. But as is made explicit in paintings such as *Cockchafer Fly*

(*Maikäfer flieg*, 1974; ill. 2.21), this burning also evokes the martial burning of enemy land, not least that of the Nazis, or the destruction of Germany itself.<sup>137</sup> Discreetly running along the far hillside above the pitch-like, locally burning fields interspersed with snow, a sentence from a German children's song is written in Kiefer's characteristic schoolboy handwriting: 'Maikäfer flieg, der Vater ist im Krieg, die Mutter ist im Pommerland, Pommerland is abgebrannt' ('Cockchafer fly, the father is at war, the mother is in Pomerania, Pomerania is burned down').

With this intermingling of war and agricultural work in landscape imagery, Kiefer seems to comment critically on the Carlylean tradition perpetuated by Jünger and the totalitarian regimes, in which a battlefield is a sort of quintessence of work, of work in its utmost concentration.<sup>138</sup> More generally, the many-layered inscription of these landscapes with historical significance appears almost as a visualisation of the way Heidegger fused the earth with the fatal occurrences of the historical *Volk* living on it: victory and defeat, blessing and curse, mastery and serfdom.<sup>139</sup> Furthermore, in works such as *To Paint = To Burn* (*Malen = Verbrennen*, 1974) or *Nero Paints* (*Nero malt*, 1974), Kiefer, by way of the palette symbol, again projects his artistic persona into the destroying agent of the landscapes: in the latter, flames from the paint brushes set afire a row of houses and a church on the horizon, recalling specifically the *verbrannte Erde* strategy of the Nazi eastern front. Here we are back among the ruined buildings encircling Baselitz's *Neue Typ*.

Considering Kiefer's full thematic circle, it is not easy to forget certain strands of Millet's and van Gogh's imagery. Kiefer's emphasis of the desolate state of fields otherwise supposed to be the source of human nourishment recalls the dialectic of blossoming and exhaustion found in the van Gogh-Millet combination, and his use of earthy materials such as sand, ash, straw and lead amounts to a realisation of Millet and van Gogh's common desire to paint with the earth itself, including letting peasants be of the earth. Likewise, his insistence on filling his panoramic canvases with flat earths overlaid by a small strip of sky especially re-evokes Millet's simple juxtaposition of plane-like earths and skies – a simplicity he himself emphasised: 'In my pictures of fields I see only two things: the sky and the ground, the two separated by the horizon, and imaginary lines, rising and falling. I build on that and the rest is either accidental or incidental.'<sup>140</sup> And if we consider the violent connotations

pertaining to the quantities of smoke rising from Kiefer's burning fields, the many smoking fields of Millet are emphatically re-invested with a future-informed *unheimlichkeit*. Superimposed with this remembrance they invoke not only the agricultural cycle but also that apocalyptic destruction of the earth and its crops, which Millet himself presented as a grand metaphor for artistic, thought-based creation. In this way, Millet's paintings of burning fields are also superimposed with an imaginary palette, signifying that the worker-artist may turn into a tyrannical emperor painting with flames, whether in politics or on canvas: 'Watch the goal of devastation greatly accomplished, and the imagination is astonished.'

Kiefer's burning fields also allude to the Holocaust, of course.<sup>141</sup> With the master metaphors of golden straw and leaden and ashen grey, Kiefer, for instance, puts into haunting visual imagery the 'Todesfuge' (1945), the poem by the Romanian-Jewish poet Paul Celan which perhaps triggered Adorno's famed dictum that 'After Auschwitz, to write a poem is barbaric.'<sup>142</sup> In this poem, which more than most contemporary poetry renders explicit the Nazi genocide, Celan intermingles the killing and cremation of Jews in the concentration camps with the Israelite hope for salvation, even resurrection, thus unknowingly exposing the literary significance of the later designation, Holocaust, as a 'sacrifice by fire'. Celan also crosses the images of victim and master by juxtaposing the golden hair of Margarete, the Ur-German maiden known from Goethe's *Faust*, and the ashen hair of Shulamith, the Jewish bride from the Song of Songs. In his appropriation of these ambivalent displacements, Kiefer inserts, for instance, bundles of straw on greyish field-like backgrounds, turning Margarethe's hair (in Kiefer with an h) into the Ur-German cornfield while at the same time interweaving her with Shulamith, the burning of the same field, through the understanding of straw as dead grass and the grey colour as ash (ill. 2.22).<sup>143</sup> This, then, brings us back to the anthropomorphic identification of the corn with autochthonously bred humans - an identification which was first suggested in relation to *Germinal's* revolutionary armies of labourers and their appropriation again in van Gogh's peasants, and which, of course, now becomes especially obvious in relation to the Nazi ideas of *Blut-und-Boden*. However, by letting the corn wither into straw and ash, Kiefer points to the vulnerable point of totalitarian cultures: that same and other, master and victim, become indistinguishable. This flickering victim-master is also con-



**2.22.** Anselm Kiefer, *Your Golden Hair, Margarethe - Midsummernight* (1981), oil, acrylic, emulsion and straw on canvas. Amsterdam, Collection Sanders. © Anselm Kiefer.

noted by another aspect of the straw – that it was used as a bed not only by countless concentration camp prisoners but also, as mentioned by Kiefer himself, by *Faust's* Gretchen in the prison.<sup>144</sup> Peter Schjeldahs sums up this idea: 'As grasses sprout from the ground and are burned back into it, perhaps, the Holocaust was a harvest and is now a constituent of the German soil.'<sup>145</sup> If, in Celan's words, 'Death is a master from Germany', this master's attempt to mow down the Other implies that a considerable part of the Same was harvested too. It is no wonder, after all, that the young Kiefer's object of identification could shift from van Gogh, the painter of earth-born peasants who sacrificed himself in the midst of cornfields, to a Nazi conqueror who venerated the native soil and sought to burn to its level the Jewish race, the big other of the earth-born Germans.

In an ultimate defloration of the past – perhaps bordering on rape, some would think – we could include in this sacrificial circle Millet's depiction of a *Woman Baking Bread* (1853-54; ill. 2.23).<sup>146</sup> In the pallid light of the otherwise dark rustic kitchen, the bread being passed into the stone oven by the mannish peasant woman has a corporeal glare, enshrouding the scene in disturbing associations to cremation. The immediate horizon would be a Christian one, turning the heating of the crushed grain in the oven's womb into a Eucharistic promise of Resurrection – a symbol of renewed fertility sustained by the woman's penetrative gesture and the disturbingly vaginal form of her apron. But in the light of later events, and Kiefer's interpretation of them, this horizon is fused with memories of Holocaust, the crushed



**2.23.** Jean-François Millet, *Woman Baking Bread* (1853-54), oil on canvas. Otterloo, Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller.

grain now signifying Jewish corpses sliding into the crematoria of the death camps: an ironic reversal of Heidegger's vision of man turning into grain: 'Woe to him who is not pulverized.' And Millet's longing for the countryside, including 'the ruined roof from which the chimney lets out smoke that fades poetically in the air and lets us perceive the woman who cooks supper for those who enter, tired of work in the fields',<sup>147</sup> glides over into Celan's resurrectionist vision of the smoke of the concentration camp crematoria: 'your ashen hair Shulamith/ we shovel a grave in the air there you won't lie too cramped'.

Whether or not the reader will find this layer of significance in Millet revealing, Kiefer himself explores in-depth the notion of transformation, if not resurrection. Using materials like straw, ash and lead, he evokes a partially alchemical dialectic of creation in which baser materials, especially the heavy metal of melancholia, will be transformed into higher ones, with gold at the apex.<sup>148</sup> One macabre part of this reinterpretation is the Nazis' industrialist efforts at recycling the remnants of exterminated victims and turning them into useful items. In three giant leaden books, perhaps ultimately derived from van Gogh's still-life with a huge Bible, Kiefer has, for instance, inserted locks of women's hair, twisting further the Margarethe/Sulamith dialectic;<sup>149</sup> similarly, human teeth, along with small toy soldiers, have been encapsulated in the wings of a leaden war aeroplane in *Jason* (1989). By evoking both the concentration camp victims and the warriors rising from the dragon's teeth sown by the title protagonist of the piece (just as the black avenging army of workers would rise from the furrows in van Gogh's paraphrase of Zola's *Germinal*), Kiefer once more pronounces the extreme ambivalence of resurrection.<sup>150</sup>

A final part of nature invested with totalitarian dilemmas by both Baselitz and Kiefer, and also having certain forerunners, especially in Millet, is the forest and its timber. With the forest we are close to the totalitarian dream of re-connecting with nature's sources and revealing their anthropomorphic potential, but also to the brutal inversion of this dream in the industrial hyper-exploitation of nature - turning nature into Heideggerian *Bestand* - which perhaps culminated in the communist regimes. For Baselitz, especially, the forest formed an important part of personal experience, since in 1956 he considered a career as a forester and was admitted to the State Forestry School in Taranth before entering art school.<sup>151</sup> In his paint-



**2.24.** Georg Baselitz, *The Tree I* (1965-66), oil on canvas. Duisburg, Grothe Collection.

ings from the second half of the sixties, trees constitute a crucial ingredient, mingling, for instance, with dogs and overgrown forest workers in the split and splintered images leading up to the ‘upside-down’ shift, or assuming an almost human suffering in the *Neue Typ* and related paintings. In these, the trees also seem to be victims of the martial efforts resulting in the ruined landscapes: they are partially dismembered and bleeding from newly inflicted wounds from sharp instruments, their roots pierced with a knife, or trunks penetrated by their own branches (ill. 2.24). Forebodings of such a violent exploitation of nature’s resources, perceptibly converting work into



**2.25.** Anselm Kiefer, *Varus* (1976), oil and acrylic on burlap. Eindhoven, Van Abbemuseum. Photo: Peter Cox, Eindhoven.

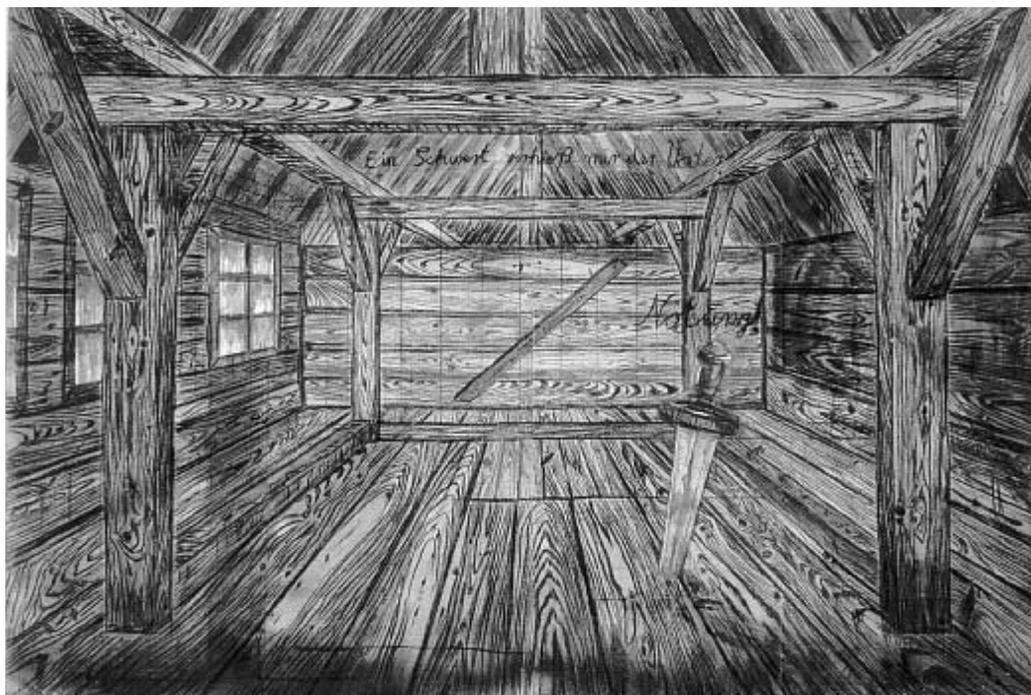
war, are sensed in Millet's *Woodsawyers* (1848; London, Victoria and Albert Museum), in which the titanic efforts of the sawing workers result in a series of huge, surgically cut chunks of logs; and it is taken to caricatured heights in Hans Schrödter's Nazi *Forest Workers*, in which the sawing utensils and axes resemble a parade of gruesome battle and torture instruments.<sup>152</sup>

In Kiefer, the forest first of all represents the roots of the German *Volksgeist*, pointing, for instance, to the impenetrable *Teutoburger Wald* in which Arminius (Hermann) defeated the Roman army headed by Varus in 9 AD. As depicted by Kiefer, this forest again seems full of anthropomorphic forces, crystallising into the handwritten names (*Varus*, 1976; ill. 2.25) or formulaic icons (*Ways of Worldly Wisdom*, 1976-77 and 1978-80) of Germany's 'spiritual heroes' (*Geisteshelden*). In *Varus*, furthermore, the surprisingly barren and linear branches of the densely packed fir trees are uplifted symmetrically around the lonely, snowy path which disappears into the

bluish depths. This erectness not only generates a vault-like effect, playing on old ideas of Gothic architecture's origin in the primeval wood,<sup>153</sup> but also multiplies the *Heiling* gesture appropriated by Kiefer in the slightly earlier *Occupations*, in this way evoking an applauding crowd which paves a historical processional way leading from the Arminius battle to Romanticism and on to National Socialism. In this anthropomorphisation of the forest, Kiefer reactualises Nazi ideas about the German landscape being a huge organism, such as those propounded by Walter Schoenichen, the most popular writer on biology in the Weimar and Nazi era. According to Schoenichen, the landscape could be 'sick', 'wounded', 'tamed' or 'domesticated', and foresters were sylvan 'doctors' who should implement 'therapies' for the illnesses of civilisation, including racial pollution.<sup>154</sup> Schoenichen could also remark that spruce trees 'hardened by battle with the elements, are the first line of defence for the forest in the high mountains', and that 'the confusion of branches reaching in all directions marks the forest of spruce as a battle zone', thereby suggesting a Darwinistic 19th-century tradition in which the whole of nature is seen as a battlefield.<sup>155</sup> From this highly anthropomorphic charging of trees there seems to be but a small step to Kiefer's forest parades; and likewise Baselitz's wounded trees are invoked.

Yet Kiefer's trees not only point to corporeal signifieds but are superimposed with references to evil artefacts which pollute, for instance, the otherwise modernist metamorphosis of *Piet Mondrian - Arminius' Battle* (1976), a fir tree mutating into a grid of black bars. Memories of concentration camp fences thus also suggest themselves in *Varus's* erect branches rising from naked tree trunks, an association emphasised by the white, dryly billowing lines seen in the right foreground and multiplied to tangles in *Ways of Worldly Wisdom*: forms resembling decayed barbed wire.<sup>156</sup> Once more metamorphosing master to victim, self to other, the ghostly heroes of the forest path of *Varus* turn into hardworking *Muselmänner* following a ghoulish *Holzweg* - late successors of Millet's *Death Gripping the Woodcutter* (1859) perhaps?<sup>157</sup>

The same kind of connotative shifts, only with a starting point in culture, are mixed in, finally, when we move into Kiefer's wooden interiors. Whether more explicitly suggesting his own attic studio in the former school building or some indeterminate heroic hall - Old Norse, Wagnerian or National Socialist (*Deutschlands Geisteshelden*,



**2.26.** Anselm Kiefer, *Notung* (1973), oil and charcoal on burlap, with oil and charcoal on cardboard. Rotterdam, Museum Boymans-van Beuningen.

1973) - the nakedly exposed wooden boards, beams, rafters, and not least the windows with their simple grid of bars, give the viewer *unheimlich* reminders of some other buildings of the recent past: the humbly constructed barracks of the concentration camps (ills. 2.26 and 2.27).<sup>158</sup> In these interiors, the Germanic cult of rustic *Heimat* building, visualised already in peasant construction scenes such as Egger-Lienz' *Das Leben* (1912)<sup>159</sup> and reaching a climax in the Nazi *Heimatschutzstil* of wooden youth homes, schools and recreation centres, is ironically reversed, so that again the worlds of victors and victims melt into one another. The ominous atmosphere of these interiors is stressed by elements such as strangely immaterial Trinitarian fires; a viper like those played with by the guard in *Todesfuge*; or a Wagnerian sword, whose bloody penetration of the naked wood recalls the sword piercing the roots of Baselitz's *Der Baum I* (1965). Not so unlike Baselitz's trees then, Kiefer's forest is a vulnerable one, forced into violent uses and in this way getting wounded itself.

As Kiefer's and Baselitz's far-sighted perspectives might confirm, then, the heroisation of work is not a phenomenon that can be bracketed off to the eras of totalitarian regimes. It is a utopian-dystopian seduction of late modernity which resurges when the heroic ideals from an otherwise work-shy classical past are revived and form a sinister amalgam with a modernity that accepts work but is otherwise non-heroic. Hereby an unstable alliance is shaped between elitist warrior power and the duties of the working mass which threatens to turn the superhuman heroes into animal victims. More specifically, when rural motives pertaining to this alliance recur in Millet/van Gogh, totalitarianism, and Baselitz/Kiefer, respectively, it is because they are iceberg tips of a deeper-lying cultural development, one moving from ominous potential to a schizophrenic divide of idylisation and horrific action, and further on to reflective *trauerarbeit*.



**2.27.** Barrack interior in Auschwitz II-Birkenau, photograph (c. 2000).

**NOTES** If not otherwise specified, the translations are mine.

- 1 Martin Heidegger, 'The Origin of the Work of Art' [1960], in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. and intro. Albert Hofstadter (Harper and Row; New York, Evanston, San Francisco and London, 1971), pp. 33–34.
- 2 This connection has provoked considerable debate; see Richard Wolin (ed.), *The Heidegger Controversy: A Critical Reader* (MIT Press; Cambridge (Mass.) and London, 1993 [1991]). It was first unveiled in Victor Fariás, *Heidegger and der Nationalsozialismus*, trans. Klaus Laermann, foreword Jürgen Habermas (S. Fischer; Frankfurt a.M., 1989; Fr. 1st edn. 1987) – here esp. pp. 318–20. For further evidence, see Emmanuel Faye, *Heidegger, l'introduction du nazisme dans la philosophie: Autour des séminaires inédits de 1933–1935* (Albin Michel; Paris, 2005). See also Hugo Ott, *Martin Heidegger. Unterwegs zu einer Biographie* (Campus; Frankfurt and New York, 1988); and Rüdiger Safranski, *Martin Heidegger: Between Good and Evil*, trans. Ewald Osers (Harvard University Press; Cambridge (Mass.) and London, 1998; German 1st edn. 1994), pp. 260 and 297–99.
- 3 Karl Löwith, 'The Political Implications of Heidegger's Existentialism', in Wolin, *The Heidegger Controversy*, p. 170.
- 4 In a letter to his brother Theo, *The Complete Letters of Vincent van Gogh* (Thames and Hudson; London, 1958), 614a, vol. 3, p. 232; together with Jules Breton. See also Alexandra Murphy et al., *Jean-François Millet: Drawn into the Light* (exh. cat.), Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown (Mass.), et al., 1999, p. 10; *Millet - Van Gogh* (exh. cat.), Musée d'Orsay, Paris, 1998, p. 55.
- 5 Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century* (MIT Press; Cambridge (Mass.) and London, 1996), p. x.
- 6 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Hermeneutik I: Wahrheit und Methode. Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik* (J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck); Tübingen, 1990), pp. 307–12.
- 7 Robert Rosenblum, *Modern Painting and the Northern Romantic Tradition: Friedrich to Rothko* (Harper and Row; New York, 1975), pp. 10–11 and 13; Geoffrey Batchen, 'Burning with Desire: The Birth and Death of Photography', *Afterimage*, vol. 17, no. 6, January 1990, p. 11 (in Batchen's later, more thoroughly poststructuralist *Burning with Desire: The Conception of Photography* (MIT Press; Cambridge (Mass.) and London, 1997) only 'desire' is left (p. 183) after a cleansing, or rather encryption, of evolutionist terms); Foster, *The Return*, pp. xii, 13 and x.
- 8 Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford University Press; Stanford, 2002; German 1st edn. 1947).
- 9 Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi, foreword Fredric Jameson (Manchester University Press; Manchester, 1984; Fr. 1st edn. 1979); Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford University Press; Stanford, 1998; It. 1st edn. 1995), p. 115.
- 10 Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit*, collected by Raymond Queneau, ed. Allan Bloom, trans. J.H. Nichols, Jr. (Cornell University Press; Ithaca and London, 1980; Fr. 2nd edn. 1947).
- 11 Max Weber, 'Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist der Kapitalismus' [1904–05], in *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie I* (J.C.B. Mohr; Tübingen, 1920), pp. 1–206.
- 12 Weber, 'Die protestantische Ethik', p. 203.
- 13 For this and the following, see Eric Bentley, *A Century of Hero-Worship: A Study of the Idea of Heroism in Carlyle and Nietzsche, with Notes on Wagner, Spengler, Stefan George, and D.H. Lawrence* (Beacon Press; Boston, 1957), pp. 239 and 246.
- 14 Bentley, *Hero-Worship*, p. 250.
- 15 Here cited from Igor Golomstock, *Totalitarian Art: in the Soviet Union, the Third Reich, Fascist Italy, and the People's Republic of China*, trans. R. Chandler (HarperCollins; New York, 1990), p. 84.
- 16 Morozov, in Boris Groys and Max Hollein (eds.), *Dream Factory Communism: The Visual Culture of the Stalin Era* (exh. cat.), Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt a.M., 2003, p. 71.
- 17 Cited in Bentley, *Hero-Worship*, p. 153.
- 18 Bentley, *Hero-Worship*, pp. 252 and 256; Günther, in Groys and Hollein, *Dream Factory*, p. 106; Herbert Grier-son, 'Carlyle and Hitler', in *Essays and Addresses* (Chatto and Windus; London, 1940), p. 101: 'The feelings with which Russian and Italian and German turn appealingly to the Hero show the same blend of religious mysticism and economic demand as Carlyle felt and proclaimed.'
- 19 Bertrand Russell, 'The Ancestry of Fascism', in *The Praise of Idleness and Other Essays* (George Allen & Unwin; London, 1935), p. 94; Bentley, *Hero-Worship*, pp. 252 and 71.
- 20 Thomas Carlyle, *Arbeiten und nicht verzweifeln: Auszüge aus seinen Werken*, trans. Maria Klihn and A. Kretzschmar (Karl Robert Langewiesche; Düsseldorf and Leipzig, s.a. (c. 1904)), pp. 28 and 10 (citation).
- 21 Carlyle, *Arbeiten*, p. 87.
- 22 Carlyle, *Arbeiten*, pp. 34, 36 and 39.
- 23 Carlyle, *Arbeiten*, 29 and 34–35.
- 24 Bentley, *Hero-Worship*, p. 252; Thomas Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus. On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History* (J.M. Dent & Sons; London, E.P. Dutton; New York, 1908).
- 25 Russell, 'Ancestry of Fascism', p. 96.
- 26 Severin Müller, *Phänomenologie und philosophische Theorie der Arbeit* (Karl Alber Freiburg; Munich, 1992–94), 2 vols., vol. 1, p. 256, note 158.
- 27 Ernst Jünger, *Der Arbeiter: Herrschaft und Gestalt* (Hanseatische Verlagsanstalt; Hamburg, 1932), p. 65; see also Müller, *Phänomenologie*, vol. 1, p. 225.

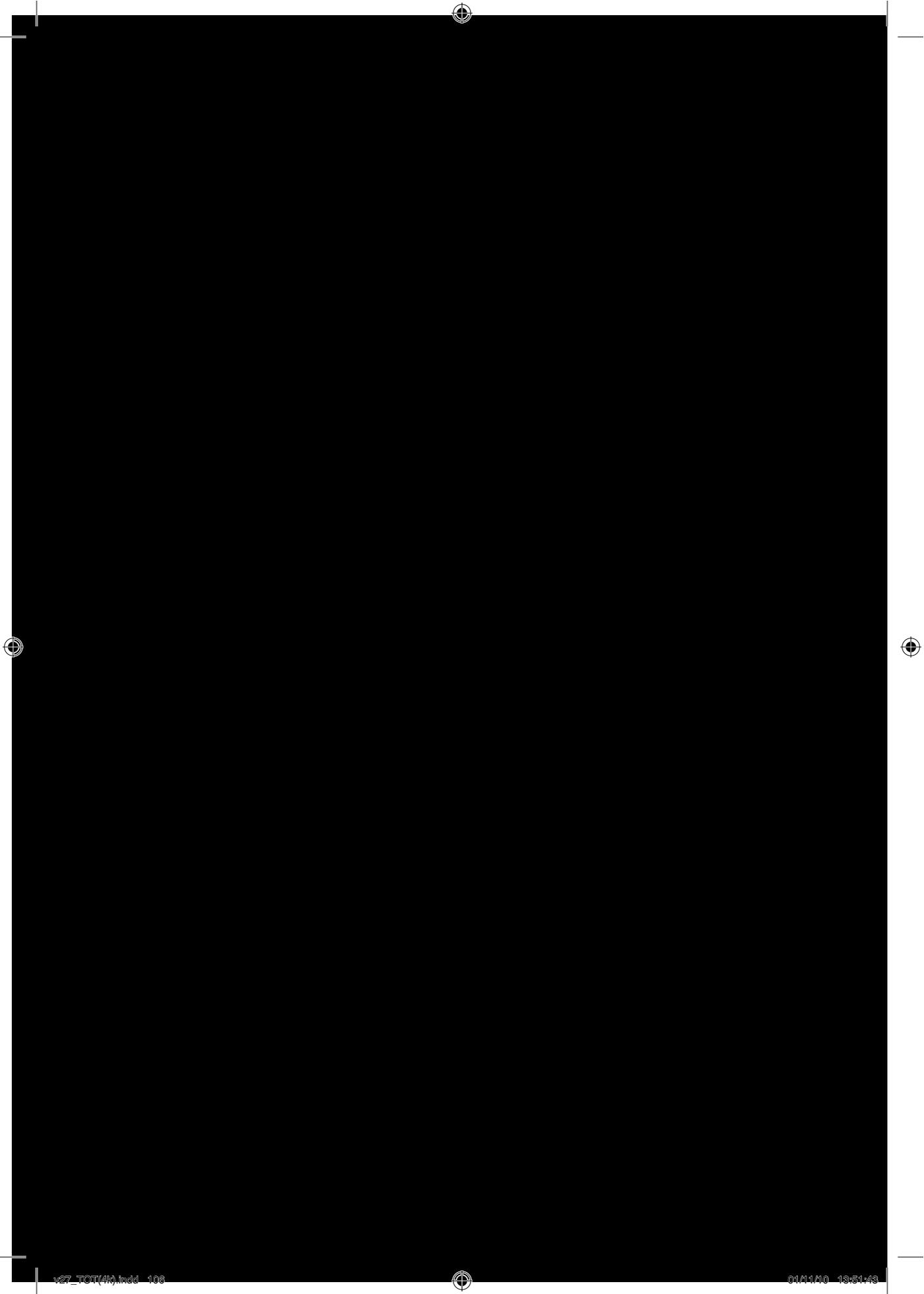
- 28 *Die totale Mobilmachung* [1930]. In Groys, in Groys and Hollein, *Dream Factory*, p. 27, a comparison between Jünger and writers from the Soviet journal *LEF* is drawn.
- 29 Müller, *Phänomenologie*, vol. 1, pp. 252–74.
- 30 Jünger, *Der Arbeiter*, pp. 71 and 150; Müller, *Phänomenologie*, vol. 1, pp. 234–36, 271, 274 and 292–94.
- 31 Jünger, *Der Arbeiter*, pp. 11 and 18; Müller, *Phänomenologie*, vol. 1, p. 245.
- 32 *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 16 (Vittorio Klostermann; Frankfurt a.M., 2001), pp. 200–01. See also Faye, *Heidegger*, pp. 183–84.
- 33 Martin Heidegger, 'Zur Seinsfrage' [1955], in *Wegmarken* (Vittorio Klostermann; Frankfurt a.M., 1967), p. 390 (218).
- 34 Heidegger, 'Zur Seinsfrage', pp. 398–99 (226–27) and 394–95 (222–23); Jünger, *Der Arbeiter*, p. 150.
- 35 Jünger, *Der Arbeiter*, pp. 391–92 (219–20).
- 36 Karl Marx, 'Die entfremdete Arbeit', in idem., *Ökonomisch-philosophische Manuskripte aus dem Jahre 1844*, Marx and Engels, *Werke*, Ergänzungsband, 1. Teil (Dietz; Berlin (East), 1968), XXIV, p. 516. See also Marx, *Das Kapital: Kritik der politischen Ökonomie* (Europäische Verlagsanstalt; Frankfurt a.M., 1967), 2 vols., vol. 1: 3, 5, p. 192.
- 37 Marx, 'Entfremdete Arbeit', XXIII–XXV, pp. 514–17. See also the following articles in Peter Damerow, Peter Furth and Wolfgang Lefèvre (eds.), *Arbeit und Philosophie: Symposium über philosophische Probleme des Arbeitsbegriffs* (Germinal; Bochum, 1983); Sonja Petrovic-Lazarevic, 'Labor as a Cause of Alienation and Disalienation', pp. 145–56; Andreas Arndt and Wolfgang Lefèvre, 'Thesen zum Schwerpunktthema: Poiesis, Praxis, Arbeit. Zur Diskussion handlungstheoretischer Grundbegriffe', pp. 21–34; and Horst Müller, 'Handlung, Arbeit und Praxis als Schlüsselprobleme der Gesellschaftstheorie', pp. 163–76.
- 38 Kojève, *Introduction*, pp. 15, 42 and 46; Jean-Pierre Vernant, 'Arbeit und Natur in der griechischen Antike', in *Seminar: Die Entstehung von Klassengesellschaften* (Suhrkamp; Frankfurt a.M., 1973), pp. 246–70.
- 39 Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, trans. W.O. Henderson and W.H. Chaloner (Basil Blackwell; Oxford, 1971; German 1st edn. 1845), pp. 104–07 and 132–33; <socialistviewpoint.org/mar\_04> (accessed 6 May 2010); Russell, 'Ancestry', p. 94.
- 40 See Bhikhu Parekh, 'Marxism and the Problem of Violence', in Bob Jessop and Russell Wheatley (eds.), *Karl Marx's Social and Political Thought*, vol. 7: *The state, politics, and civil society* (Routledge; London, 1999), pp. 747–61.
- 41 *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, vol. 9 (1979), p. 453, here cited from Parekh, 'Marxism', p. 757 and 761, note 3.
- 42 Marx, *Kapital*, vol. 1, in Marx and Engels, *Werke*, p. 779, cited in André Glucksmann, *Köchinn und Menschenfresser: Über die Beziehung zwischen Staat, Marxismus und Konzentrationslager* (Klaus Wagenbach; Berlin, 1976; Fr. 1st edn. 1974), p. 93.
- 43 Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (Max Niemeyer; Tübingen, 1967 [1927]), pp. 102–04.
- 44 In *The Myth of the Machine: The Pentagon of Power* (Secker and Warburg; London, 1971), pp. 243–53.
- 45 Hannah Arendt, *Antisemitism*, Part One of *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Harcourt Brace; San Diego, New York and London, 1979 [1951]), p. 6, and idem., *Totalitarianism*, Part Three of *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1976 [1948]), p. 42. See also pp. 29–30 in *Totalitarianism*.
- 46 Berthold Hinz, *Die Malerei im deutschen Faschismus: Kunst und Konterrevolution* (Carl Hanser; Munich and Vienna, 1974), p. 78, translated in Golomstock, *Totalitarian Art*, p. 255. See also Peter Schirmbeck, 'Zur Industrie- und Arbeiterdarstellung in der NS-Kunst: Typische Merkmale, Unterdrückung und Weiterführung der Tradition', in Berthold Hinz et al. (eds.), *Die Dekoration der Gewalt: Kunst und Medien im Faschismus* (Anabas-Verlag Kämpf; Giessen, 1979), pp. 61–74.
- 47 Günther, in Groys and Hollein, *Dream Factory*, p. 115.
- 48 Günther, in Groys and Hollein, *Dream Factory*, pp. 108 and 112; Golomstock, *Totalitarian Art*, p. 213.
- 49 See Schirmbeck, 'Industrie- und Arbeiterdarstellung'; and the reproductions in Mortimer G. Davidson, *Kunst in Deutschland 1933–1945: Eine wissenschaftliche Enzyklopädie der Kunst im Dritten Reich* (Grabert; Tübingen, 1988–95), 4 vols, e.g. vol. 2/1 (1991), nos. 419–22 and 714; and vol. 2/2 (1992), no. 1231.
- 50 Hinz, *Malerei*, p. 76.
- 51 Hinz, *Malerei*, p. 77.
- 52 Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, passim. See also Wolfgang Sofsky, *The Order of Terror: The Concentration Camp* (Princeton University Press; Princeton, 1997; German 1st edn. 1993).
- 53 Jane Applebaum, *Gulag: A History of the Soviet Camps* (Allen Lane; London, 2003), pp. 220 and 225.
- 54 *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 16, p. 178. See also Faye, *Heidegger*, p. 169.
- 55 Applebaum, *Gulag*, p. 225.
- 56 Arendt, *Totalitarianism*, p. 136: '[...] these camps are the true central institution of totalitarian organizational power.' Glucksmann, *Köchinn*, p. 59: 'It seemed as if the camps were established only at the margin of society, and yet they revealed unadorned the truth of Nazi conquest.' See also Mumford, *Pentagon of Power*, p. 247.
- 57 Applebaum confirms this in the case of the Soviet Union (*Gulag*, pp. 221 and 225).
- 58 René Girard, *Job, The Victim of His People*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Stanford University Press; Stanford, 1987; Fr. 1st edn. 1985).
- 59 Georges Bataille, 'Die psychologische Struktur des Faschismus' [1933–34], in *Die psychologische Struktur des Faschismus. Die Souveränität*, trans. R Bischof, E. Lenk and X. Rajewsky (Matthes & Seitz; Munich, 1997), pp. 7–43.

- 60 Agamben, *Homo sacer*, pp. 104–11.
- 61 *Republic*, 565e–566a, commented in Agamben, *Homo sacer*, p. 108.
- 62 Boria Sax, *Animals in the Third Reich: Pets, Scapegoats, and the Holocaust* (Continuum; New York and London, 2000), pp. 77 and 34 (citation).
- 63 Sax, *Animals*, p. 106.
- 64 Agamben, *Homo sacer*, p. 118 ff.
- 65 Glucksmann, *Köchin*, p. 95.
- 66 Golomstock, *Totalitarian Art*, pp. 213–14.
- 67 <[http://www.dieterwunderlich.de/Karmakar\\_Himmeler.htm#cont](http://www.dieterwunderlich.de/Karmakar_Himmeler.htm#cont)> (accessed 6 May 2010).
- 68 For a discussion of the idea of violent suppression as being deeply embedded in both socialism and fascism, see Friedrich A. Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom* (University of Chicago Press; Chicago, 1944), esp. pp. 24–31 and 167–80.
- 69 Robert L. Herbert, 'City vs. Country: The Rural Image in French Painting from Millet to Gauguin', *Artforum*, vol. 8, February 1970, p. 55.
- 70 Carol Zemel, *Van Gogh's Progress: Utopia, Modernity, and Late-Nineteenth-Century Art* (University of California Press; Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1997), p. 63; Herbert, 'City vs. Country', p. 51; Griselda Pollock, 'Van Gogh and the Poor Slaves: Images of Rural Labour as Modern Art', *Art History*, vol. 11, no. 3, September 1988, p. 416.
- 71 *Complete Letters*, 337 (to Theo), vol. 2, p. 192; *Millet-Van Gogh*, p. 41.
- 72 Van Gogh's emphasis, *Complete Letters*, 368 (to Theo 1884), vol. 2, p. 291. See also Pollock, 'Van Gogh', p. 413.
- 73 Letter from May 1885 to Theo, *Complete Letters*, 418, vol. 2, p. 403. See also Pollock, 'Van Gogh', p. 412; and *Millet-Van Gogh*, pp. 33 and 41. With the exception of Gauguin, Millet is the artist most frequently referred to in van Gogh's letters to his brother (see the index in *Complete Letters*, vol. 3).
- 74 Murphy et al., *Millet*, p. 21; Griselda Pollock, *Millet* (Oresko Books; London, 1977), p. 17.
- 75 *Complete Letters*, R11, vol. 3, p. 326; less accurate translation in *Letters to an Artist: From Vincent van Gogh to Anton Ridder van Rappard 1881-1885*, trans. Rela van Messel (Constable; London, 1936), VIII, p. 31.
- 76 Sigmund Freud, 'Das Unheimliche', in *Gesammelte Werke, chronologisch geordnet*, vol. 12: *Werke aus den Jahren 1917-1920* (Imago; London, 1947), pp. 227–68.
- 77 Herbert, 'City vs. Country', p. 47; Murphy et al., *Millet*, p. 14. Confirmed by Millet's friend and biographer Alfred Sensier, who for instance writes of some of his drawings from around 1849 (*La vie et l'oeuvre de J.-F. Millet*, ed. Paul Mantz (A. Quantin; Paris, 1881), pp. 117–18): 'first, the man of the place [*du terroir*] in blouse and clogs - that's the hero of work, the point of departure [...].'
- 78 Cited in Herbert, 'City vs. Country', p. 47.
- 79 Murphy et al., *Millet*, p. 7. On Poussin as Millet's model, see Sensier, *Millet*, p. 211. Van Gogh (*Complete Letters*, 423, vol. 2, p. 412) remarks to Theo that '[...] Poussin seems to me the original grain; the others [Millet and Lhermitte], the full ear.'
- 80 Cited in Herbert, 'City vs. Country', p. 47. For this mixture, with a different accent, compare also Théophile Gautier on *Harvesters Resting* (Boston, 1850–53), cited in Sensier, *Millet*, p. 142: 'certain of these down-lying puppets boast some Florentine twists and some attitudes of Michelangelo statues. They have, despite their misery and their ugliness, the majesty of workers in contact with nature.'
- 81 Cited in Sensier, *Millet*, pp. 159–60.
- 82 Millet to Sensier c. 1850–51, cited in Sensier, *Millet*, p. 130; translation, here slightly modified, in Murphy et al., *Millet*, p. 22.
- 83 'Becoming a painter of the *Jacquerie*, that was too complicated for him. No subversive idea boiled in him. Of social doctrines he would know of none. The little he had heard being said did not appear clear to him.' Sensier, *Millet*, pp. 111, 337 and 157 (citation). See also Millet's sceptical statement to Sensier from 1863 in Sensier, *Millet*, p. 242; Murphy et al., *Millet*, p. 9.
- 84 *Millet-Van Gogh*, p. 39.
- 85 Letter to his son Lucien, 2 May 2 1887, cited in Pollock, *Millet*, p. 5.
- 86 January 15, cited in Murphy et al., *Millet*, p. 93.
- 87 In letters to Sensier, 2 and 27 May 1871, respectively (Sensier, *Millet*, p. 337).
- 88 Discussion summarised in a letter to Sensier from 1 February 1870 (Sensier, *Millet*, pp. 325–26).
- 89 Sensier, *Millet*, pp. 107–11 (with reproduction of the drawing, p. 109).
- 90 Letter to Theo, *Complete Letters*, 410, vol. 2, p. 385. *Germinal*, trans. Havelock Ellis (Dent; London, 1933; Fr. 1st edn. 1885), p. 532: 'Men were springing forth, a black avenging army, germinating slowly in the furrows, growing towards the harvests of the next century, and this germination would soon overturn the earth.' See also Pollock, 'Van Gogh', p. 424. Incidentally, van Gogh believed that Zola's impression of peasants was so close to Millet's that he wonders why Zola never mentions him (*Complete Letters*, R38, vol. 3, p. 392).
- 91 *Complete Letters*, 410, vol. 2, p. 385, putting together, and slightly expanding, passages from *Germinal*, edn. cit., Part 5, V, p. 398. See also Pollock, 'Van Gogh', p. 423.
- 92 Letter from c. 10 July 1890 (*Complete Letters*, 649, vol. 3, p. 295).
- 93 Löwith, 'Heidegger's Existentialism', p. 170.
- 94 *Millet-Van Gogh*, p. 51. On van Gogh's explicit intention not to be anatomically 'correct', see letter to Theo, *Complete Letters*, 418, vol. 2, pp. 400–01.
- 95 Pollock, 'Van Gogh', p. 425.
- 96 Letter to Sensier, cited in Pollock, *Millet*, p. 18.
- 97 Alexandre Ysabeau, *Lavater et Gall. Physiognomie et Phrénologie rendues intelligibles pour tout le monde* (Garnier-Frères; Paris, 1909 (s.d.)), pp. 66–67; and *Millet-Van Gogh*, p. 51. In a letter to Theo (*Complete Letters*, 332, vol. 3, p. 170), van Gogh, furthermore, observes some 'wonderful types of Nonconformist clergymen, with pigs' faces', who before they 'reach the cultural and rational level of ordinary pigs' must 'improve considerably'.

- 98 Letter to Theo from July 1884, *Complete Letters*, 372, vol. 2, p. 299. See also Pollock, 'Van Gogh', p. 411. Louis van Tilborgh, in *Millet-Van Gogh*, p. 51, however, distorts Ysabeau when he claims that he (*Lavater et Gall*, p. 71) links low foreheads with stupidity. In this passage Ysabeau, more precisely, refers to a skull with a 'straight forehead' (*front droit*).
- 99 Letter to Theo, *Complete Letters*, 404, vol. 2, p. 370. See also Pollock, 'Van Gogh', p. 421.
- 100 Letters to Theo, *Complete Letters*, 402, vol. 2, p. 367; 405, vol. 2, p. 373; and 410, vol. 2, p. 384.
- 101 *Sartor Resartus: The Life and Opinions of Herr Teufelsdröckh* (Chapman and Hall; London, 1897 [1831]), III, IV ('Helotage'), pp. 181-82; and X ('The Dandiacal Body'), pp. 224-25; Pollock, 'Van Gogh', pp. 426-27; Pollock, however, only selectively illuminates the connection. Van Gogh (*Complete Letters*, R30, vol. 3, p. 374) comments on Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*, calling it 'beautiful - and faithful to reality - and humane.' Carlyle's *Heroes and Hero Worship* is designated 'a beautiful little book' (*The Complete Letters*, 332, vol. 3, p. 170).
- 102 *Sartor Resartus*, p. 226. This scene is not remarked on by Pollock.
- 103 Letter to Theo, *Complete Letters*, 160, vol. 1, p. 273; see also Zemel, *Van Gogh*, p. 62. Van Gogh, furthermore, often had Legros's etching of Carlyle in his study in mind when he wanted to think of Millet, 'as he really was' (*Complete Letters*, 297, vol. 2, p. 67).
- 104 Letter to Theo, *Complete Letters*, 404, vol. 2, p. 371.
- 105 Referred to by Sensier, *Millet*, p. 157.
- 106 To Sensier, in idem., *Millet*, pp. 101-02; Étienne Moreau-Nélaton, *Millet raconté par lui-même* (Henri Laurens; Paris, 1921), 3 vols., vol. 1, p. 66.
- 107 Undated letter to Roussau (Sensier, *Millet*, p. 148; Moreau-Nélaton, *Millet*, vol. 1, p. 100 (here, however, the citation reads: 'like a troop of negroes')): 'Finally, it's about working like several negroes.' In another undated letter (Sensier, *Millet*, p. 121): 'I work like a troop of negroes [...]. To Rousseau, around 1857 (Sensier, *Millet*, p. 166): 'I work like a negro in order to put the last blot on my painting (*The Gleaners*).' To Sensier 4 March 1864 (Sensier, *Millet*, p. 258): 'I work like a true negro in order to finish my *Veau* [...]. To Sensier 15 June 1864 (Sensier, *Millet*, p. 272): 'I dig up like a negro [...]. Sensier confirmed this whole amalgam of artistry, hard work, heroism and idiosyncratic racism in these words about the Millet of 1849 (p. 116): 'He became peasant again, and more than ever he remained painter in order to sing and glorify his race and his battle fields.'
- 108 Meyer Schapiro, 'The Still Life as a Personal Object - A Note on Heidegger and van Gogh' [1968], in *Theory and Philosophy of Art: Style, Artist and Society, Selected Papers 4* (George Braziller; New York, 1994), pp. 135-51.
- 109 *Millet-Van Gogh*, p. 37. The drawing is reproduced in Sensier, *Millet*, p. 183. In addition, in a letter to Theo (*Complete Letters*, 400, vol. 2, p. 363), van Gogh refers approvingly to Millet's dictum of walking in wooden shoes as an act of refusing the life of a gentleman and identifying instead with the peasants.
- 110 Heidegger, 'Origin of the Work of Art', pp. 64, 35-36, 38 and 51, respectively.
- 111 Heidegger, 'Origin of the Work of Art', pp. 54 and 56.
- 112 Jacques Derrida, 'Restitutions of the truth in pointing [*pointure*]', in *The Truth in Painting*, trans. G. Bennington and I. McLeod (The University of Chicago Press; Chicago and London, 1987), pp. 255-382. See also David Joel Shapiro, 'Van Gogh, Heidegger, Schapiro, Derrida: The Truth in Criticism (Notes on Restless Life)', in Joseph D. Mascheck (ed.), *Van Gogh 100* (Greenwood Press; Westport (Conn.) and London, 1996), pp. 281-94.
- 113 Das Ge-Stell' [1949], *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 79 (1994), p. 27. Crucially, when this lecture was published as part of *Die Technik und die Kehre* (Neske; Pfullingen, 1962 [1949-50]), this passage was erased. In fact, it comprises the only explicit philosophical remark that Heidegger ever made concerning the Nazi death camps (see Hans Ruin, 'Ge-stell: Enframing as the Essence of Technology', in Bret W. Davis (ed.), *Martin Heidegger: Key Concepts* (Acumen; Durham, 2010), pp. 191-92). I thank Martin Hauberg-Lund for bringing this passage to my attention.
- 114 *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 36-37: *Sein und Wahrheit*, p. 91. See also Faye, *Heidegger*, pp. 383-84.
- 115 Murphy et al., *Millet*, cat. 74.
- 116 Murphy et al., *Millet*, cat. 49.
- 117 Sensier (*Millet*, p. 167) generally sees the shepherd as 'an enigmatic personage, a mysterious being; he lives alone, he has no other companions than his dog and his flock.' About this particular image, he writes in full (p. 168): 'astonishing page of truth; where the shadow fights with the wan light of a moon which Millet understands to paint in the space as a bizarre and awesome world; where mysterious noises seem to rise from the depths of the plains; where the croaks of the frogs and the mournful cry of the owls interrupt the voice of the shepherd whom one perceives in the distance as a being prey to the evil spells of the night [*un être en proie aux maléfices de la nuit*].'
- 118 To Sensier, *Millet*, p. 121; dated 5 January 1851 in Moreau-Nélaton, *Millet*, vol. 1, pp. 88-89.
- 119 See my *Landscape as World Picture: Tracing Cultural Evolution in Images* (Aarhus University Press; Aarhus (DK), 2009), vol. 1, pp. 351 and 408-09.
- 120 See his work and other early examples of eerie Germanic *Heimat* art in Richard Hamann and Jost Hermand, *Stilkunst um 1900* (Akademie Verlag; Berlin (West), 1967).
- 121 Sax, *Animals*, p. 77.
- 122 Sax, *Animals*, pp. 148-49.
- 123 Sax, *Animals*, pp. 59-62.
- 124 *Love and Exile* (1997), pp. 19-20, cited in Sax, *Animals*, p. 140.
- 125 Christian Kämmerling and Peter Pursche, 'Nachts fahre ich mit dem Fahrrad von Bild zum Bild. Eine Werkstattsgespräch mit Anselm Kiefer über seine Arbeit und seine Weltansicht', *Süddeutsche Zeitung Magazin*, vol. 46,

- November 16, 1990, pp. 22–30, here cited from <www.engramma.it/rivista/saggio/italiano/ottobre02/figure/Kiefer.html> (accessed 6 May 2010).
- 126 Siegfried Gohr, 'In the Absence of Heroes: The Early Work of Georg Baselitz', *Artforum*, vol. 20, no. 10, Summer 1982, pp. 67–69. The formalist Gohr, however, only relates the *Neue Typ* concept to Suprematism and not to Socialist Realism. See the reproductions in Detlev Gretenkort (ed.), *Georg Baselitz: Paintings 1962–2001* (Alberico Cetti Serbelloni; Milan, 2002); and Andrea Franzke, *Georg Baselitz*, idea and concept Edward Quinn, trans. David Britt (Prestel; Munich, 1989).
- 127 Baselitz, in Groys and Hollein, *Dream Factory*, pp. 315–16.
- 128 Günther, in Groys and Hollein, *Dream Factory*, p. 115–16.
- 129 Alexander Mitscherlich, *Auf dem Weg zur vaterlosen Gesellschaft: Ideen zur Sozialpsychologie* (R. Piper; Munich, 1963); see also Lisa Saltzman, *Anselm Kiefer and Art After Auschwitz* (Cambridge University Press; Cambridge, New York and Melbourne, 1999), pp. 50–53.
- 130 Suggested in Saltzman, *Kiefer*, p. 54.
- 131 'Der Gegenstand auf dem Kopf' [1981], in Georg Baselitz, *Texte 1966–2000* (Gachnang und Springer; Bern and Berlin, 2001), p. 8.
- 132 One should notice too that the shepherd is a central figure in the work of Marcus Lüpertz, another German neo-expressionist.
- 133 Matthew Biro, *Anselm Kiefer and the Philosophy of Martin Heidegger* (Cambridge University Press; Cambridge, New York and Melbourne, 1998), p. 7.
- 134 Sabine Schütz, *Anselm Kiefer – Geschichte als Material. Arbeiten 1969–83* (DuMont; Cologne, 1999), pp. 115–23; Saltzman, *Kiefer*, pp. 54–58 and 60–62.
- 135 See the reproductions in, for example, Mark Rosenthal, *Anselm Kiefer* (exh. cat.), The Art Institute of Chicago and Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1987.
- 136 Schütz, *Kiefer*, p. 163. The autobiographical reference was first observed by Jürgen Harten (1984).
- 137 Schütz, *Kiefer*, pp. 258–67.
- 138 *Arbeiten und nicht verzweifeln*, p. 39; Ernst Jünger, *Werke* (Ernst Klett; Stuttgart, 1960–65), vol. 5, p. 130; Müller, *Phänomenologie*, vol. 1, p. 236.
- 139 Biro, *Kiefer*, p. 7, states that Heidegger and Kiefer fundamentally share iconographies.
- 140 Murphy et al., *Millet*, p. 25.
- 141 Schütz, *Kiefer*, pp. 285–312.
- 142 Published in *Mohn und Gedächtnis* (Stuttgart, 1952), cited in Schütz, *Kiefer*, p. 309, note 15; Saltzman, *Kiefer*, pp. 17 and 30.
- 143 Saltzman, *Kiefer*, pp. 28–30.
- 144 Rosenthal, *Kiefer*, p. 99.
- 145 In *Art of Our Time, 3: The Saatchi Collection* (London, 1984), pp. 15–17; here cited from Schütz, p. 308, note 9.
- 146 See Pollock, *Millet*, p. 56.
- 147 In an undated letter to Rousseau, cited in Moreau-Nélaton, *Millet*, vol. 1, p. 102.
- 148 Kämmerling and Pursche, 'Nachts'; for a more cautious judgment of Kiefer's use of alchemy, see Urszula Szulakowska, 'The Paracelsan Magus in German Art: Joseph Beuys and Rebecca Horn', in Jacob Wamberg (ed.), *Art & Alchemy* (Museum Tusculanum Press; Copenhagen, 2006), pp. 179–80 and 182–83.
- 149 In a book for the leaden library *Zweistromland* (1985ff.) and in two others called *Sulamith* (1990), see Schütz, *Kiefer*, pp. 297–300.
- 150 *Jason* (1989), Louisiana, Museum of Modern Art, Humlebæk, Denmark. The dragon teeth motif is confirmed by Kiefer in Kämmerling and Pursche, 'Nachts'.
- 151 Michael Auping, 'Portrait of a Resistor', in Gretenkort, *Baselitz*, p. 18.
- 152 Reproduced in Davidson, *Kunst in Deutschland*, vol. 2/2, no. 1226.
- 153 Ingrid D. Rowland, 'Raphael, Angelo Colocci, and the Genesis of the Architectural Orders', *Art Bulletin*, vol. 76, no. 2, March 1994, p. 101.
- 154 Sax, *Animals*, pp. 108, 115 and 117.
- 155 Cited in Sax, *Animals*, p. 109.
- 156 This has seemingly not been observed before.
- 157 Copenhagen, Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek.
- 158 Schütz, *Kiefer*, pp. 155, 163–69 and 190–96. This reference to concentration camps, still rarely exposed, was first observed by Jack Kroll in *Newsweek*, vol. 111, no. 3, 18 January 1988. In a photographic album such as *Kyffhäuser* (1980–81; Rosenthal, *Kiefer*, Plates 39–40), the otherwise unidentified decayed cellar environment, mingled as it is with images of burning fields, likewise evokes concentration camps and cremation.
- 159 Reproduced in Hamann and Hermand, *Stilkunst*, p. 195.





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# RECEPTION

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### 3 APPROACHING TOTALITARIANISM AND TOTALITARIAN ART

MIKKEL BOLT RASMUSSEN

#### INTRODUCTION

The concept of totalitarianism is notoriously slippery. After the term was first put into use by opponents of Mussolini's fascist movement in the early 1920s – Mussolini was critiqued for giving excessive power to the fascist party – the term has been debated for decades but still lacks a proper definition. Tellingly for the slipperiness of the term, Mussolini was able to pick it up as a positive description of the fascist project.<sup>1</sup> For Mussolini the term expressed the primacy of the political over all other social spheres as well as the state's integration of and control over all aspects of social life. The use of the term quickly spread to other European nations, and in Germany several conservative and rightwing writers associated with the *Völkisch* movement used it in a positive sense. The writer Ernst Jünger, for example, used the terms 'total' and 'totality' in his writings on the mobilisation in World War I.<sup>2</sup> In the interwar years the term was also taken up by leftwing philosophers like Boris Souvarine and Karl Korsch, who made use of it in a 'negative' description not only of the Nazi regime, but also of the totalitarian character of capitalism.<sup>3</sup> Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer also used the term in their analysis in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* from 1944, in which they wrote about the violence perpetrated by Western nations against not only colonial people but also the poor in the capitalist metropolis.<sup>4</sup> After World War II and the arrival of the Cold War the concept acquired a new significance when liberal thinkers like Jacob Talmon and Hannah Arendt used the term as a description of Hitler's Germany and the Soviet Union.<sup>5</sup> According to these theories, both systems were characterised by the absolute rule of a party-state led by a charismatic leader who instituted a lawless system and used terror to control the population. This interpretation became dominant during the 1950s and 1960s, and remains so even today. The earlier polysemy disappeared in favour of a focus on the similarity between Nazism and communism. By stressing this similarity the Western world was able to present itself as the embodiment of freedom and liberty in a struggle against the new totalitarianism now located in the Soviet Union and its vassal states, all of which were infected by the communist ideology.

The following article is written as a modest contribution to the discussion of the concept of totalitarianism and totalitarian art. It offers three interconnected clusters of observations. The first concerns the relationship between totalitarianism and democracy.

Following the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben, I propose to understand totalitarianism as a dangerous dimension in democracy that provides cohesion and unity to democracy. The border between democracy and totalitarianism is not fixed. I will then continue with an overview of the problems inherent in the idea of totalitarianism, understood as a characterisation of the 20th-century experience of both Nazi and Stalinist dictatorships. The third cluster of observations is of a historico-political nature and concerns the relationship between art, state and counter-revolution in Italy, Germany and the Soviet Union. Through a discussion of Igor Golomstock's *Totalitarian Art*, I will consider the relationship between art and politics in totalitarian regimes.

### DEMOCRACY, SOVEREIGNTY AND TOTALITARIANISM

When discussing the relations between democracy and totalitarianism, we are entering very complex terrain that requires a certain scepticism with regard to the way the term totalitarianism is used. The term is often used to stigmatise opponents of the West because it generates images of slaughter and brutality. We have to prevent the instrumentation of these 'unconscious' reactions.<sup>6</sup> When we – in the light of 9/11 and former President George Walker Bush's permanent 'State of War' – approach the question of totalitarianism, we have to take into account the very important analyses of sovereignty, power and law that Agamben has carried out for the last ten to fifteen years.<sup>7</sup> According to Agamben, there is 'an inner solidarity between democracy and totalitarianism,' because both of these systems create a zone where law and violence become indistinguishable.<sup>8</sup> Agamben provocatively claims that democracy and totalitarianism are not each other's opposites, but should be considered two points on a sliding scale. We must of course insist on the historical differences between the democratic systems and the totalitarian systems; but we cannot, Agamben argues, stay blind to their similarity. Totalitarianism, like democracy, regards state power as being central and in principle all powerful. Or in Agamben's more technical terms, both systems share the same idea about the form of sovereignty. Both democracy and totalitarianism equip the sovereign with a special tool for use in extreme cases: the state of emergency.

Following the Swedish jurist Herbert Tingsten, Agamben argues that the constitution of a state of exception threatens to liquidate democracy, because a zone of indistinction is created between law

and exception. The state of exception is a juridical paradox. When it is declared it is possible for the sovereign to act outside the law. According to Agamben, at this moment the sovereign shows his true face in so far as sovereignty is the existence of a power that can suspend the law. This is the 'secret' of sovereignty: the sovereign is simultaneously inside and outside the juridical order as he decides on the exception. In deciding on the state of exception, 'the sovereign creates and guarantees the situation that the law needs for its own validity.'<sup>9</sup> Since the exception cannot be codified in the established order, it is necessary to decide whether it is an exception, and whether the rule applies to it. The sovereign is the one who takes this decision on what constitutes public order and security, the person who decides whether the public order has been disturbed. As Agamben phrases it: '[W]hat is at issue in the sovereign exception is not so much the control or neutralization of an excess as the creation and definition of the very space in which the juridico-political order can have validity.'<sup>10</sup>

Following 9/11 and the so-called 'war on terror', the fluidity of the border separating democracy and totalitarianism has become evident as several Western governments led by the American administration have suspended a series of rights fixed by the law in order to protect their nations. The Patriot Act and other emergency laws concerning internal security have undermined fundamental liberties associated with the constitutional state. With the declaration of a 'war on terror', President Bush as Commander-in-Chief was granted war powers. This effectively left the interpretation and application of the law to Bush's discretion. This is a very dangerous process that reveals the proximity between democracy and totalitarianism. As Agamben reminds us, a statute permitting exceptional measures for the sake of the nation formally justified the Nazi extermination of the Jews. Hitler never abrogated the Weimar Constitution, he suspended it for the whole duration of the Third Reich with his Reichstag Fire Decree issued on 28 February 1933. The difference between totalitarianism and democracy is thin, as rule by decree has become increasingly common since World War I.

But why do the democratic nation states of the Western world need a power that can eliminate democracy? According to Agamben, the nation state and all sovereigns are dependent upon exclusion: the sovereign creates excluded subjects in order to constitute himself. The sovereign is created by a combination of the exclusion and

inclusion of so-called naked life. In Greek Antiquity life was already divided into two different spheres: naked life (*zoe*) and political life (*bios*). From the outset the political sphere was separated from the sphere of women and slaves, from propagation and work. The sovereign produces the political sphere by excluding someone: '[T]he production of a biopolitical body is the original activity of sovereign power.'<sup>11</sup> The subject of the exclusion is not simply set outside the law, it is given to the law in its withdrawal. The subject that is excluded is thus both inside and outside the juridical order. In Antiquity the majority of people existed as a faceless and bio-political mass exposed to the whims of the sovereign power. Historically, a growing portion of these faceless people gained access to the political sphere, but only so far as they conformed to the demands of sovereignty. The body of the people was disciplined and regulated by various bio-political measures that gained momentum in the 18th and 19th centuries. The population was subjected to political governance where everybody was marked and identified and misfits were expelled as sick or aliens. The opposition between sovereign power and naked life thus reappeared in the formally democratic societies: 'Behind the long, strife-ridden process that leads to the recognition of rights and formal liberties stands once again the body of the sacred man with his double sovereign, his life that cannot be sacrificed yet may, nevertheless, be killed.'<sup>12</sup> According to Agamben, the attempt to unite the people around a party or an identity will always result in a split where 'the others' are excluded from the political and juridical spheres and left to die. The refugee is the proof that this process in which people are being stripped of their juridical and political status and transformed into naked life is active in the contemporary world. Refugees are transformed from political subjects with a legal status and reduced to lawless hordes of naked beings that are placed in camps at the mercy of the police.

As the Belgian sociologist Jean-Claude Paye has shown, the 'war on terror' launches a transformation where the constitutional state is replaced by a permanent state of exception.<sup>13</sup> The 'war on terror' has created a zone of indistinction between law and exception. This indistinctness is both temporal and spatial. The 'war on terror' takes place indefinitely and on an unspecified battlefield, against an enemy which is periodically redefined. The terms of this war are not dictated by earlier international laws, but by the representatives of the executive power of the United States. Politics is thus transformed

into a continual security operation that suspends the right of citizens. As Paye (following Agamben) writes, American international police repression functions in a state of exception, setting rules contingently while using the institutional framework of the rule of law: 'The antiterrorist fight abolishes the distinction between enemy and criminal. War is reduced to a simple police operation against bandit states. Likewise all social movements can be criminalised in the name of the actions against terrorism.'<sup>14</sup> In many Western nations the state can now arrest citizens and deprive them of their citizenship without explanation and without taking them to court. In the present situation more and more people risk ending up in this zone where they are transformed into outlaws - *homines sacri*.

The Guantanamo camp has become a symbol of this lawless zone, a place where the sovereign can send subjects that are said to present a danger to the nation.<sup>15</sup> As such, Guantanamo exposes a deep crack in the very foundation of the constitutional state of the Western world. The camp is an enclosed zone established on a field in Cuba controlled by the United States. The camp is outside any lawful jurisdiction and more than 600 people are imprisoned there, stripped of their juridical status and deprived of the possible alternatives of international law - they are neither prisoners of war nor accused with the right to have their cases tried in court. They are thus placed in a situation of maximal indeterminacy that is similar to the situation in the camps of Nazi Germany, where Jews, homosexuals and the mentally ill were put to death in order to protect the Aryan race. In the Guantanamo camp and in Abu Ghraib we have witnessed the American military reducing Iraqis to bare life.

### COUNTERREVOLUTION, TOTALITARIANISM AND THE COLD WAR

In his book from 2001, *Did somebody say Totalitarianism? Five interventions in the (mis)use of a notion*, the Slovene philosopher Slavoj Žižek undertakes an analysis of the use of the notion of 'totalitarianism'.<sup>16</sup> As Žižek writes, this notion is commonly used to compare the fascist regimes in Germany and Italy with the Stalinist regime in the Soviet Union. This comparison and juxtaposition of fascism and Stalinism has always, according to Žižek, had a precise strategic function, namely to guarantee the liberal-democratic hegemony by dismissing the leftist critique of liberal democracy as the twin of the fascist dictatorships. He writes:

Throughout its entire career, 'totalitarianism' was an ideological notion that sustained the complex operation of 'taming free radicals', of guaranteeing the liberal-democratic hegemony, dismissing the leftist critique of liberal democracy as the obverse [...] of the Rightist Fascist dictatorship [...]. [I]t is useless to try to redeem 'totalitarianism' through division into subcategories (emphasizing the difference between the Fascist and the Communist variety): the moment one accepts the notion of 'totalitarianism', one is firmly located within the liberal-democratic horizon.<sup>17</sup>

The notion of 'totalitarianism', according to Žižek, functions as a kind of *Denkverbot* where any attempt to engage in political projects that aim to challenge the existing order is branded suspicious and dangerous, forcing us to abandon all serious radical engagement. The notion of 'totalitarianism' is thus a strategic counter-shibboleth forcing the left to accept the basic co-ordinates of liberal democracy: 'democracy' versus 'totalitarianism'. A strategic bogey forcing the left to refrain from proposing alternatives to the present order of things.

As Žižek writes in his book, the discourse on the problem of totalitarianism has returned with ever-greater force after the fall of the Berlin Wall, thereby paradoxically confirming the decline of a utopian vision that once imbued leftists. The combination of liberalism and market capitalism is seldom challenged, and if it is any such challenge will quickly be considered suspect and old fashioned. As a consequence of this, people on the left harbour no far-reaching vision of the future, Žižek writes. They anticipate crises and limited employment, but call for only limited reforms, 'grounded in the possible', a better balance between labour and capital. For critics like Žižek the point is not that improved air, enhanced welfare or a broader democracy is bad. The question, rather, is the extent to which a commitment to reasonable measures supplants a commitment to unreasonable ones – those more subversive and visionary. Should a leftist not protest against an idea of the future as an improved model of the present, where labour is not abolished or minimised, but simply better compensated? Will radicalism persist, Žižek worries, if it is reduced to means and methods through the blackmail of the notion of totalitarianism?

There is no question that the concept of totalitarianism has played and still plays a central role in the attempt to cast doubt on the revolutionary tradition of 1789-1917. As the Italian philosopher

Domenico Losurdo argues, totalitarianism is one of the central categories of historical revisionism that claims that it is possible to deduce the totalitarian phenomenon from the revolutionary project.<sup>18</sup> According to revisionist writers like Friedrich Hayek and later Ernst Nolte, the ideal of perpetual peace advanced by the French Revolution turned into its opposite: total civil war.<sup>19</sup> Blinded by missionary zeal, the revolutionary tradition refused all rules and undermined the borders separating nations and classes, they argue. Nazism and the communist ideology were 20th-century versions of this dangerous phenomenon. Thus, after World War II the situation was clear: the threat came from the Soviet Union. According to the revisionist historians, the violent suppression of freedom evident in the USSR was the direct consequence of the communist ideology put forward by Karl Marx, an ideology now menacing the free world and undermining the security of the United States. Stalin's totalitarian regime was the logical, inevitable consequence of Marxist ideology. Communist totalitarianism was characterised by the sacrifice of morals on the altar of the philosophy of history and its necessary laws. Communism and the revolutionary tradition were demonised, and totalitarianism explained 'all the horrors of the 20th century'.<sup>20</sup> From the French Revolution and onwards the revolutionary demand for equality had threatened to overflow the world and institute barbaric regimes indifferent or hostile to liberty.

Arendt's classic presentation of totalitarianism, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* from 1951, provides symptomatic evidence of the way the category of totalitarianism was transformed with the advent of the Cold War. As Losurdo shows, Arendt's book is composed of two highly disjointed parts. In the two first parts of the book she writes about anti-Semitism and imperialism, analysing Lord Cromer's murderous administration of Egypt and the rise of pan-Germanism. In an attempt to account for the origins of Nazi violence, Arendt looks into the administrative massacres committed in the colonies by the British imperialist administrator. According to Arendt, these constituted the condition of possibility for Hitler's regime, a regime that sought to create a 'colonial empire [in Central and Eastern Europe] based on the dominion of a pure, white, Aryan race, once the Jewish germ of subversion, which fuelled the revolt of *Untermenschen* and inferior races, had been exterminated once and for all.'<sup>21</sup> In the two first parts of the book - written while Arendt was in France - racial imperialism played the leading role. In the third part Arendt

focuses exclusively on Hitler's Germany and the Soviet Union, analysing the total state created in both places. Here, however, she downplays the fundamental role colonialism played in the orchestration of the origin of Nazi violence, and presents communist totalitarianism as the logical outcome of Marx's philosophy. In the movement from the first part of the book to the last part, which was written in the United States, the category of imperialism is replaced by the category of totalitarianism. The objects of study were no longer Great Britain, France and the Third Reich, but Stalin's USSR and Nazi Germany exclusively. These two regimes suddenly appeared as totalitarian twins, both characterised by dangerous ideologies that inevitably lead to the death camp.<sup>22</sup>

'Totalitarianism' was a key weapon for the West in the ideological struggle of the Cold War. The concept of totalitarianism was – this is the case with Carl Joachim Friedrich and Zbigniew Brzezinski's influential *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy* from 1956 – often created through a reading of similarities in the systems of the Third Reich and the Soviet Union.<sup>23</sup> This model was used as an illustration of the necessity of fighting Soviet communism as a continuation of the fight in World War II against Nazism. Communism and Nazism were essentially the same, the argument ran. The fact that they had been engaged in a mortal combat in World War II simply provided evidence of the destructive nature of the two ideologies that drove the two regimes. The evils of the Hitler regime were thus used to condemn the Soviet system that opposed the Western world. The 1940s and 1950s were a replay of the 1930s: the enemy was identified and the American administration knew what to expect.<sup>24</sup>

Alongside the Cold War deployment of a comparative analysis of Nazism and communism, various criticisms of the dominant version of the idea of totalitarianism did also emerge. Philosophers, scholars and writers on the political left tried to question the usefulness of the notion. But even though leftwing formulations of the totalitarian thesis were made – by Claude Lefort, Cornelius Castoriadis and others associated with the post-Trotskyist *Socialisme ou Barbarie* group in France – the conservative and liberal versions were far more influential.<sup>25</sup> The problem for leftwing writers in the post-war years was that they were caught between the liberal attempt to merge Nazism and communism and the USSR-backed attempt to glorify events and experiences in the Soviet Union. It was extremely

difficult to create a third position, as the two Cold War combatants tried to reduce the political horizon to a choice between American-led liberal democracy and capitalism and Soviet-style one-party communism. The Soviet-directed communist parties had almost hegemonic status in most European nations in the 1950s and 1960s, so most leftists could not bring themselves to compare Stalinism and Nazism. Few dared to describe the Soviet Union as a totalitarian state, and many mistakenly concentrated on defending the principle of 'socialism in one country' and defending 'existing socialism'. In general the notion of totalitarianism then served the political interests of the Right in Western Europe. The comparisons of Soviet and Nazi regimes had enormous value as an intellectual weapon against communism and as a tool for legitimating a variety of anti-communist policies taking place both locally and globally in the Third World. The crude assertions of an imminent global communist threat not only made it possible to lead an anti-Soviet foreign policy, it also paved the way for domestic anti-communism where any identifiable leftwing proposal was connected with the intangible mechanics of totalitarianism that could show its face anywhere.

Because of the ideological dominance of the Cold War version of the concept, the Left tends to dismiss the notion and totalitarianism has appeared to many as a lamentable product of the Cold War itself. But as Losurdo has shown, this picture is both too simple and too politically convenient. The comparative analysis of dictatorships in the 20th century has a longer and more challenging history than the most outspoken critics of what has come to be called 'totalitarian theory' have been willing to grant. Critiques of modern tyranny have emerged from a variety of political and philosophical perspectives, including the leftist perspective. In fact, a look at the contemporary historical context of the 1920s and 1930s will reveal that a relevant critique of dictatorship - and recognition of the blurring of the borders separating democracy from totalitarianism - was produced by leftists such as Karl Korsch, Amadeo Bordiga and Otto Rühle.<sup>26</sup> For these ultra-leftists the function of the concept of totalitarianism was to enable an anti-fascist critique that could also account for Stalinism. This posture measured both the dynamics of the fascist and Stalinist regimes and their convergence in the use of terror, as well as measuring the crises of liberal democracy. The concept was thus also used as an analytical tool in a critique of the functioning of liberal democracy. The liberal democracies were not spared

from critique: the category of totalitarianism was used to show the danger inherent in the democratic system.

According to Karl Korsch, 'socialism in one country' (the Soviet Union) as well as fascism (Italy and Nazi Germany) were counter-revolutionary forms aimed at blocking the revolutionary energies that had challenged the established orders of the world. The counter-revolution was, according to Korsch, the movement that took over the dynamic in a political-economic transformation when the transformation was devoid of alternatives. A transformation of revolutionary energies into an impetuous innovation of modes of production, lifestyles and social relations that re-established and consolidated capitalist command. The counterrevolution enjoyed the very pre-suppositions and the very economic, social and cultural tendencies that the revolution would have been able to engage; it occupied and colonised the territory of its adversary; it gave different responses to the *same* questions that caused the revolution. Korsch described the counterrevolution as the variety of efforts in several nations - including nations politically and even military opposed to one another - to nullify the independent movement of the working class. The counterrevolution prevailed as a conscious attempt both to destroy an actual revolutionary process and to prevent a future one from taking place. The counterrevolution, like its symmetrical opposite, left nothing unchanged. It created an extended state of emergency in which the temporal succession of events seemed to accelerate. It actively made its own 'new order' and forged new mentalities, cultural habits, tastes and customs.

Both the preventive counterrevolution in Italy and the final counterrevolutions in the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany were reformist and capital preserving. None of them were engaged in the abolition of capital that would require the abolition of money. Instead, they were different continuations of the capitalist economic system privileging production and work. The Soviet Union played a leading role in this process: the Soviet experiment had 'degenerated' since it became isolated at the end of the last war. Korsch wrote in the text 'State and Counterrevolution:

The Russian state has abandoned more and more its original revolutionary and proletarian features. Through the comprehensiveness of its anti-democratic and totalitarian development it has often anticipated the so-called fascist characteristics of the openly counterrevolutionary states of Europe and Asia.<sup>27</sup>

Confronted with the situation in the Soviet Union, it was necessary to analyse the process through which a 'revolutionary dictatorship' became a 'counterrevolutionary state' and even 'a powerful lever in the fascization of Europe'.<sup>28</sup> The new use of the state was also a central characteristic of the fascist counterrevolution, Korsch argued. Fascist state capitalism deliberately used the state as an instrument of suppression. The tendency of the fascist state as well as the Soviet state was thus towards totalitarian control of the entirety of society. The counterrevolution was a movement that adopted the dynamic in a political and economic break, when the break lacked ways and means. Revolutionary preparedness was transformed into totalitarian politics and economy. Whether the counterrevolution was preventive as in fascist Italy or finishing as in Nazi Germany, it was always reformist and safeguarded capital.

In the counterrevolution revolutionary preparedness was transformed into totalitarian solutions within politics and economy. As such, Korsch emphasised, the counterrevolution was opportunistic in its references to the communistic perspective and the revolution. 'After the complete exhaustion and defeat of the revolutionary forces, the Fascist counterrevolution attempts to fulfil, by new revolutionary methods and in widely different forms, those social and political tasks which the so-called reformistic parties and trade unions had promised to achieve but in which they could no longer succeed under the given historical conditions.'<sup>29</sup> Fascism was successful because capitalism 'had not, in fact, developed all the forces of production'.<sup>30</sup> Fascism had been able to do this by furthering the development of the capitalist forces of production. The anti-capitalistic propaganda of the fascists should not be taken at face value; it had not managed (and did not want) to put an end to class conflict. At the same time it was vital to understand the serious threat fascism posed. The fact that fascism continued to revolutionise the capitalist forces of production did not make it yet another stepping stone on the way to socialism. Fascism was not a 'preparation stage' for the inevitable revolution, Korsch argued. Nazism was not the last stage of capitalism to be followed by the proletarian dictatorship. Fascism actually represented the danger of a more or less permanent defeat of the working class.

Supporting the 'democracies' of the non-fascist or non-'socialist' countries was not a solution, according to Korsch. The pre-totalitarian systems were not worth defending. The Western capitalist

nations were totalitarian states *in spe*.<sup>31</sup> Korsch refused to defend 'democracy' against 'fascism'. Democracy tended to either collapse in the face of fascist offensive, or to adopt totalitarian methods in its own economy, society and foreign policy.

The 'secret' underlying the verbal battles between 'totalitarianism' and 'anti-totalitarianism' and the more important diplomatic and military struggle between the Axis and the Anglo-American group of imperialist powers is the historical fact that the worst and most intimate foe of democracy today is not Herr Hitler and people who think like he did, but 'democracy' itself.<sup>32</sup>

There was no desirable choice between Hitler and the actually existing 'democracy' of the Western nations. Totalitarianism was a dimension within all the democratic nations – this had been evident ever since the Social-Democrat President of the Republic Friedrich Ebert (after Hitler's failed coup d'état in Bavaria) forced the workers' government in Saxony and Thuringia to step down in 1924. Ebert's counter-offensive had instituted a kind of legal fascism for which Korsch had nothing but contempt.

According to Korsch, the movement between constitution and emergency law was more important than the bombastic opposition between totalitarianism and democracy. The ideal of equality before the law could be sidestepped in favour of a political facticity that suspends the law. The political discourse always grounds its actions in something other than the law. Nothing augments the facticity and the lawlessness of politics like the revolution and the counter-attack that legitimates itself as a response to the revolution. This was the case in 1924 in Italy when Mussolini referred to the threat of revolution; and it was also the case after 9/11 when Bush declared a 'state of war'.

The interwar use of 'totalitarianism' disappeared after World War II in favour of a rigid opposition between democracy and totalitarianism. Liberal democracy became the rational counter model to the dangerous revolutionary ideologies. 'In the monochromatic scheme [of Cold War totalitarianism theory], revolutionaries and counterrevolutionaries became totalitarians bent on subjecting first their own countries and then the world to a permanent system of oppression, exploitation, and dehumanization.'<sup>33</sup> As Žižek writes, the Cold War rhetoric still looms large over the term totalitarianism. And he is not the only one warning about the use of the notion of totalitarianism. The historians Ian Kershaw and Zeev Sternhell have

also recently warned against collapsing the Nazi regime and the Stalinist regime into one monolithic model of dictatorship.<sup>34</sup> They fear that a new wave of anti-communism is distorting our historical perspective by combining historical phenomena which are altogether different. According to Kershaw and Sternhell, the two regimes were fundamentally different - the Nazi movement, unlike Stalin's Communist Party, was a classic charismatic leadership movement, and Hitler's dictatorship was wholly unbureaucratic while Stalin immersed himself in bureaucratic detail. The theory that fascism and communism are twins, accomplices and enemies at the same time, and that Nazism was an imitation of Stalinism, an understandable and even natural response to the Bolshevik danger and a simple product of World War I, is regarded by both Kershaw and Sternhell as a banaliation of Nazism, but above all as a distortion of the true nature of the European disaster of the 20th century.

This idea of communism being the explanation of Nazism, put forward by Nolte in the 1960s and recently taken up by François Furet in his *Le passé d'une illusion*, which is accepted by a large part of the conservative right in Europe, is indeed highly suspect and should be critiqued because of its obvious historical shortcomings and blatant anti-communism.<sup>35</sup> As Jean Pierre Faye has explained:

Fascism and Nazism explicitly present themselves as counter movements denying and effacing the wake of the French Revolution and their stated objectives is the reinforcement of inequality, hierarchy and oppression. Whereas the Russian Revolution appealed to the long march of revolutionary liberation and inserted itself explicitly in the continuation of this tradition.<sup>36</sup>

According to Faye, an interpretation that is uniquely oriented towards the conflict between Bolshevism and Nazism cannot but deform the complexity of the period: '[T]otalitarianism [...] obstruct[s] the examination and comprehension of some of the most important issues of contemporary history. In particular they detract attention from the genesis, course, and nature of the confrontation of revolution and counterrevolution in the context of a global civil war.'<sup>37</sup> Although Hitler's war against the Soviet Union and the attempt to create a *Lebensraum* for the Aryan race were all aspects of the same project, the project was embedded in the deep crisis of the European world. The Russian Revolution was not the cause of this crisis, but only one of its first effects. As Karl Heinz Roth has shown in his *Geschichtrevisionismus. Die Wiedergeburt der Totalitarismustheorie*,

Nolte's equation of 'red' and 'brown', Stalinist and fascist, is simplistic, threatens to criminalise all attempts to question the current order of things, and transforms 'liberty' into signifying the citizen's rights to choose which commodities to buy.<sup>38</sup> Because of the muddled political motives current in the use of the notion of totalitarianism, it is necessary, I believe, both to provide a historical explanation of the different uses of the notion and to clearly situate one's own use within the present world situation, which is characterised by a counterrevolutionary attempt to prevent the creation of alternatives to the present American-led globalisation. Today highly differentiated kinds of syntheses between fascism, racism and democracy are possible. Totalitarianism is not concentrated in states in Southern or Eastern Europe but is, as Korsch and Agamben have shown, embedded in all Western democracies.

### TOTALITARIAN ART

The art created in the so-called totalitarian regimes - Nazi Germany, fascist Italy and the Soviet Union - still largely remains outside the scope of mainstream art history. The publication of the book *Art since 1900* by the leading art historians associated with the very influential and dominant journal *October* confirms this tendency.<sup>39</sup> Art produced in the Soviet Union, Nazi Germany and fascist Italy is rarely included in the canon of art. For the most part modern art is still seen as opposed to the art produced in the USSR, Nazi Germany and fascist Italy. This opposition of free art and totalitarian art is embedded in the Cold War logic that Žižek and Losurdo critique. It is of course also connected to the historical development of Western bourgeois society, where art is constituted as an autonomous sphere with its own rules. In the 18th century a courtly-representative culture was replaced by a bourgeois culture in which the artist, ideally, created his art works isolated from the masses and from the market. In this historical transition art came to be viewed as a paradigm of freedom and expression. During the Cold War the idea of the autonomy of art from the world of politics became entangled in the political battle between East and West. The 'freedom' of modern art was an equivalent to or expression of the freedom that characterised the liberal democratic American world. Art was 'free' to explore its own intrinsic concerns in the liberal democracies of the Western world, and was used as a propaganda tool in the Soviet

Union just as it had been in Nazi Germany. The art created in the Soviet Union celebrated the achievements of socialist Man, while the art of the West was free of any such obligation and in its uselessness focused on humanity's failures and cruelties. 'Free' art equalled the 'Free West'. Because of this ideological over-coding, the art created outside Western liberal democracies has rarely been the object of art-historical attention; and it has often been dismissed as bad art or kitsch on the few occasions when such attention has been focused on it.

In 1990 the Russian art historian Igor Golomstock published a big book titled *Totalitarian Art*. In this book Golomstock sets out to account for what he terms 'the second international style of our century's culture.'<sup>40</sup> According to Golomstock, there is such a thing as genuine totalitarian art with a specific content and form, and throughout the text he investigates striking similarities in the establishment of an official aesthetic in fascist Italy, Nazi Germany, and communist Russia and Maoist China. As he writes in the introduction, not only is 'the final product [totalitarian art] identical', but also 'the means of preparation (totalitarian aesthetics) and the technology of production (totalitarian organization) turn out to be equally similar' in the four regimes.<sup>41</sup> The constitution of totalitarian art follows a certain pattern according to Golomstock, and he excavates 'the general laws of development of a totalitarian revolution'.<sup>42</sup> These laws lay down the terms of development of art whenever a totalitarian regime comes into being. As Golomstock writes:

From its first appearance, the totalitarian state begins to construct a new culture according to its own image [...] with no parts that are not strictly functional, with a rigid programme and a universal aim. Anything that hinders its work is ruthlessly eliminated. The foundations of totalitarian art are laid down at the same time and place as those of the one-party state: 1. The State declares art [...] to be an ideological weapon and a means of struggle of power. 2. The State acquires a monopoly over all manifestations of the country's artistic life. 3. The state constructs an all-embracing apparatus for the control and direction of art. 4. From the multiplicity of artistic movements then in existence, the State selects one movement, always the most conservative, which most nearly answers its needs and declares it to be official and obligatory. 5. Finally, the State declares war to the death against all styles and movements other than the official ones, declaring them to be reactionary and hostile to class, race, people, Party or State, to humanity, to social and artistic progress, etc.<sup>43</sup>

The megamachine and the laws of totalitarian art install a certain style that Golomstock terms 'total realism' – even if influential leading members of the party seek to get more modernist styles accepted, which was the case in Nazi Germany. Golomstock writes: 'Goebbels's personal ambitions had clashed with the iron laws of development of totalitarian culture.'<sup>44</sup> Even though leading actors in the totalitarian systems might try to enforce the use of modern styles and practices, the laws of totalitarian art enforce themselves. According to Golomstock, the result is the proliferation of an official aesthetic which imposes an anti-modernist, formal realism whose function is essentially propagandistic. 'But once the [totalitarian] megamachine is set in motion, however diverse the historical and cultural traditions of the countries in question, there arises a style one can justifiably term the international style of totalitarian culture: total realism.'<sup>45</sup>

There is no doubt that the fascist regime, the Nazi regime and the Stalinist regime exerted a pressure on art and that this pressure became more systematic over time. Golomstock has collected a breathtaking number of pictures of leaders, happy workers and peasants. In particular, there are similarities between some of the paintings and sculptures created under the three regimes. But there is a great distance between these similarities and the concept of totalitarian art that Golomstock advances. There are very significant differences between the way the three regimes tried to orchestrate the art world and use art to symbolise their own grandeur. Golomstock may have supplied us with an account of the art produced in Nazi Germany, fascist Italy and the Soviet Union (and Maoist China); but he has done so in a way that only reinforces the Cold War logic of 'totalitarianism'. The direct connection that he claims exists between style and ideology is problematic. The fact that the art of Nazi Germany and the art of the Soviet Union in some respects share themes, modes and tropes cannot amount to the existence of a particular form of totalitarian art. Golomstock starts out by ascertaining the existence of totalitarianism, and his exposition then advances by juxtaposing paintings from the regimes under discussion. But we can easily disturb this collapsing of style and ideology if, for instance, we place a state-commissioned American painting of a worker from the 1930s next to a Nazi painting with a similar depiction of a worker. What has been called 'the aesthetics of production'

was by no means restricted to what Golomstock without hesitation terms the totalitarian states.<sup>46</sup> Golomstock plays on the relative difference between most of the art created in the United States and Western Europe in the 20th century and the art created in Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union to construct totalitarian art as a distinct artistic and ideological product. But if we place a *Neue Sachlichkeit* portrait next to a Nazi painting things get more complicated, because the paintings are similar 'technically' even though they are 'politically' different. It is impossible to equate style and ideology.

And it is evident when reading Golomstock's book that he has a hard time getting rid of the diversity that clearly characterises the four regimes he considers - it is difficult to prove the existence of the 'iron laws'. Throughout his book Golomstock comes up against the obvious differences between the regimes and he has difficulties explaining them away. Because he does not take context, circumstances and contingency into consideration, he constructs a simple structure of opposition between democracy and totalitarianism, free art and totalitarian art. Therefore, he cannot grasp the important differences between a totalitarian state like that of Italy, which descended from a liberal (although brief) constitutional state, and the state erected in the Soviet Union, which arose out of a revolutionary process with new representative agencies and a civil war involving several armies. As Angelo Tasca has written, the fascist assumption of power was a preventive counterrevolution as the fascist terror set in after two years of strikes, occupations of factories and pillaging of shops. In other words, what was involved was a quasi-revolutionary but ineffective movement that was never close to taking power.<sup>47</sup> In Russia it was almost the opposite that happened: first the revolutionaries took power, and then a counter-movement set in that was able to weaken both economically and juridically the constitution process of the revolutionary power.<sup>48</sup> Golomstock is blind to the struggle between revolution and counterrevolution.

Fascist Italy was more receptive to modernist aesthetics than the rival totalitarianism regimes in Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, although the general backlash of the 1930s was also felt in fascist aesthetics. In Italy the shift from a constitutional state to a state of exception in which Mussolini repressed all rival political organisations took place over more or less five years; while the process took place almost overnight in Germany in 1933 even though the consti-

tution in itself had been bent systematically by Ebert and then Paul von Hindenburg in the 1920s. Mussolini's fascism did not destroy the artistic avant-garde, and permitted and promoted all strands of modernism from Rationalist architecture to Futurism and the art of the *novecento*. These different styles mixed in a curious blend. Art played a vital role in fascism's attempt to rediscover the irrational dimensions in the relationship between people, politics and history. As Emily Braun writes:

It was the projection of a future destiny grounded in a remote past that defined the temporal dynamic and political modernism of Fascism: the power of its myth lay precisely in an imaginary national essence or origins that were to be 'recovered' and created anew.<sup>49</sup>

Art historians like Braun, Giovanni Lista and Marla Stone have shown how concepts associated with modernist aesthetics – regeneration, spiritualism, primitivism and avant-gardism – were not only integrated into the anti-enlightenment pantheon of fascist values. Fascist aesthetics also utilised new and dynamic media like photomontage, typography and collage.<sup>50</sup> As for Nazi Germany: although the ferocious attacks on modern art drastically worsened conditions for the creation of modern art, it has been shown that it would be simplistic to assume that *all* elements of modernism were eliminated at once in the Third Reich.<sup>51</sup> In several spheres of artistic expression like advertising, architecture, cinema, design and music, modernist elements subsisted.<sup>52</sup> As Golomstock himself acknowledges and as Alan Steinweis has shown, campaigns for different artistic expressions were competing at least until 1936.<sup>53</sup> But Golomstock's 'laws of totalitarian art' do not permit such diversity. They can neither allow for competition among various Nazi organisations for economic and cultural hegemony, nor understand the complex process of compromise and compliance on the part of modernist artists working for the government.

The complicated relationship between art and politics – where art tries to appropriate politics while politics recuperates art – is transformed into an easy relationship in Golomstock's account insofar as he is highly sceptical towards any attempt to rethink the relationship between art and politics. According to Golomstock, the Russian avant-garde – Tatlin, Rodchenko, Lissitzky – paved the way for totalitarianism because it tried to rethink the relationship between art

and politics and strove to open art to society. Although Golomstock *en passant* does mourn the tragic destiny of Majakovsky et al., it is clear that these artists lie on the beds they had made for themselves. Clearly, Golomstock sides with an art that confirms its autonomy and does not work on the borders separating art and life. That is why he is unable to offer a suitable explanation of the change from avant-garde culture to totalitarian art policy. But if we affirm the significance of the counterrevolution we find ourselves able to explain the interplay between a revolutionary take-off in the egalitarian aspirations of the masses and the state-controlled continuation of this take-off as a counterrevolutionary replacement.<sup>54</sup> The notion of counterrevolution is much better suited to account for this complex interplay than the schematic 'law of the totalitarian regimes' that Golomstock proposes in his book. It is in within this horizon - the exterminating fight of the counterrevolution against the artistic avant-garde - that the question of the state as a total work of art, *Gesamtkunstwerk*, makes sense. And within this horizon it is also possible to account for the differences between the totalitarian regimes when it came to art. Contrary to the real counterrevolutions of Hitler and Stalin, the preventive counterrevolution of Mussolini was able to start before the revolutionary take-off became a real revolt; and because of this Mussolini was able to integrate and recuperate parts of the avant-garde culture, such as architecture, visual arts, poetry and philosophy. Hitler's regime was so late in performing the counterrevolution that it had to deal with a Keynesian or 'reformist' problem of New Deal character that it was almost not able to integrate national-Bolshevik elements like Heidegger and Jünger while the pro-national-socialist expressionism of Emil Nolde and Gottfried Benn was almost too much art to fit into the construction of the Nazi state. The lesson would be that if the counterrevolutionary dynamic is able to move fast - as in Italian fascism - it can allow experimentation at least as long the counterrevolutionary energy is alive. But if it moves slowly it cannot permit experimentation as local freedom as was the case in Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union in the 1930s.

## NOTES

- 1 Cf. Jean Pierre Faye, *Théorie du récit. Introduction aux Langages totalitaires* (Hermann; Paris, 1972), pp. 57–62; Simona Forti, *Il Totalitarismo* (Laterza; Rome, 2001), pp. 3–9.
- 2 Cf. Jean Pierre Faye, *Langages totalitaires* (Hermann; Paris, 1972).
- 3 Karl Korsch, 'State and Counter-Revolution' [1939], trans. Karl-Heinz Otto and Andrew Giles-Peters, in Douglas Kellner (ed.), *Karl Korsch: Revolutionary Theory* (University of Texas Press; Austin and London, 1977), pp. 237–44.
- 4 'Previously only the poor and savages had been exposed to the untrammelled force of the capitalist elements. But the totalitarian order has granted unlimited rights to calculating thought and puts its trust in science as such. Its canon is its own brutal efficiency.' *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford University Press; Stanford, 2002; German 1st edn. 1944), pp. 67–68.
- 5 Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Meridian Books; New York, 1958 [1951]); Jacob Talmon, *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy* (Frederick A. Praeger; New York, 1960 [1952]).
- 6 In the present situation post-9/11 Islam is often denounced as 'religious totalitarianism'. In this context the term totalitarianism yet again functions as a key word in the ideology of war legitimating a 'crusade' against the enemies of the Western world and justifying the killing of thousands of Iraqis, continual violation of the Geneva Convention and the inhuman treatment of detainees in Abu Ghraib, Guantanamo and secret prisons all over the world. The term totalitarianism is used to legitimate the 'war on terror'. As Nikhil Pal Singh writes: 'It is almost too obvious that terrorism now occupies the place and function that fascism held in World War II and that communism held within the discourse of the cold war. As Bush put it most recently, today the religiously diverse, tolerant, peace-loving peoples of the world are menaced by 'a new totalitarian threat.' 'Cold War Redux: On the 'New Totalitarianism', *American Historical Review*, no. 85, 2003, p. 173.
- 7 Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford University Press; Stanford, 1998; It. 1st edn. 1995); idem., *State of Exception*, trans. Kevin Atell (University of Chicago Press; Chicago, 2004; It. 1st edn. 2003).
- 8 Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, p. 10.
- 9 Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, p. 17.
- 10 Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, p. 19.
- 11 Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, p. 6.
- 12 Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, p. 10.
- 13 Jean-Claude Paye, *La fin de l'État de droit. La lutte antiterroriste de l'état d'exception à la dictature* (La Dispute; Paris, 2004).
- 14 Jean-Claude Paye, *La fin de l'État de droit*, p. 10.
- 15 Cf. Judith Butler, 'Guantanamo Limbo: International Law Offers Too Little Protection for Prisoners of the New War', *Nation*, 1 April 2002, pp. 20–24.
- 16 Slavoj Žižek, *Did somebody say totalitarianism? Five Interventions in the (mis)use of a Notion* (Verso; London, 2001).
- 17 Žižek, *Did somebody say totalitarianism?*, p. 3.
- 18 Domencio Losurdo, *Il revisionismo storico. Problemi e miti* (Laterza; Rome, 1996); idem., 'Towards a Critique of the Category of Totalitarianism', trans. Marella and Jon Morris, *Historical Materialism*, vol. 12, no. 2, 2004, pp. 25–55.
- 19 Friedrich Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom* (Routledge; New York and London, 1993 [1944]); Ernst Nolte, *Der europäische Bürgerkrieg 1917–1945. Nationalsozialismus und Bolschewismus* (Ullstein; Frankfurt, 1987).
- 20 Losurdo, 'Towards a Critique', p. 38.
- 21 Losurdo, 'Towards a Critique', p. 30.
- 22 Jean Pierre Faye, 'Langage totalitaire et 'totalitarisme'', in *La critique du langage et son économie* (Galilée; Auvers-sur-Oise, 1973), pp. 63–71.
- 23 Carl Joachim Friedrich and Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy* (Harvard University Press; Cambridge (Mass.), 1986 [1968]).
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- 26 Karl Korsch, 'Theses toward a Critique of the Fascist Conception of the State' [1932], pp. 236–37; 'State and Counter-Revolution', pp. 237–44; 'The Fascist Counter-Revolution' [1940], pp. 244–53; 'The Worker's Fight against Fascism' [1941], pp. 253–69, all in Kellner, *Karl Korsch, Revolutionary Theory*; Amadeo Bordiga, *Communisme et fascisme*, trans. Programme Communiste (Éditions Programme Communiste; Marseille, 1970); Otto Rühle, *Schriften. Perspektiven einer Revolution in Hochindustrialisierten Ländern* (Rowohlt; Reinbek, 1971).
- 27 Korsch, 'State and Counter-Revolution', p. 238.
- 28 Korsch, 'State and Counter-Revolution', p. 242.
- 29 Korsch 'The Fascist Counter-Revolution', p. 248.
- 30 Korsch 'The Fascist Counter-Revolution', p. 249.
- 31 'There is no essential difference between the way the *New York Times* and the Nazi press publish 'all news that's fit to print' - under existing conditions of privilege and coercion and hypocrisy. There is no difference in principle between the eighty-odd voices of capital mammoth corporations - which, over the American radio, recommend to legions of silent listeners the use of Ex-Lax, Camels, and neighbourhood

- grocery, along with music, war, baseball, and domestic news, and dramatic sketches – and the one suave voice of Mr. Goebbels who recommends armaments, race-purity, and worship of the Fuehrer. He too is quite willing to let them have music along with it – plenty of music, sporting news, and all the un-political stuff they can take.’ Korsch, ‘The Fascist Counter-Revolution’, p. 251.
- 32 Korsch, ‘The Workers’ Fight against Fascism’, p. 254.
- 33 Arno Mayer, *Dynamics of Counter-revolution in Europe, 1870-1956: An Analytic Framework* (Harper Torchbooks; New York and London, 1971), p. 19.
- 34 Ian Kershaw, *The Nazi Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives of Interpretation* (Edward Arnold; London and New York, 1993); Zeev Sternhell, ‘Fascism: Reflections on the Fate of Ideas in Twentieth-Century History’, in Michael Freeden (ed.), *Reassessing Political Ideologies: The Durability of Dissent* (Routledge; London and New York, 2001), pp. 92–115.
- 35 François Furet, *Le passé d'une illusion. Essai sur l'idée communiste au XXe siècle* (Robert Laffont; Paris, 1995).
- 36 Faye, ‘Langage totalitaire et ‘totalitarisme’’, pp. 68–69.
- 37 Mayer, *Dynamics of Counterrevolution in Europe*, p. 33.
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- 41 Golomstock, *Totalitarian Art*, p. xii.
- 42 Golomstock, *Totalitarian Art*, p. 86.
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- 44 Golomstock, *Totalitarian Art*, p. 79.
- 45 Golomstock, *Totalitarian Art*, p. xiv.
- 46 Cf. Susan Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Utopia in East and West* (MIT Press; Cambridge (Mass.) and London, 2000); Bernard F. Reilly, Jr., ‘Emblems of Production: Workers in German, Italian and American Art during the 1930s’, in Wendy Kaplan (ed.), *Designing Modernity: The Arts of Reform and Persuasion, 1885-1945* (Thames and Hudson & The Wolfsonian; London, 1995), pp. 287–313.
- 47 Angelo Tasca, *Naissance du Fascisme. L'Italie de l'armistice à la marche sur Rome* (Gallimard; Paris, 1938; 1st edn. 1922).
- 48 Cf. Arno Mayer, *The Furies: Violence and Terror in the French and Russian Revolutions* (Princeton University Press; Princeton and Oxford, 2000).
- 49 Emily Braun, *Mario Sironi and Italian Modernism: Art and Politics under Fascism* (Cambridge University Press; Cambridge, 2000), p. 188.
- 50 Giovanni Lista, *Arte e politica. Il Futurismo di sinistra in Italia* (Multhipla; Milan, 1980); Marla Stone, *The Patron State: Culture and Politics in Fascist Italy* (Princeton University Press; Princeton and Oxford, 1998).
- 51 Cf. Otto Karl Werckmeister, ‘Review: Stephanie Barron (ed.): *Degenerate Art: The Fate of the Avant-Garde in Nazi Germany* and Christoph Zuschlag: *Entartete Kunst: Ausstellungsstrategien im Nazi-Deutschland*’, *Art Bulletin*, vol. 79, no. 2, 1997, pp. 337–41.
- 52 Cf. Dawn Ades and David Britt (eds.), *Art and Power: Europe under the Dictators* (Thames and Hudson; London, 1995).
- 53 Alan Steinweis, *Art, Ideology, and Economics in Nazi Germany: The Reich Chambers of Music, Theatre, and the Visual Arts* (University of North Carolina Press; Chapel Hill, 1993).
- 54 As Arno Mayer writes, ‘The ideologies of counterrevolutionary movements and regimes are solidly anchored in venerated principles, values, attitudes, and habits, both secular and religious, of established societies; [...] their programs call for the purification rather than the transformation or overthrow of existing institutions [...]. In addition to these ill-concealed ties to the past and present, counterrevolutionary ideologists and leaders imitate and simulate, but do not copy, some of the stylistic and programmatic features of the hated revolutionary rival. [...] Their project is meant to create the impression that they seek fundamental changes in government, society, and community. In reality their blueprint and policies are at best pseudo-revolutionary.’ *Dynamics of Counterrevolution in Europe*, p. 116.

MARLA STONE

## INTRODUCTION

I begin this essay with three images with which to think about the aesthetic possibilities for the representation of fascist politics. The three works of art that I introduce here engage issues of empire, the Italian past and the fascist present. They each in different ways reconcile the domination of Italy over Ethiopia; they each offer ideas about Italian civilisation and about fascism as the incarnation of Italian history. These works of art give us three languages and three forms for the depiction of fascist ideology in the late 1930s. Do their narratives, symbols and varied styles indicate anything about their production and reception? To what extent have they integrated the political and ideological priorities of the regime? What do they have in common? Is one of them more fascist than the others? What do they tell us about fascism in the late 1930s? We must think about the form, as well as the content: two of the three were executed in genre – murals and *bas-relief* – encouraged as authentically Italian by fascist official culture.

The first image, *The Conquest of Empire (La conquista dell'impero)* by Franco Girelli, was shown at the 1938 Venice Biennale as an entry in the *bas-relief* competition (ill. 4.1). The *bas-relief* operates at two levels: on one level it is a depiction of the Greek myth of Pegasus, the winged horse, and Bellerophon, who captured Pegasus while it was drinking from a spring. In the myth, Bellerophon rides Pegasus and defeats the Chimera, the fire-breathing monster with the head of a lion and the body of a goat. After the defeat of the Chimera, Bellerophon tries to ride Pegasus to Mount Olympus, but Zeus sends an insect to sting Pegasus, who then throws off Bellerophon and flies to freedom. At this level, the *bas-relief* is about Bellerophon's hubris. Yet, the work is titled 'The Conquest of Empire', which forces another reading onto the obvious one. In this second reading, Pegasus represents Civilisation in the guise of Italy, throwing off the forces of barbarism, crushing the naked Bellerophon and the tragic lion. Contemporary Italy becomes the last in a historical sequence which moves from Greece to Rome to fascist Italy, as the Roman battle standard adorned with an imperial eagle in the background links Greece to Rome. Here Empire is civilising, inevitable, and predestined by History. In this reading, the horse is a symbol of power, authority and mastery. The figures are tightly squeezed into the space; indeed, the three figures – horse, human, and monster – are interconnected, implying a link between the forces of Civilisation/Free-



**4.1.** Franco Girelli, *The Conquest of Empire* (1938), relief. Venice, Archivio Storico dell'Arte Contemporanea.

dom and those of ignorance and oppression. The gap between the title of this work and its content also raises the possibility that Girelli executed it and then changed the title in order to receive official patronage.

Girelli's *bas-relief* follows a common pattern for some Italian art following the declaration of war against Ethiopia: after 1935, the pre-existing emphasis on *Romanità* assimilated an explicit racial component, often depicting Africans and political opponents (such



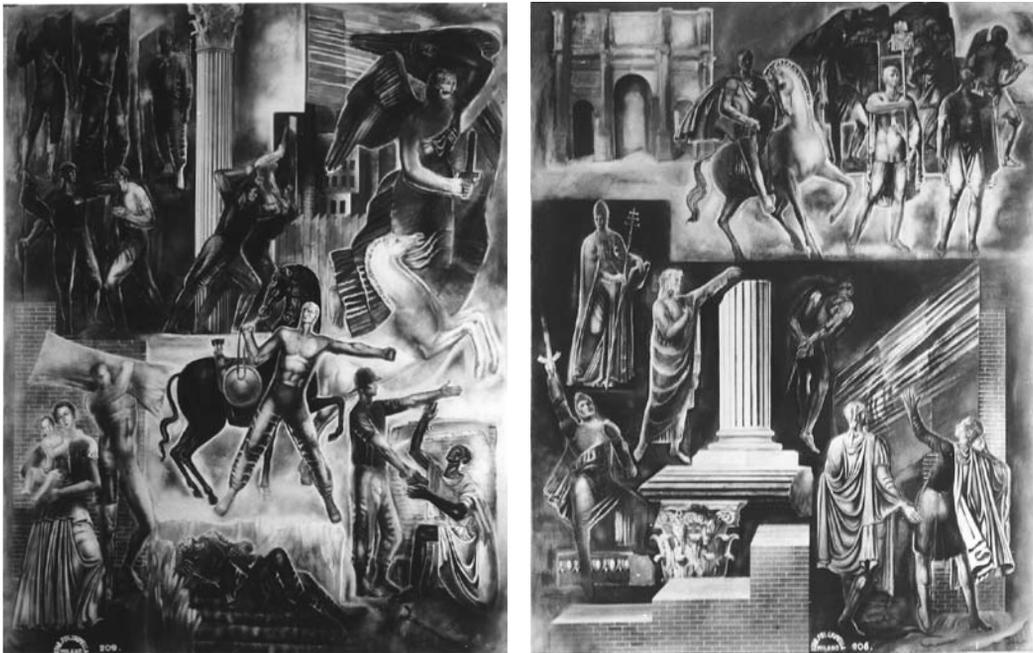
**4.2.** Mario Menin, *The Battle of Uorc Amba as Experienced by the Futurist Blackshirt Menin* (1936), oil on canvas. Venice, Archivio Storico dell'Arte Contemporanea.

as the Spanish Loyalists) as subhuman or animal-like. In addition to race, some art in the late 1930s elevated bombastic historical and national categories to produce a kitsch Roman style known as *stile littorio*. At the same time, *La conquista dell'impero* has many of the qualities of late 19th-century monumental statuary and could easily have represented only a slight departure from pre-fascist work on the part of the artist. Girelli was a regionally successful sculptor who exhibited in a number of national shows during and after the fascist era, including the 1932 and 1936 Venice Biennales. He served as director of the *Accademia Cignaroli* of Verona, and received local church and municipal commissions. Like so many artists who prospered under fascism, Girelli's career seems to have been little damaged by his participation in fascist official culture. After the war, his work was shown at the 1954 and 1958 Venice Biennales and the 1955 Roman Quadriennale.

The second image, by the Futurist Mario Menin, takes an entirely different aesthetic for its representation of the fascist war for empire. This painting, *The Battle of Uorc Amba as Experienced by the Futurist Blackshirt Menin* (*Combattimento Dell' Uorc Amba Vissuto Dalla Camicia Nera Futurista Menin*), shown at the 1936 Venice Biennale, applies the Futurist technique of *aeropittura* to a battle scene (ill. 4.2). The battle took place in February 1936 over the conquest of the Ethiopian town of Uorc Amba. Menin paints the offensive from above, with the Italian forces attacking from the surrounding hills. The landscape moves with the Italian soldiers, whose bodies fuse

into the hills. The fascist body is dynamic and one with the landscape, implying the naturalness and vitality of fascist conquest. Menin depicts the Ethiopian forces as ant-like dots in the valley. The canvass has the viewer looking down over the hills from the perspective of the soldiers and over the fascist machine guns, creating an immediate identification between the audience and the military conquest. Menin works to show the experience of combat from the inside, 'as he lived it.' His painting embraces the Futurist goal of showing technology as an extension of the human body. This celebration of the landscape of modern war has no remorse for the overwhelming force unleashed by the Italian military. Moreover, this canvass depends upon the 'colonial gaze', with its erasure of the specificity of those about to be conquered.

The third work of art, by Arnaldo Carpanetti, uses fascist empire as the endpoint of Italian history. The mural painted for the 1936 Milan Triennale entitled *The Millennial Italian Civilisation* (*La millenaria civiltà italiana*) offers the inexorable triumph of history in the style of a Renaissance fresco (ill. 4.3). Here History begins with



**4.3.** Arnaldo Carpanetti, *The Millennial Italic Civilization* (1936), fresco. Venice, Archivio Storico dell'Arte Contemporanea.

Rome in the upper left-hand corner and ends with fascist empire in the lower right-hand corner. In between, Italians make cities, spread law, defend Christianity and culture, become a nation, die for the nation, are reborn through fascism, and bring civilisation to Ethiopia. In this mural, the horse figures prominently again as a symbol of civilisation and as a symbol of the submission of the 'barbarians'. The final image depicts a fascist legionnaire breaking the chains of slavery in Ethiopia and bringing enlightenment and freedom. In this summary of Italian history, the movement is always forward, with the figures pointing toward the fascist victory in the upper right-hand corner: history is male and is embodied through the achievements of conquest, building, culture. Civilisation comes through male sacrifice for the nation, as in the dying World War I soldier who precedes the act of fascist conquest. Carpanetti, an artist who skillfully used the fascist arts patronage system to his own advantage, won prizes for paintings on fascist themes at the 1930 and 1932 Venice Biennales and received a commission to work on the *Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution (Mostra della rivoluzione fascista)*.

### THE ATTENTION TO CULTURE

I offer these three images as a way to frame my discussion of the impact of the scholarly focus on culture for our understanding of Italian fascism. The last two decades have witnessed an academic movement which analyses the culture of the fascist era, its production and reception and its origins and legacies. Scholarly assessments of the cultural bases of Italian fascism and attention to inter-war Italian cultural life have been so extensive as to constitute a significant body of work. One historian writes of 'an explosion of interest in the origins and nature of Italian fascist culture.'<sup>1</sup> And certainly beyond the borders of academia, fascist culture fascinates: 'it is the Fascist aesthetic and obsession with aesthetics', writes Richard Spencer, 'whether in the form of national symbolism, extreme cultural chauvinism, and the mass rally, that continues to haunt the modern imagination.'<sup>2</sup>

The Mussolini dictatorship's commitment to an aestheticised and visualised politics and its intervention in all fields of cultural production makes culture a rich vein and an important path into the workings of fascism. Moreover, the promise embedded in the fascist project of 'totality' and of a 'new society' populated by 'new fascist

men' depended heavily upon culture. As scholars both in Italy and abroad have revealed, Italian fascism pursued many of its priorities – from the renovation and the regimentation of society by class, gender and region to the pursuit of national and international legitimacy and expansion – to a significant extent through cultural initiatives. Culture represented fertile ground for the realisation of goals as varied as national identity, demographic growth and empire. Between 1922 and 1945, the fascist party and government patronised, oversaw and coordinated a vast world of cultural programmes, events and products – from the fine arts to mass culture, from tourist excursions to summer camps. These, to one degree or another, touched the lives of all Italians.

The attention to the cultural origins, cultural mobilisation and culture produced during the fascist ventennium continues, and its ripples are felt beyond the study of Italy. In the wake of the first works rethinking the fascist relationship to culture and to cultural producers and audiences, as well as the scholarly appraisal of the diverse influences upon fascist culture, scholars began to ask similar questions about the 20th century's other dictatorships, from Nazi Germany to Stalin's Soviet Union.<sup>3</sup> In each case, where we had seen only monolithic policy and inexorable drives toward centralisation, we now see culture in even the most totalitarian settings as shaped from above and below and as taking form from a range of cultural influences.<sup>4</sup> While none of this alters the fundamental terror and repression through which fascism and totalitarianism ruled, it does argue for the critical and complex role played by culture in the achievement and maintenance of that power. It also calls for even greater attention to the interplay between politics and culture at all levels of society. And it calls for investigations into areas scholars previously imagined as separate – because for these regimes culture and politics were never distinguished from one another.

An academic movement that began by questioning fascism's relationship to culture and its uses of culture to penetrate society has transformed the ways in which we comprehend fascism. The multifaceted analysis of culture has brought in its wake a series of revisions and new challenges: as it has led to a more nuanced understanding of the support of many Italians for the dictatorship and the collaboration of many intellectuals and artists with the regime. Finally, it has been part of a movement to rethink the depth and breadth of the regime's racist and antisemitic ideologies. We now

have the cultural history of fascism from above: that is from the viewpoint of the state, and from the cultural producers who collaborated with the fascist state. Not only has the attention to culture changed the way we see the material legacy of fascism, from the buildings to the visual culture it left behind, but it has pushed us to think about the ways in which we 'see' Italy itself. Fascism left behind a transformed Italian landscape that shapes our own understanding of Italian history and culture, from the beauty of the Tuscan 'Renaissance' hill towns to the imposing monuments of Rome.

In several areas the study of fascism's relationship to culture has added to our historical knowledge about Italian fascism. For the purposes of this discussion, I use culture in a wide sense to include high culture, mass culture, academic production, and cultural experiences, from mass tourism to ritual. Cultural histories of fascism have proposed a more diffused and negotiated view of fascist power and historical agency than traditionally assumed. In much of the new work, fascist rule is seen as a multi-valenced system in which power, while wielded from above, is also negotiated among a diversely administered party and government, cultural producers, and a complex and shifting set of publics. In these readings, power is in flux and is shaped by a range of forces, with dictatorship obviously being the dominant one. Once fascist power is understood in this way, the origins and character of fascist policies and practices must be looked at from below and between, as well as from above. In this vein, D. Medina Lasansky and Diane Ghirardo have examined the ways in which local leaders, such as *podestà* and mayors, and local organisations responded to and reshaped government cultural directives, such as those involving urban reconstruction projects, exhibitions or regional festivals, in accordance with local agendas.<sup>5</sup> And the negotiations between cultural producers, from artists to writers, and the fascist state is the subject of a number of studies, including Ruth Ben-Ghiat's *Fascist Modernities* (2001) and my own *The Patron State* (1998). In its desire for cultural producers to have 'collaborative relationships with the state', the various organs of the party and government actively courted cultural producers and promoted policies which would encourage their participation.<sup>6</sup>

Cultural studies of fascism have raised critical questions about the articulation and reception of fascist programmes, ideology, and the process through which ideology became policy. What has emerged from this investigation is the multiple ways in which the regime's

priorities were mediated by a number of forces – cultural producers, audiences, and bureaucrats at all levels.

The attention to culture opened the door to interdisciplinary studies of fascism. Disciplines beyond history and political science now posit interpretations of fascism, particularly through engaging culture. Sociology, anthropology, art and architectural history, cinema studies, gender studies and literary studies have all contributed to the ‘cultural turn’. The work being produced is, in many cases, innovative in method and novel in interpretation; it has challenged the historiographic and disciplinary assumptions of the field, and often blurs the boundaries between disciplines. Much of the interdisciplinary scholarship on fascist culture has been written by scholars working in English. This is due in large part to the stress on interdisciplinarity and theory in American universities and the existence of more rigid disciplinary boundaries in Italy.<sup>7</sup> The American embrace of interdisciplinary approaches to fascism has also been due to the differing political contexts: in Italy the study of fascism, until recently, mirrored the postwar Italian politics of left and right, making it difficult to challenge reigning orthodoxies.

Interdisciplinary scholarship on fascism and culture has expanded the subjects and objects of study. The enlarged notion of legitimate scholarly subjects led both to the inclusion of new topics, such as gender relations, sexuality and public and private space, and to a new look at ideology, cultural production, rituals and myths. From historical sociology have come, as in the work of Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi and Mabel Berezin, analyses of the ways in which fascism mobilised, transmitted and translated its ideology to Italians. Looking at the regime’s uses of symbols and rituals, and at its mobilisation of the public sphere through rallies, commemorations and parades, Falasca-Zamponi and Berezin revealed the ideological elements of fascism’s pursuit of the participation and consent of Italians.<sup>8</sup> Even more, some new work on the fascist era defies the notion that the ‘text’ – be it a film, painting or building – itself is a stable object. As Lasansky wrote, buildings, for example, can ‘have multiple and transient pasts depending upon the changing cultural context.’<sup>9</sup>

Nearly every contemporary theoretical development has appeared in the work on fascism and culture: cultural analyses of fascism have applied the techniques of critical analysis, discourse analysis and semiotics, among other tools, to aspects of fascist Italy previously

overlooked, especially to the relationship between the state and its publics. Cultural investigations have focused on the diverse identities of the Italians and looked at them as workers, gendered subjects, consumers, members of families, member of generations, and inhabitants of regions. Inspired by the new social history and post-colonial studies as well, cultural studies of the fascist era have explored the margins of society and those farthest from the centre of power, such as women, children and colonial subjects. Awareness of the differing experiences of various segments of the Italian population under fascism has helped us to understand better the successes and failures of the fascist pursuit of a shared national and fascist identity.

One of the first and primary achievements of the interest in culture has been the research into the variety and character of fascist official culture. From the numerous studies of the artistic and literary movements which embraced the regime's priorities and/or worked alongside them, we have learned that cultural producers were both conditioned by fascist ideology and, in turn, shaped that ideology. From the 1980s forward, Walter Adamson, Giorgio Ciucci, Enrico Crispolti, Emily Braun, Richard Etlin, Dennis Doordan, Rossana Bossaglia and Esther da Costa Meyer, among others, traced the connections between fascist and pre-fascist cultural styles, genres, practices and movements. They continued the debate over what is meant by the term 'fascist culture'.<sup>10</sup> This work ranges in focus from *Futurist aeropittura* (air painting) to monumental architectural expressions of *Romanità*; from the Novecento search for a contemporary aesthetic which drew inspiration from national traditions to the *Strapaese* (Supervillage) movement, which saw indigenous Italian styles as the dominant source for Italian artists to abstraction. Much of this work, such as that of Walter Adamson and Giorgio Ciucci, isolated the contribution of the avant-garde, from the Florentine literary modernists around journals such as *Lacerba* to the Rationalist architects of the *Gruppo 7*, to the fascist project.

Once the notion of a 'fascist culture' was posited, the era's once ghettoised visual culture and cultural products – buildings, films, fine art, popular culture and literature – were looked at for the first time in forty years and analysed alongside the culture of non-fascist nations. Scholars discovered a trove of officially-sanctioned art, architecture and film, diverse in style, inspiration and quality; they studied the cross-fertilisation between German Expressionists,

Russian Constructivists and fascist modernists for the first time. There is now a vast literature detailing the diversity in influence and style of officially sanctioned art, architecture and film, from Futurism to 'Return to Order' to Neo-classicism. Party- and government-patronised culture, as we now recognise, varied from the glass and steel of Rationalist architecture to the kitsch frescoes of fascist naturalism to replicas of Roman *bas-relief*. The scholarly rehabilitation of fascist culture meant that buildings such as Guiseppe Terragni's *Casa del fascio*, ignored for a generation because of its fascist patronage, are now analysed as the confluence of influences – Bauhaus and Corbusier and Classical Roman – that they are. Painters and sculptors, from Mario Sironi to Felice Casorati, were returned to the modernist canon, as was their use of a modernist vocabulary to convey fascist ideas and aspirations.<sup>11</sup>

Analysis of the cultural production of the fascist era has revealed the international character of some of the era's art, as well as its diversity and modernity.<sup>12</sup> Rossana Bossaglia has highlighted the international origins and character of the Futurists, as well as stressing the non-Italian influences in the Novecento movement, such as Felice Casorati's 'interactions with central European culture'.<sup>13</sup> The design arts and the exchanges among design and painting and sculpture were critical aspects of fascist culture borrowed from the international avant-garde. The regime's interest in cultural innovation and experimentation was visible in a number of places, such as in exhibition design and in some official events, such as the avant-garde theatrical spectacle 18BL.<sup>14</sup> Cultural innovation and openness to foreign inspiration was also visible in the widely promoted public arts of mosaics, murals and *bas-relief* seen on most party and government buildings by the late 1930s.

The focus on culture has revealed that the fascist dictatorship gained, for much of its rule, the consent and participation of cultural producers. Once the era's cultural products (art, architecture, literature and film) entered the scholarly and, then, public mainstream, this corollary issue emerged: if the fascist era produced some critically acclaimed work and if some of it has international and avant-garde influences, while being patronised by the fascist Party and government, what was the relationship between those who produced that culture – artists, writers, architects, film makers – and the fascist regime? How did the regime attract the allegiance of many of Italy's most talented artists, writers and intellectuals? In *The Patron*

*State: Culture and Politics in Fascist Italy*, I proposed an answer through the arts patronage policies of the fascist party and government.<sup>15</sup>

Fascist cultural intervention, beginning in the late 1920s and accelerating in terms of funding and bureaucratic intervention, was imprecise and changing – the product of a constant negotiation among the dictatorship’s interest in patronising a fascist and national culture, the aesthetic choices of artists and the tastes of spectators. The offices of the party and the government designated to organise artists and to patronise art did so with an approach I have labeled ‘hegemonic pluralism’ or ‘aesthetic pluralism’ – the acceptance, appropriation and mobilisation of a variety of aesthetic languages in the pursuit of consent and in the search for a representational language evocative of the fascist ‘new era’. By accepting a variety of formal representations and genres, the dictatorship created a culture of widespread adhesion and hegemonic control over the structures of representation, such as exhibitions, arts academies and artists’ unions.

But beyond a tolerance of stylistic diversity, how did the regime and its bureaucracies attract a notoriously fractious and autonomous social group such as artists and writers? In *Fascist Modernities*, Ben-Ghiat argued that the complex and mutual relationship between the fascist regime and Italian intellectuals, especially the generation that came of age during fascism, was based on fascism’s programme of national regeneration or *bonifica*.<sup>16</sup> The fascist promise of its particular brand of modernity, neither the Soviet mass collective nor the atomised marketplace of America, attracted many intellectuals, writers and film makers. What fascism offered instead was a ‘fascist modernity’ of social order and renewal within a national, imperial and racial collective.<sup>17</sup>

### THE MOBILISATION OF THE ITALIAN PAST

While the first wave of fascist cultural studies emphasised the contribution of modernism and the avant-garde to fascist culture and stressed fascism’s self-representation as new and revolutionary, the search for fascism’s cultural sources soon drew scholars to the another side of fascist culture – its mobilisation of the Italian past. A fundamental element of fascist culture, the appropriation and assimilation of the past allowed the regime to represent itself as the fulfilment of Italian history, as the incarnation of the Italy of the

Caesars and the Popes.<sup>18</sup> ‘Rome’ appeared continually in the era’s fine arts, mass culture and architecture – as an ideological reference and a cultural inspiration. *Romanità* manifested itself in archeological excavations and urban plans highlighting Roman imperial ruins and exhibitions, such as the *Augustean Exhibition of the Roman World (Mostra Augustea della Romanità)*, the celebration of the 2,000<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of the Emperor Augustus which presented Mussolini as Italy’s modern-day Augustus. The scholarly attention to *Romanità* in fascist culture and political discourse brought to light the multiple uses of the classical past and the collaboration of classicists and archeologists in adapting antiquity to fit fascist priorities from empire to race.<sup>19</sup>

Fascism’s own obsession with the Roman past translated into an initial neglect by cultural historians of the regime’s uses of other historical epochs, especially the medieval and Renaissance periods. D. Medina Lasansky, one of the first scholars to assess the fascist relationship to these later epochs, wrote that the memory of medieval and Renaissance Italy was ‘integral to the discourse of local and national identity’ and ‘an important element of Fascist cultural experimentation.’<sup>20</sup> A number of recent interdisciplinary books have taken up fascist culture’s relationship to Italian history, opening new facets of fascist cultural politics and continuing the debate over the penetration into Italian culture of fascist rhetorical and aesthetic priorities. *Donatello Among the Blackshirts: History and Modernity in the Visual Culture of Fascist Italy* (2005) brought together classicists, medievalists, art historians, architectural historians, comparative literature scholars and historians for a collection of essays on fascism’s appropriation of Italy’s iconic pasts.<sup>21</sup> As the editors, Claudia Lazzaro and Roger Crum, wrote, ‘the Fascist regime shaped the available pasts into a new myth of the nation.’<sup>22</sup>

As a result of works such as *Donatello Among the Blackshirts*, we now know much more about local cultural initiatives, such as officially coordinated revivals of Renaissance gardens and *maiolica* ceramics. Such cultural interventions reveal the regime’s desire to be seen as the guardian and patron of all things ‘authentically’ Italian. While government-sponsored garden, wine-making, or ceramic competitions seem distant from the core of fascist politics, these programmes do say something about the impact of fascism on daily life. They also reflect the fascist commitment to the cultural sphere in its most local and regional guise. Demonstrating great energy at

both national and local levels, fascist cultural bureaucrats sought, through urban renewal, tourism, film, high art and popular culture, to highlight the ages of Italian independence and cultural hegemony and to minimise the centuries of foreign domination. As Diane Ghirardo wrote in 'Inventing the Palazzo del Corte in Ferrara', this impulse translated into sometimes dubious 'historical' reconstructions which privileged 'scenography' and an idealised past over historical accuracy.<sup>23</sup> Ghirardo detailed Ferrarese civic leaders' pursuit of a reconstructed historical centre which 'bypassed the period of economic and cultural decline under the papacy and returned to the era of the city's greatest cultural prominence, the centuries of d'Este dominion.'<sup>24</sup> Here, local leaders nostalgic for their own glorious regional past battled with the government in Rome for reconstructed civic buildings, such as the Palazzo del Corte, which reflected their visions of typical 13th and 14th century architecture. The interest in a politically usable past came from both the central and local governments, from 'above' and 'below' – an example of how fascist policy becomes a more negotiated process when examined at multiple levels.

D. Medina Lasansky's *The Renaissance Perfected: Architecture, Spectacle and Tourism in Fascist Italy*, one of the most innovative of the interdisciplinary studies of fascist culture, detailed the regime's dependence upon a repackaged medieval/Renaissance past for representations of Italian national culture and civic life. In her study of fascist-led reconstructions of historical Italian city centres and the folklore festivals, pageants, tourism, films and trinkets that accompanied them, Lasansky assessed the many layers of fascist national identity construction and demonstrated the central role played by phenomena such as regional festivals and historical tourism. In 'Towers and Tourists: The Cinematic City of San Gimignano' she examined government-funded short documentaries of Italian cities to reveal the intersection of film, tourism, national culture and consumption. *San Gimignano, Town of Beautiful Towers (San Gimignano dalle belle torri)*, produced by the government newsreel production company, the *Istituto Luce*, transformed the Tuscan hill town into a 'protagonist' and the purveyor of the priorities of fascist cultural politics. The film 'focus[ed] on the city's medieval past to the exclusion of all else' and presented 'medieval Tuscany as the repository of native culture and Italic spirit [...]'<sup>25</sup>

We now have a much richer picture of the multiple and changing uses of the Italian past by fascism. What emerges is the centrality of a flexible past to fascist conceptions of national identity and national culture. The regime located the Italian past at the centre of its cultural programme, while celebrating itself as the embodiment of cultural revolution and modernity.

An awareness of the legacy of fascist cultural politics for postwar Italy and for our own experience of Italy is a very recent contribution by cultural studies. Lasansky's example of San Gimignano reveals the ways in which the contemporary iconic 'vision of the Tuscan landscape' is a product of the fascist architectural emphasis on the medieval era, which it deemed native and masculine in contrast to the foreign and feminine baroque. In *Mussolini's Rome*, Borden Painter examined the ways in which fascist urbanism in the city of Rome, especially with its scenographic isolation of imperial monuments, shapes contemporary views of the Roman past. The proposition that our own experience of Tuscany or ancient Rome has been shaped by fascist 'packaging' raises the provocative possibility that we all view the built environment left by fascism in ways determined by the rhetorical priorities of the era.<sup>26</sup> In addition to illuminating the ways in which contemporary views of Italy are configured by fascist programmes and by the priorities of fascist urbanism, recent scholarship has raised questions about the legacies of fascist involvement in academic disciplines such as art history, history and classics. Fascist interventions in university culture, from establishing research agendas to the hiring and firing of professors, have coloured academic agendas to the present day. As Scott Perry has written, the new work on fascist culture, 'make[s] a compelling case for the importance of analyzing the 'visual culture' and the 'spectacle' created by the Fascist dictatorship, not only to understand that regime, but, perhaps more importantly, to understand how our own vision of art history, right up to the present moment, has been unwittingly shaped by the Fascists.'<sup>27</sup>

Some of the challenges to the postwar myths of Italian national victimhood and to ideas of Italian inoculation from racism and anti-semitism have come through critiques focused on culture. Giorgio Israel and Pietro Nastasi in *Scienza e razza nell'Italia Fascista* (2005) unearthed the significant collaboration of scientists and social scientists in fascist racial politics and practices.<sup>28</sup> With *Racial Theory in Fascist Italy*, Aaron Gillette looked at the domestic production of

fascist racial theories. Fascist racism, with its arguments about Latin/Italian superiority based on notions of Italian descent from the Romans, was an ideological project designed to transform Italian culture: Mussolini, wrote Gillette, 'thought [racism] would strengthen the consciousness of the Italian's identity, remind them of the imperial might of their ancestors, and foster the ardent desire to conquer new territories.'<sup>29</sup> It is through the analysis of culture, academic and popular, that we have come to see the construction and diffusion of domestic racial theories and the increasingly central role they played in fascist ideology during the course of the *ventennio*.

### ENVOI

Taken as a whole, the scholarly work on culture has deepened our knowledge of life in Italy during the fascist era: we now know the rituals, symbols and narratives of fascist official culture, its multiple cultural influences, its *frondes* and its cultural mainstream. Fascist cultural studies have illuminated the struggle for a unique aesthetic representative of fascism. They have revealed the internal conflicts among fascist bureaucratic factions and the era's cultural movements and generations. They have elucidated the meanings of modern and historical aesthetic languages in the fascist context. They have debated the legacy of the culture produced under fascism for postwar Italy. This body of work has forced a reconsideration of what was considered 'modern' culture, and challenged the Cold War notion that monumentalism and modernity were incompatible or that abstraction and dictatorship were an impossible pairing. The field has analysed the fascist pursuit of the past in order to mobilise it for the modern fascist future.

Certainly, scholars of fascist culture must be cautious: their field suffers from the weaknesses and pitfalls of cultural studies. There are cases in which a few cultural products are used as evidence for broad contentions about the function and content of fascism. And because so many of the sources used by cultural studies and cultural history were produced under dictatorial and coercive conditions, we must be wary of our sources and of their origins, interrogating them carefully. There are examples in which the work is so theory-driven as to be detached from historical evidence and specificity. And in some cases, scholars have been intoxicated by the 'modernity' of some fascist-era cultural products, from architecture to film, and

have decontextualised and even fetishised them. Nonetheless, the best of the scholarship on Italian fascism and culture avoids such mistakes by cautiously reading its sources and reading them against official intentions, offering up the complexity of their production and consumption.

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- 21 Lazzaro and Crum, *Donatello Among the Blackshirts*.
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## 5 WHAT EVER HAPPENED TO ERNST BARLACH? East German Political Monuments and the Art of Resistance

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KRISTINE NIELSEN

### INTRODUCTION

The twentieth anniversary of the fall of the Wall spurred a flurry of renewed interest in East German art, as shown most notably in the travelling international exhibition *Art of Two Germanys/Cold War Cultures*, in 2009-10.<sup>1</sup> This exhibition, curated by Stephanie Barron of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and Eckhart Gillen of Kulturprojekte Berlin, examined the diverging artistic paths in East and West Germany and the artists' responses to the historical events of their time. The cover of its extensive exhibition catalogue and the banners promoting the show depict the making and installation of East Berlin's Marx and Engels monument. Formally and metaphorically, the photographs of the incomplete and transitional stages of the monument come to symbolise the cut between two Germanys, subsequently shaping a 'division of identity' (ill. 5.1).<sup>2</sup>



**5.1.** Banner for the exhibit *Art of Two Germanys/Cold War Cultures* outside the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (2009). Photo: Kristine Nielsen.

Since *Art of Two Germanys* focused on both private and commissioned political art of the German Democratic Republic (GDR), the exhibition brings to view contradictions that emerge when art linked to the East German regime and mass organisations is inserted into a canon of art defined according to Western parameters. In fact, the inclusion of commissioned political projects points to the ways in which the current art historical reception of East German art necessitates, at times and paradoxically, the effacement of a particular modernist tradition from which this art also draws its artistic inspiration. The current omission relates specifically to its official acceptance by the East German regime. Thus, this paper examines how two post-1989 institutions, in legislature and art respectively, have positioned two East German artworks within a new aesthetic framework by eschewing reference to the works' modernist source, in this case the art of the Expressionist sculptor Ernst Barlach.

This is not to say that Barlach, Käthe Kollwitz, Max Beckmann and other Weimar artists are not consistently listed as artistic influences in contemporary histories of East German art. Rather, the designation of that source is made selectively in accordance with an aesthetic goal that seeks to save East German images for Western art history. The first case examines a Berlin Senate Monument Committee report issued in 1993, which prevents a political monument by probably the most admired of all East German sculptors, Fritz Cremer: the Spain Fighter memorial in Berlin (1968, ill. 5.2), also known as Spain Fighter (*Spanienkämpfer*), from being destroyed or dismantled by designating it an artwork. Nominating the monument as such, according to the report's definition of art, requires that the committee forgo research into Cremer's artistic influence, namely Barlach's sculpture *The Avenger* (ill. 5.3). The second case explored in this paper involves the 2009-10 exhibition of the two photographs of the Marx and Engels monument used on the cover of the catalogue and the banners for *Art of Two Germanys*, as captured by the East German photographer Sibylle Bergemann in 1984-86 (ills. 5.5 and 5.6). In a similar fashion, various authors efface or ironise the trope of Barlach that underlies Bergemann's photograph of the installation of the monument. This displacement leads to the assurance of Bergemann's position as a subversive artist readily inserted into Western art history. The current institutional reception of Cremer's monument and Bergemann's photographs of the Marx and Engels monument manages to reframe them as an art of resistance to the East

German regime, an interpretation made possible precisely by ‘forgetting’ the East German appropriation and official acceptance of the art of Barlach after the late 1960s.

The integration of East German images into an inherently Western conception of art history clashes most vehemently with the shamelessly heroic political monuments of the former East German regime. These monuments led the Berlin Senate to set up a politically independent Senate Monument Committee in 1992-3 to evaluate East Berlin’s public memorials so as to determine which objects to preserve, modify or destroy. The criterion for the committee’s judgment was that a given memorial meet one of four specifications: it had to possess historical, scholarly or artistic value, or hold significance for the urban space on which it was sited. It is especially the assessment of artistic value that emerges as pertinent for the concerns of this paper, consequently requiring an initial investigation into the historical foundation for the conceptualisation of a public monument in East and West Germany.

### **CLASHING FORMS OF COMMEMORATION IN EAST AND WEST GERMANY, 1945-89**

While one of the causes for the controversy about the East German political monuments after 1989 concerned the clashing concept of a monument’s proper function (e.g. should a political memorial serve to glorify or mourn a person or event?), another reason for the conflict involved contrasting notions of German identity and the proper image of the ‘nation’. If the idea of a nation is like a theatrical stage occupied by characters that reflect a preferred national identity, unwanted characters will eventually taint that performance. Thus, even when the legislation and administration surrounding the handling of GDR monuments after 1989 were fragmented and dispersed among local governments, departments, offices, districts and municipalities, one can discern how Germans on both the left and the right strove for an ideal and authoritative image of the state to guide the way.<sup>3</sup> Berlin’s gigantic Lenin monument, dismantled in 1991-92, was one of the significant characters disrupting the stage performance, demonstrating as a result the crucial role of images in the culture of politics.

Indeed, in the years following World War II, West and East Germany developed markedly different ways of employing state imagery because of their distinct constructions of German memory.<sup>4</sup>

The Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) was at odds about the right way to handle a troubling national legacy, and so deliberately avoided too many political icons and symbols that might remind viewers of the recent National Socialist past. The response to the heroic monuments erected by the Nazi regime was a subsequent and general distrust of any type of glorification represented in political images. The result was that no heroic monuments, military parades or aggressive visual confirmations of a German identity were erected or performed after 1945. After forty years with limited monument production, memorials began to emerge more forcefully in West Germany in the 1980s, reflecting on German shame as the 'culprit nation'.<sup>5</sup> However, theoretical reflections on monuments were already surfacing in the 1960s and 70s, alongside changing definitions of sculpture in art, involving an expansion of its field that admitted many kinds of structures such as architecture.<sup>6</sup> Artists often negated the classical monument of victory through oppositional gestures, invoking ideas of the ephemeral, the non-decorative, the aniconic, the 'counter' and the 'negative-form' monument.<sup>7</sup>

In Western scholarship the distinction between the memorial ('Mahnmal' or 'Gedenkstätte') and the monument ('Denkmal') gained critical attention in the 1980s. Conceptually, the 'memorial' tends to commemorate tragedy and address victims of war, such as The Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C.<sup>8</sup> The term 'monument', on the other hand, may describe statuary that glorifies an achievement or person. While these two terms are often used interchangeably and commemorative sites can serve both purposes simultaneously, a clear distinction remains in the preferred form of dedication in united Germany.<sup>9</sup> The numerous recent public commemorations in Berlin function as mournful 'memorials' dedicated to victims, such as the infamous Holocaust Memorial ('Holocaust-Mahnmal') completed in 2005, officially entitled the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe ('Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas').<sup>10</sup>

In the GDR, fascism was negated or displaced as a character belonging to West Germany.<sup>11</sup> East German authorities initiated an approach to the staging of images which conceptually contrasted with, yet formally paralleled that of the National Socialists. In East Berlin, street names were thoroughly modified to reflect the iconoclastic inversion, using the names of communist heroes to replace the names and icons of Nazism. Initially, the East German state held

marches on national holidays, but slowly the celebrations and ceremonies became increasingly formalised displays, the leadership believing that this visualisation would influence or, at the very least, impress the spectators. The inauguration ceremonies for public monuments in the GDR were in many ways the ultimate visual claim for power. By the 1980s, the veneration of socialist heroes in public monuments had become one of the main agendas of the Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party (SED).<sup>12</sup> They were in all respects icons of official culture, and little weighed heavier in the state's cultural politics than its political statues.<sup>13</sup> These official monuments were a way for the GDR to legitimise its existence and leave its mark on the urban landscape in the various cities across East Germany.<sup>14</sup>

After the creation of the East German state in 1949, the SED leadership projected grand visions onto the capital of Berlin. According to the Third Party Congress of the SED, in 1950, the plan for the rebuilding of the capital was to create a city centre for ceremonies and demonstrations, where the city's great monuments and architecture would be given a central position.<sup>15</sup> Where the original conception of East Berlin's Thälmann monument, honouring the German antifascist Ernst Thälmann, involved the confrontation with Hitler's former Reich chancellery on Wilhelmstrasse; the original idea behind the Marx and Engels monument (ill. 5.4) was that it would iconoclastically replace the dismantled equestrian statue of Wilhelm I, formerly situated in front of Frederick I's royal city palace on Unter den Linden. In 1950, the main square in front of the royal palace was renamed 'Marx-Engels-Platz' and, later that year, the leader Walter Ulbricht, aided by Erich Honecker, who would become Ulbricht's successor, began the complete destruction of the ruins of the Prussian city palace. To manifest their victory, the first great mass demonstration of the state took place on the new square the following year.<sup>16</sup> The destruction of the old images would occur, then, simultaneously with the production of new images of which the state monuments played a crucial part.

While other parties did exist, the SED governed the state single-handedly. This meant that in the visual arts, a rigid hierarchy controlled the decision-making on public monuments. In the 1980s, the SED leadership began refashioning the state's image of an East German heritage, as made evident by the re-introduction of the Prussian past. In 1983, the equestrian statue of Friedrich II was re-locat-

ed on Unter den Linden in East Berlin and inserted into the political memory of an East German state. But despite a re-conceptualisation of historical representation in the GDR, combined with changing attitudes toward the visual arts, several structural aspects of official monument production changed little in the forty years of the state's existence.<sup>17</sup>

Firstly, the guidelines of the cultural politics remained fundamentally the same and in agreement with the procedures of the Soviet Union. Secondly, as stated, all cultural activities were planned by the Politburo and Central Committee of the SED and followed a rigid hierarchy. Thirdly, the state's cultural politics were to be legible and visible at all times in state monuments, as no separation of culture and politics was desired.<sup>18</sup> Lastly, the language of cultural-political speeches and writings always entailed a limited and pre-established terminology.<sup>19</sup> The focus on a set terminology in speeches was particularly notable in the formal address at inaugural ceremonies for political monuments.<sup>20</sup>

The function of the political monuments in the GDR followed a standardised script for honouring heroes over victims, and it is precisely this triumphant character that clashed most forcefully with West German conceptions of the public monument. Even GDR memorials to the fallen victims of fascism contained an element of the victorious, since the memorial would honour individuals and groups because they fought for a better (communist) future.<sup>21</sup> The death of a hero (the communist leader Thälmann, for instance) involved his transformation into an icon that served as the future hope for the state. The Nazi concentration camps became especially important as sites for monuments that commemorated the victims of fascism, but also honoured future heroes for their brave resistance. Such monuments functioned as an East German gesture of triumph conveying hope for the future. Thus, both before and after the collapse of the GDR, Western-minded viewers disapproved of the SED regime's victorious state monuments. West Germans distrusted the authoritarian monument with its one-way form of communication; while the socialist monuments were perceived as ridiculous impositions, both aesthetically and politically.

The self-importance given to the veneration of the political monuments by the SED leadership makes their post-1989 condemnation as embarrassing and perverse appear almost destined to happen. Yet, the evaluation of the political monuments of the GDR was a his-

torically necessary process after 1989, and the ethics of their visibility and presence in museum exhibitions and the urban landscape became primary concerns. The East German regime's objective in the animation of its tradition, as imbedded in a political monument, was to affirm the commemorative value of the nation's heritage, even if the animated components highlighted particular aspects over others. From the view of the East German state and Party, the GDR's state monument represented the nation's true legacy. For the state and Party, there were no myths involved. In contrast, in the West, the function of a state monument commemorating the past must be truthful to the historical facts rather than faithful to a legacy. History, as privileged in the West, concerns the recording and preserving of facts; whereas heritage aims to secure value.<sup>22</sup> Consequently, the function of an historical monument in the West is to memorialise an event with respect to the known facts, concerned as it is with historical accuracy. The objective of the East German state monument was to embed a past event with value so as to enrich that experience. Competing claims for German history and the conception of an authoritative image provoked Berliners in the early 1990s. They sought people seeking to correct what they perceived as myths depicted in many of the East German political monuments and so expose the false ideas represented in them. It is the very concept of truth as represented by a monument that comes to view in the handling of Cremer's Spain Fighter.

#### **ART AS TRUTH? FRITZ CREMER'S SPAIN FIGHTER**

In the spring of 1992, the Berlin Senate established a politically independent committee with the purpose of examining the over 400 commemorative symbols – statues, tablets, stones, plaques, busts and stelae – erected in East Berlin after 1945. Berlin's Senator for City Development and the Senator for Cultural Affairs selected the members of the committee based on their expertise regarding Berlin's monuments. The participants (six from former East Berlin, four from West Berlin) were art historians, curators, artists, architects, historians, district politicians, urban planners and monument conservators. In the winter of 1993, the committee issued its report. The determination of a monument's historical value was the committee's primary criterion for the evaluation of East Berlin's political monuments, judged on the basis of the monument's representation of history as well as the authenticity of its location. Any falsification



**5.2.** Fritz Cremer, Monument to the German Participants in the Spanish Civil War (1968), bronze. Berlin. Photo: Kristine Nielsen.

of an historical event merited the image's or plaque's destruction or removal from the urban landscape. Most ambiguous of all of their criteria was the evaluation of a monument as worthy of protection because of its artistic value, and among the monuments recommended for preservation because of their artistic merit was Cremer's Spain Fighter (ill. 5.2). The committee's designation of a monument as 'art' was one of the safest ways to protect its existence in Berlin's urban landscape, and much is at stake, then, in a monument meeting the aesthetic standard. The 1993 committee report views art as a sphere in which artists are free to create works without ties in 'ridiculous detail' to commissions.<sup>23</sup> In the GDR, the report notes, the demand was that artists adopt political subjects uncritically for the sake of socialism, an approach that was 'fatal'.<sup>24</sup> The GDR monuments are 'predominantly without great artistic significance', argues the report, adding that, '[t]he committee sees therefore no reason to pre-

serve every monument'.<sup>25</sup> There is an ethical necessity involved in the report's dismissal of aesthetic significance. As a valuable object, art raises the cultural and historical importance of the period in which it was produced. It would be morally unsound to promote the remains of a culture controlled by a dictatorship, which censored the visual arts and imposed its own strict cultural politics on artists. In this sense, the report relies on the notion that false political content destroys aesthetic form. The issue is that of ethics inextricably bound to the politics of memory in present-day Germany, for one cannot *not* be astutely critical of the cultural remains of a former dictatorship comprising part of recent German history.

The status of the GDR artist before 1989 was an important consideration in the report's criterion concerning artistic value. Was the artist well respected among other artists and the intelligentsia in East Germany? Did the sculptor exhibit a degree of independence and resistance, despite the rigid cultural politics of the SED regime? One example of an East Berlin political monument that the report designates as art is, as mentioned, Cremer's Monument to the German Participants in the Spanish Civil War. The commissioners of this monument were the municipality of East Berlin and the Committee of Antifascist Resistance Fighters, and Cremer's task was to commemorate the German volunteers fighting with the International Brigades against fascism in Spain, during the years 1936–39, with the German communist volunteers losing the battle to the fascists.

The Senate Monument Committee report concludes that Cremer's monument holds artistic merit and should be preserved for that reason. They recommended, however, that the text plate next to the monument be removed or modified with a critical commentary.<sup>26</sup> This decision to preserve the monument yet censor the accompanying text plate raises the question as to why one component of the monument was acceptable while another was not. The crucial difference between image and word in this case lies, according to the committee report, in their respective interpretation of the historical events surrounding the German International Brigades and their defeat by the Spanish Nationalists.

The founding myth of the GDR, as aptly illustrated by the textual plate, conveyed that the death of heroes serves the future of the nation as a triumphant state. The communists who volunteered in the International Brigades were incorporated into the GDR's found-

ing myth, in which the state's political victory against fascists was made to appear imminent. Defeat would be overcome, for the Spain Fighters were the heroes of the nation, and they led the way for GDR citizens toward future victory. Consequently, when the text plate next to Cremer's monument states 'The model for our youth in our Socialist fatherland', the Senate Monument Committee designates these words a 'falsification of history'. The false message of the textual plate was that of communist victory, despite the facts of the actual events which culminated in loss. In contrast, the committee interprets Cremer's statue quite differently, seeing in it the symbolic futility of the resistance fighters. The soldier balances on one knee with his fist paradoxically obstructing his own view. The weight of the monument is heaviest at the front, hence signalling the soldier's eventual fall.<sup>27</sup> In an artistically skilled manner, Cremer's image symbolises the tragedy of the events, argues the report, whereby Cremer's memorial remains historically accurate.

The historical accuracy and by extension artistic value of the image becomes a precarious argument, however, when one takes into consideration Cremer's own interpretation of his monument as stated in 1971:

I happily took over the commission. This memorial is a symbol of our high regard for the legacy of the fight of the Spanish people and the International Brigades. The fighter is invincible; rising from the trenches with extreme energy, ready to attack. Even if he must yield to the superiority for a while, his force, the force of the proletarian internationalism, remains unbroken!<sup>28</sup>

Cremer expressed how his statue moves forward symbolically, conveying the continued fight and victory over fascism. He had hoped that his monument would evoke in viewers a readiness to fight for the cause: 'The fight is not over. It carries on', says Cremer about his monument in 1968.<sup>29</sup>

Does Cremer's soldier symbolise the loss of balance and eventual fall of the International Brigades, as argued by the Senate Monument Committee in 1993? Or does he signify forward movement, the forcefulness and invincibility of the antifascists, as conveyed by the artist in 1971? Does the Spain fighter's fist obstruct his view, or does it formally stress the preference for a frontal view of the sculpture so that the strength of his clenched fist would be visually maximised? The symbol of the clenched fist had strong political resonance in the GDR, linked as it was to Thälmann. Indeed, Cremer

was initially inspired by pictures of a soldier from the Thälmann Battalion of the International Brigades surging from the trenches.<sup>30</sup>

One might also argue for a third interpretation of the monument: Cremer was playfully operating with a semantic ambivalence allowing for both interpretations, his official account of his Spain Fighter monument being disingenuous in order to hide his real pictorial message from his political commissioners. The problem with this reading is that it would be completely out of character for an artist infamous for speaking his mind freely, at inopportune moments and without fear of the consequences, much to the annoyance of the GDR leadership. Cremer was a consistent taboo-breaker.<sup>31</sup> He never hid his contempt for the colossal monuments to Lenin and Thälmann, or the absurdity of persistently hiring Soviet artists for German artworks.<sup>32</sup> Even if the GDR department of agitation and propaganda had censored his words for the 1971 booklet in which the citation appears, the artist's intentions are difficult to misconstrue. The image commemorates, according to Cremer, the rising and unconquerable force of the antifascists. His artistic intentions were most likely in full accordance with the textual plate labelled by the committee as unworthy of monument protection because of its falsification of history.

The Berlin Senate financed the restoration of Cremer's monument in 1992, and the original text plate was later removed and replaced by a plate stating only the historical facts: 'Memorial to the German International Brigades, Spain, 1936-1939'. Cremer's sculpture is, then, an artwork according to the Senate Monument Committee because it is viewed as a mournful memorial rather than a victorious monument, skillfully portraying 'a doomed fight rather than glorified heroism'.<sup>33</sup>

### THE EAST GERMAN APPROPRIATION OF BARLACH

Cremer's Spain Fighter was inspired by Barlach's *The Avenger* from 1914 (ill. 5.3).<sup>34</sup> Barlach had considered his avenger, an unstoppable force and a righteous depiction of defence in war.<sup>35</sup> The sculpture had also expressed Barlach's nationalist sentiments at the onset of World War I, thus emerging as an exception in Barlach's artistic oeuvre, which predominantly operates with the conviction that art and politics do not mix: 'Nothing can be more certain than that art is not subject to the strictures of a political view of the world'.<sup>36</sup> If one interprets *The Avenger* as being concerned with an abstraction deal-



**5.3.** Ernst Barlach, *The Avenger* (1914), later cast, bronze. Güstrow, Ernst Barlach Stiftung.

ing with a 'transcendental act' or 'force of nature' fighting for justice, then one can more readily accept the content and form of the sculpture as a relevant source for Cremer's monument, argues Cremer's biographer Gerd Brüne. He finds the same symbolic character in Cremer's Spain Fighter, as evidenced by the soldier holding a sword rather than a rifle.<sup>37</sup> But Cremer's stylistic appropriation of Barlach's sculpture must also be understood within a larger history of East German art that transforms Barlach into a trope with stakes in both art and politics.

While Barlach was most active in the first two decades of the 20th century, he retained his popularity to a degree during the early years of the Third Reich. The Nazi authorities (especially Goebbels) did not initially question his artistic abilities, and nor did they criticise the formal language of his sculptures. Instead, it was the content of his art that the regime soon criticised as un-German and 'destructive modernism'.<sup>38</sup> The problem with the content of much of Barlach's art was its apolitical stance in relation to fascism, harbouring an emotionalism, individualism and sense of mourning that was difficult to integrate into the victorious nature of Nazi art.<sup>39</sup> As an avid defender of the autonomy of artistic creation, Barlach refused to explicitly convey an aestheticisation of politics which was vital to the

apparent success of the Nazi regime. By 1936, two years before his death, Barlach was under constant scrutiny by the authorities and many of his bronze sculptures had been dismantled or melted down.

After World War II, art exhibitions in the East funded by the SED regime included works by Die Brücke as well as Kollwits and Ernst Barlach, yet these were now reframed as politically active artists and incorporated into a longstanding socio-critical tradition of Realism.<sup>40</sup> In the work of Kollwits and Barlach, East German artists and art historians found a reference to the German proletarian art of the 1920s; and Expressionism consequently allowed East German artists to make a compromise between the artists' desired artistic autonomy and an attempt to satisfy the cultural politics of the SED leadership.<sup>41</sup> Despite the SED Party's official negation of Barlach in 1951, because he expressed an unacceptable 'subjective emotionality' in a social realm where art's purpose was to be in the service of science, artists and art historians found ways to negotiate the line between modernist art and the political system nevertheless. By the mid 1960s, Expressionism had become an acceptable visual language to the SED leadership, once again conceptualised as a legitimate socialist art that rejected bourgeois society. In 1967/68, then, when Fritz Cremer produced his Spain Fighter monument, the art of the Expressionists was a favorite visual quote among contemporary East German artists and art historians, allowing Cremer to address an artistic tradition of modern art and, at the same time, politically assert the humane ideas of socialism, the GDR's heritage, and the triumph of justice to come. Because Barlach's *The Avenger* supports Cremer's intention to depict a heroic fighter surging from the trenches, the acceptance of Cremer's monument as a 'work of art' by the Senate Monument Committee in 1993 necessitates a 'forgetting' of the role of Ernst Barlach as an artistic source.

### SIBYLLE BERGEMANN'S MARX AND ENGELS MONUMENT

The negotiations between a modernist tradition and Party guidelines for art continued in the 1970s and 80s, a period when the political elite permitted a greater variety in the visual arts. The 1986 Marx and Engels monument in Berlin serves as an example of such negotiations (ill. 5.4). Commissioned by the Central Committee of the SED and guided by the East German sculptor Ludwig Engelhardt, the monument ensemble on the Marx and Engels Forum echoes

several styles, including the art of Barlach as well as the Constructivists, at least conceptually, a Moscow-Berlin artistic connection prior to Stalin's programme of Socialist Realism.<sup>42</sup> While using Expressionism and Constructivism, the artists of the Marx and Engels Forum managed to please and adhere to the ideology and cultural-political preferences of Party officials in the 1980s through the installation's content, which narrates the global struggle of the proletariat towards revolution as led by the science of Marxism-Leninism.<sup>43</sup>

Rather than considering the modernist influences in the Marx and Engels installation, the reception of this state monument after the collapse of the GDR preferred a different and curiously teleological representation, seeing it as a symbol of the last and futile phase of GDR history.<sup>44</sup> An essay by Eugen Blume and Roland März in the catalogue for the 2003 exhibition *Kunst in der DDR*, held at the New National Gallery in Berlin, turns the Marx and Engels monument into the image of the state's collapse.<sup>45</sup> They accuse the makers of the Marx and Engels installation of 'false deification' of the his-



**5.4.** Ludwig Engelhardt, Marx and Engels monument (1986), bronze. Berlin. Photo: Kristine Nielsen.

torical persona of Marx and Engels, and in an effort to illustrate this point they refer to the series of images by Bergemann. Bergemann had followed the creation and installation of Engelhardt's Marx and Engels monument and captured various moments during its production and installation in Berlin.<sup>46</sup> Blume and März argue that her photographs disavow the statue and its 'ridiculous' and 'propagandistic' form.<sup>47</sup> The interpretation of Bergemann's photographs of the Marx and Engels monument in the exhibit *Art of Two Germanys / Cold War Cultures* is more refined but still noticeably rooted in the idea of her disavowal of the regime's programme. Indeed, her photographs come to represent the art exhibition as a whole – not only on the cover of the catalogue, but also on the banners outside the museum promoting the show. The catalogue cover pictures Bergemann's 1984 photograph of the Marx and Engels monument as a plaster cast where the upper bodies of Marx and Engels were still unfinished and unassembled, creating an eerie incompleteness or ghost-like presence because the identity of the two men remains unknown. The museum banners, on the other hand, show Bergemann's 1986 photograph of the sculpture of Engels as it is being installed on the square with a rope around its torso, thus seemingly dangling from the air and formally dividing the picture plane into two halves (ill. 5.1).

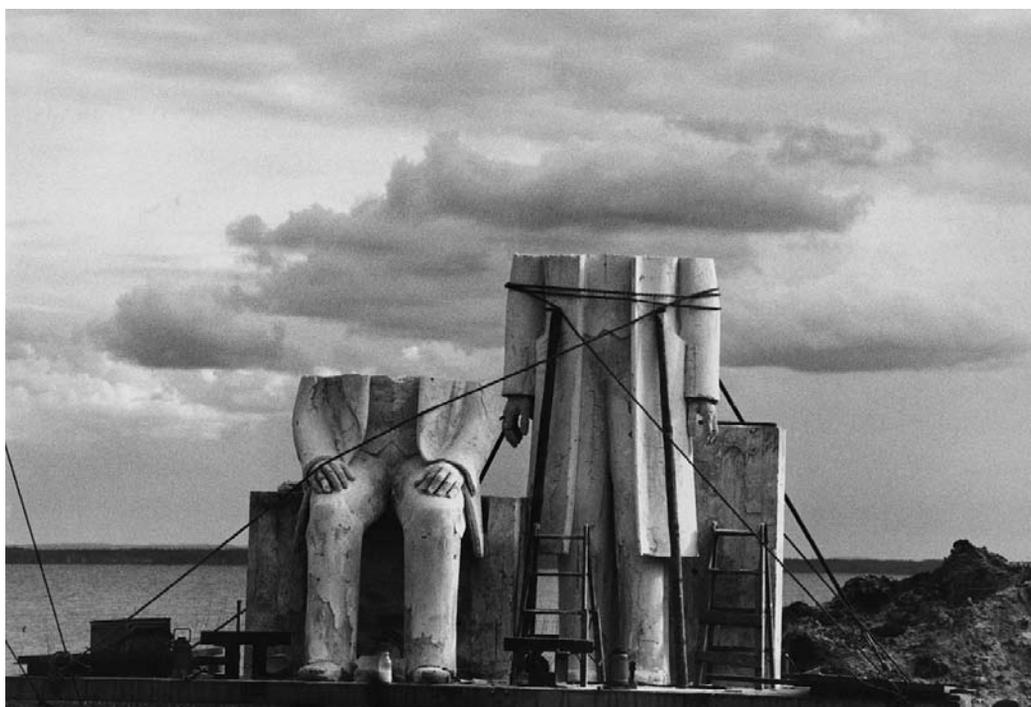
Bergemann's framed photographs were included in the *Art of Two Germanys* exhibition in a gallery room dedicated to the artistic and social criticism of the 1980s in East and West Germany. This room, entitled '1980-1989 Manic Normality in Germany', argued rather ambiguously that the preservation of routines took on a 'manic character' during this decade. The theme of the gallery also aimed to show how the SED regime slowly permitted more public criticism, which became a catalyst for change eventually leading to the end of the Cold War. Thus, Bergemann's two photographs, comprising the frontispiece for the exhibit as a whole, come to represent social and artistic criticism before the collapse of the GDR. In the catalogue one reads that:

Sibylle Bergemann's photographs reveal another insidious side of the GDR, through her use of the uncanny. In one picture of the installation of the Marx-Engels monument in Berlin, Engels appears to hang facedown from a noose. In another shot showing a construction site in Gummelin, the figures look like human bodies cut cleanly in half. Without knowledge of the dates these

photographs were taken, one could readily presume that they are documents of Communist monuments being dismantled. But more importantly, the division of identity that they suggest still resonates today.<sup>48</sup>

The monument's inception looks prophetically to its potential demolition, while the curators use the images to refer metaphorically to the two Germanys. What remains unexplored is the message of Bergemann's images before this recent interpretation. Would an examination of pre-1989 relations justify the conclusions that her photographs are a disavowal of the SED's propaganda art, as the exhibition *Kunst in der DDR* argued? Would it confirm the 'insidious' message about the GDR in her photographs, as claimed by *Art of Two Germanys*?

Bergemann, a fashion photographer, was commissioned by the Ministry of Culture of the GDR to document the creation of the Marx and Engels monument, from the winter of 1975 until its installation on the Forum in the spring of 1986. The Ministry of Culture used some of her early photographs from her collection on the monument-in-progress for their public exhibition about the Marx and Engels



**5.5.** Sibylle Bergemann, *Untitled (Gummlin)* (May 1984), photograph. © Sibylle Bergemann/Ostkreuz.



5.6. Sibylle Bergemann, *Untitled (Berlin)* (February 1986), photograph. © Sibylle Bergemann/Ostkreuz.

Forum in 1983.<sup>49</sup> In the 1984 photograph of plaster casts of Marx and Engels, *Untitled (Gummlin)*, showing only the lower parts of their bodies, they are fixed with strings to the board on which they stand (ill. 5.5). Because their cast, unfinished bodies are abruptly cut at the waist, the clouds behind them seem to hide their upper bodies, making it appear as if their heads are in the clouds. The sky was often used as the appropriate background for officially sanctioned monuments in the GDR, as it implied monumentality and a connection with the divine. Bergemann's image could be suggesting that if the strings were not holding the statues of Marx and Engels to the ground, these gods would rise to the heavens. Bergemann's own 1993 interpretation would appear to be in alignment with such a reading, for the theme of the divine reappears when some of her photographs were reprinted in the journal *Daidalos*. Bergemann entitles her photograph of Marx and Engels with their heads in the clouds 'Götterklein' ('Morsels of Gods').<sup>50</sup> Rather than being brought to the ground, Marx and Engels are elevated metaphorically to the skies in Bergemann's picture of the plaster casts of Marx and Engels.



**5.7.** Ernst Barlach, *The Güstrow Memorial* (1927), bronze. Güstrow, Cathedral.

Bergemann's photograph from February 1986, *Untitled (Berlin)*, capturing the moment that the bronze cast of Engels is being installed on the Forum, depicts the stiff and horizontally lifted bronze body of Engels hanging from a the rope of a crane (ill. 5.6). But is Engels hanging 'face down from a noose' (as *Art of Two Germanys* claims) if one takes into consideration that Bergemann's image is a visual reference to Barlach's bronze figure of a floating angel, the Güstrow Memorial from 1927? (ill. 5.7)<sup>51</sup> Barlach's statue hung in the Cathedral of Güstrow suspended from the ceiling. His commissioned memorial commemorated the 234 members of the congregation killed in World War I, but he memorialised it in such a way as to stress the tragedy of the event while ignoring any message of heroic duty or service to the nation. Consequently, his memorial conveyed a non-patriotic sentiment which was considered unacceptable to many, especially the National Socialists.<sup>52</sup> The bronze statue was confiscated by the Nazis in 1937 and melted down in the early 1940s. Like Barlach's angel, Bergemann's figure of Engels ('Engel' in German means angel) appears elevated above the earth and below

the heavens. In 1986, Bergemann's image of Engels in a tilted position, floating in mid-air, suggested the communist hero's affinity with the divine. The implication is that Bergemann quoted Barlach in order to endow the figure of Engels with the aura and sacredness of Barlach's no longer existent angel, thus in a sense resurrecting a legacy.

The GDR writer Heiner Müller's book of poetry, *Ein Gespenst verlässt Europa* from 1990, includes Bergemann's photos of the Marx and Engels statues reproduced at the end of the book. The book's title is a reference to the very first line of *The Communist Manifesto*, 'A spectre is haunting Europe', only Müller modifies the line to 'A spectre leaves Europe'.<sup>53</sup> Müller's 1990 juxtaposition of his critical poetry and Bergemann's photographs of the Marx and Engels monument recast her photographs as images that clarify Müller's words. Because of the poetry's political emphasis, Bergemann's images come to be read as satire of the SED regime, or even a 'parody' of Barlach's angel, according to the East German film director Peter Voigt in 1990. Voigt was also commissioned by the regime to assist in the production of the monument installations on the Marx and Engels Forum during the 1980s.<sup>54</sup> But to what extent did Bergemann 'parody' Barlach's angel in 1986, and what would such a parody entail, taking into account the immense respect that East German artists held for Barlach?

Indeed, did Bergemann possess the same political interests as Müller and express that agenda in her photographs before 1989? Müller's political interests were exposed as far from clear when, in 1992, the Stasi files were opened to the public. It became known rather than merely suspected that Müller, like other GDR writers, had collaborated with the Stasi. Müller had worked in support of the SED regime, while simultaneously claiming his resistance. The regime had given him gifts in exchange for conformist literature, which included some criticism of the regime, yet maintained the political system nonetheless. While other writers expressed their disappointment in Müller, his own reaction to the charges remained ambivalent. My point in reviving a twenty-year old controversy is not to judge Müller once again or even Bergemann for the compromises they may or may not have made, but to question why it has become pivotal for current artistic exhibitions to claim Bergemann as a subversive artist when the evidence of her practice before 1989 could just as easily suggest otherwise.

### SAVING EAST GERMAN IMAGES FOR ART

In many ways, the stakes involved in the current re-appropriation of Bergemann's photographs concern the definition of art. The view on art as necessarily autonomous believes that true art can only be produced with the artist's freedom to express his or her creativity without political restraints and guidelines. By representing Bergemann as a dissident, then, *Kunst in der DDR* had a particular mission in mind. Focusing primarily on paintings, the catalogue and exhibition portrays the category of the visual arts as a sphere where there is no place for commissioned political projects.<sup>55</sup> Despite its more diplomatic approach to commissioned GDR works, *Art of Two Germanys/Cold War Cultures* remains nonetheless dedicated, however subtly expressed, to the idea that good art is independent of a political commissioner and resistant to an oppressive political regime.

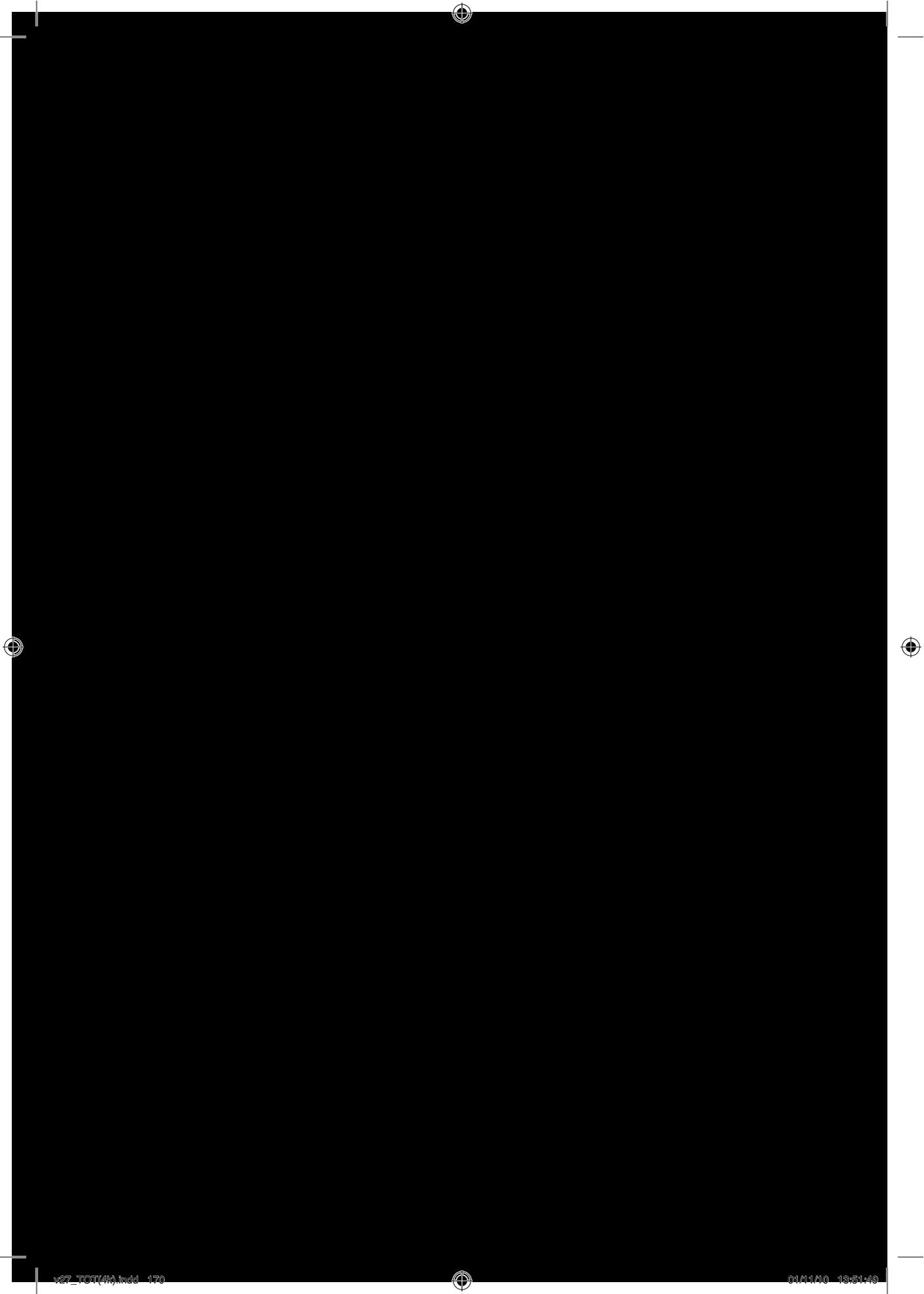
Describing a GDR photographer employed by the Party as sincerely aligning herself with the cultural politics of the SED regime in the 1980s would seem to unnecessarily complicate her status as an artist today. Indeed, few living artists who were active in the GDR would announce their compliance with or belief in the political goals of the former regime, as they wish to forget and dissociate themselves from the past. This belies the fact that well-respected East German artists were often proud of their state political commissions. There was never a shortage of GDR artists more than willing to undertake a politically motivated commission by the state or Party.<sup>56</sup> The goals of artists in the GDR were more compliant and sympathetic to various aspects of the politics in the GDR than current historiography tends to admit. The recent trend in the reception of East German art thus imposes a discursive form onto the visual arts which seeks to save artists for Western art history by placing them in the category of subversive GDR artists. The result is that the history of art of East Germany is being re-written as a history of and tribute to resistance. The interpretive development in the historiography of Barlach toward political affiliation provides an ironic twist to the events, when taking into consideration that Barlach himself was an avid defender of the autonomy of artistic creation. The trope of Barlach, which allowed East German artists a space of freedom to address a modernist tradition of autonomous art, is now too easily associated with its apparent opposite, with antifascism and the cultural policies of the SED regime.

## NOTES

- 1 *Art of Two Germanys: Cold War Cultures*, Los Angeles County Museum, Los Angeles, 2009; Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nuremberg, 2009; Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin, 2009–10.
- 2 Stephanie Barron and Sabine Eckmann (eds.), *Art of Two Germanys: Cold War Cultures* (exh. cat.), Los Angeles County Museum et al., pp. 344–45.
- 3 With regard to German concerns, Jürgen Habermas argues against nationalism and the ‘normalisation’ of the German past promoted by German nationalists after 1989, preferring, instead, that Germans consider 1945 as the turning point away from nationalism. Jürgen Habermas, *A Berlin Republic: Writings on Germany*, trans. Steven Rendall (University of Nebraska Press; Lincoln, 1997; German 1st edn. 1967), pp. 161–81.
- 4 For an analysis of the divided German constructions of memory after Nazism, see Jeffrey Herf, *Divided Memory: The Nazi Past in the Two Germanies* (Harvard University Press; Cambridge, 1997); Mary Nolan, ‘The Politics of Memory in the Bonn and Berlin Republic’, in Daniel Walkowitz and Lisa Maria Knauer (eds.), *Memory and the Impact of Political Transformation in Public Space* (Duke University Press; Durham and London, 2004).
- 5 The literature on the subject of memory and monument is enormous. To mention a limited few that focus on Berlin after German reunification, see Karen E. Till, *The New Berlin: Memory, Politics, Place* (University of Minnesota Press; Minneapolis and London, 2005); Jennifer A. Jordan, *Structures of Memory: Understanding Urban Change in Berlin and Beyond* (Stanford University Press; Stanford, 2006); Peter Carrier, *Holocaust Monument and National Memory: France and Germany since 1989* (Bergham Books; New York and Oxford, 2003).
- 6 Annette Tietenberg, ‘Denkmalpraxis in Ost- und West Berlin. Zum Denkmalbegriff’, in Eberhard Elfert et al. (eds.), *Erhalten, zerstören, verändern? Denkmäler der DDR in Ost-Berlin. Eine dokumentarische Ausstellung* (exh. cat.), Aktives Museum Faschismus und Widerstand in Berlin and Neue Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst, Berlin, 1990, p. 19.
- 7 James Young, ‘The Counter-Monument: Memory Against Itself in Germany Today’, *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 2, 1992, pp. 267–86; Walter Grasskamp (ed.), *Unerwünschte Monumente: Moderne Kunst im Stadtraum* (Silke Schreiber; Munich, 1992 [1989]); Michael Diers (ed.), *Mo(nu)mente: Formen und Funktionen ephemerer Denkmäler* (Akademie Verlag; Berlin, 1992); Felix Reusse, *Das Denkmal an der Grenze seiner Sprachfähigkeit* (Klett Cotta; Stuttgart, 1995).
- 8 Arthur Danto, ‘The Vietnam Veterans Memorial’, *The Nation*, August 31, 1986, p. 152. Young disputes Danto’s claim that any intrinsically formal difference exists in the function of a monument and a memorial. James Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (Yale University Press; New Haven, 1993), p. 3.
- 9 To Heinrich, ‘Denkmal’ remains the overarching term for all forms of commemoration. Christoph Heinrich, *Strategien des Erinnerns: Der veränderte Denkmalbegriff in der Kunst der achtziger Jahre* (Silke Schreiber; Munich, 1993), pp. 7 and 17. In contrast, Young chooses ‘memorial’ as the broader, more general term while he reserves ‘monument’ for the subset category that defines ‘material objects, sculptures, and installations used to memorialize a person or thing’. James Young, *The Texture of Memory*, p. 4.
- 10 Here ‘Denkmal’ is the broader category and umbrella term for forms of commemoration. The memorial is infamous for the many controversies surrounding it: the hiring of a firm that collaborated with the Nazis; the commemoration of Jews specifically and not the many minorities that were also persecuted and killed; and the randomly chosen location for the memorial. For the debates surrounding the monument, see Bürgerinitiative Perspektive Berlin (ed.), *Ein Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas: Dokumentation, 1988–1999* (Berlin, March 1995); Sybille Quack (ed.), *Auf dem Weg zur Realisierung. Das Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas und der Ort der Information. Architektur und historisches Konzept* (Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt; Stuttgart, 2002).
- 11 See for example Peter Reichel, ‘Berlin nach 1945 – eine Erinnerungslandschaft zwischen Gedächtnis-Verlust und Gedächtnis-Inszenierung’, in Hermann Hipp and Ernst Seidl (eds.), *Architektur als politischer Kultur: Philosophia practica* (Dietrich Reimer; Berlin, 1996); Herfried Münkler, ‘Das Kollektive Gedächtnis der DDR’, in Dieter Vorsteher (ed.), *Parteiauftrag: Ein neues Deutschland. Bilder, Rituale und Symbole der frühen DDR* (exh. cat.), Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin, 1996; Monika Flacke and Urike Schmiegelt, ‘Deutsche Demokratische Republik. Aus dem Dunkel zu den Sternen: Ein Staat im Geiste des Antifaschismus’, in Monika Flacke (ed.), *Mythen der Nationen: 1945-Arena der Erinnerungen: eine Ausstellung des Deutschen Historischen Museums ...* (exh. cat.), Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin, 2004, vol. 1.
- 12 SAPMO-BA, DY/30/J/IV 2/3/4089, Anlage Nr. 4 zum Protokoll Nr. 29, 18.03.1987, ‘Betreff: Zur Gestaltung von Denkmälern’, pp. 33–40.
- 13 Monika Flacke (ed.), *Auftrag: Kunst 1949–1990. Bildende Künstler in der DDR zwischen Ästhetik und Politik* (exh. cat.), Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin, 1995, p. 204.
- 14 Adelheid von Saldern, ‘Zusammenfassung’, in idem. (ed.), *Inszenierte Einigkeit: Herrschaftsrepräsentationen in DDR-Städten* (Franz Steiner; Stuttgart, 2003), vol. 1, p. 391.
- 15 Walter Ulbricht, ‘Die Großbauten im Fünfjahrplan. Rede auf dem III. Parteitag der SED’, *Neues Deutschland*, 23 July 1950.

- 16 SAPMO-BA, NY/4036/686, Abteilung Wirtschaftspolitik an das Politbüro, Berlin, 14.8.1950, 'Betr.: Neuaufbau Berlins'; Bruno Flierl, 'Rund um Marx und Engels: Berlins 'sozialistische' Mitte', in Helmut Engel and Wolfgang Ribbe (eds.), *Hauptstadt Berlin - Wohin mit der Mitte? Historische, städtebauliche und architektonische Wurzeln des Stadtzentrums* (Akademie Verlag, 1993), p. 126.
- 17 Brigitte Hartel, *Denkmalgestaltungen in der DDR. Ein Beitrag zur Bestimmung einiger Grundzüge der Denkmalgestaltungen in der DDR unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Jahre 1971 bis 1989* (PhD diss., Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, 1992), pp. 11-12; Ulrike Goeschen, 'From Socialist Realism to Art in Socialism. The Reception of Modernism as an Instigating Force in the Development of Art in the GDR', *Third Text*, vol. 23, no. 1, January 2009, p. 53.
- 18 The vast majority of large statues in the GDR were figurative and placed in connection with an architectural ensemble. Commemorative stones and stelae were often abstract and linked to an historical site. Elfert et al., *Erhalten*, p. 21.
- 19 Hartel, 'Denkmalgestaltungen', pp. 11-12.
- 20 Adelheid von Saldern, 'Einleitung', in idem., *Inszenierte Einigkeit*, vol. 1, p. 38.
- 21 Heinrich, *Strategien*, p. 18.
- 22 David Lowenthal, 'Fabricating Heritage', *History and Memory*, vol. 10, spring/summer 1998, pp. 5-24.
- 23 Abgeordnetenhaus von Berlin, 'Kommission zum Umgang mit den politischen Denkmälern der Nachkriegszeit im ehemaligen Ost-Berlin', Drucksache 12/2743 (Berlin, 15 February 1993), p. 6.
- 24 Abgeordnetenhaus, 'Kommission', p. 15.
- 25 Abgeordnetenhaus, 'Kommission', p. 6.
- 26 Abgeordnetenhaus, 'Kommission', p. 13.
- 27 Abgeordnetenhaus, 'Kommission', p. 13.
- 28 Fritz Cremer: 'Ich habe den Auftrag freudig übernommen. Diese Gedenkstätte ist ein Symbol dafür, dass wir das Vermächtnis des kämpfenden spanischen Volkes und der Interbrigadisten hochhalten. Der in äusserster Spannung aus dem Graben zum Angriff aufsteigende Kämpfer ist unbesiegbar. Muss er auch für eine Weile der Übermacht weichen, seine Kraft, die Kraft des proletarischen Internationalismus, bleibt ungebrochen!' Quoted in Rosemarie Stettin (ed.), *Berlin Hauptstadt der DDR. Der Leninplatz und Volkspark Friedrichshain* (Berlin-Information; Berlin, 1971), p. 14.
- 29 As quoted by Gerd Brüne, *Pathos und Sozialismus: Studien zum plastischen Werk Fritz Cremers (1906-1993)* (Verlag und Datenbank für Geisteswissenschaften; Weimar, 2005), p. 289.
- 30 Brüne, *Pathos*, p. 288.
- 31 Goeschen, 'From Socialist Realism', p. 51.
- 32 Stiftung Archiv der Akademie der Künste Berlin, 'Sitzungen der Sektion Bildende Kunst 1967-68', and 'Plenartagung der Deutschen Akademie der Künste zu Berlin am 22. Mai 1969'.
- 33 Dario Gamboni, *The Destruction of Art: Iconoclasm and Vandalism since the French Revolution* (Reaktion Books; London, 1997), p. 87.
- 34 Brüne, *Pathos*, p. 286.
- 35 Brüne, *Pathos*, pp. 286-87.
- 36 As quoted in the epigraph to Peter Paret, *An Artist against the Third Reich: Ernst Barlach, 1933-1938* (Cambridge University Press; Cambridge, 2003), p. v.
- 37 Brüne, *Pathos*, p. 287.
- 38 Paret, *An Artist*, p. 27.
- 39 Paret, *An Artist*, pp. 30 and 40.
- 40 Günter Feist (ed.), *Stationen eines Weges. Daten und Zitate zur Kunst und Kunstpolitik der DDR 1945-1988* (Dirk Nischen; Berlin, 1988), pp. 9-10; John-Paul Stonard, *Fault Lines: Art in Germany 1945-1955* (Ridinghouse; London, 2007), pp. 183 and 272.
- 41 Goeschen, 'From Socialist Realism', p. 49.
- 42 For an account of the Constructivist approach to the Marx and Engels monument, see my dissertation: *Gestures of Iconoclasm: East Berlin's Political Monuments, from the Late German Democratic Republic to Postunified Berlin* (University of Chicago, 2010).
- 43 Ministerium für Kultur, *Marx-Engels-Forum: Das Denkmal für Karl Marx und Friedrich Engels in Berlin, Hauptstadt der DDR* (exh. cat.), Akademie der Künste der DDR, Marstall, April 1983, p. 6.
- 44 Authors who have also noted this trend include Hans-Ernst Mittag, 'Was ist aus Denkmälern der DDR heute zu lernen?', in Ralph Lindner, Christiane Mennicke and Silke Wagler (eds.), *Kunst im Stadtraum - Hegemonie und Öffentlichkeit* (DresdenPostplatz; Dresden, 2004), p. 89; and Brian Ladd, *The Ghosts of Berlin: Confronting German History in the Urban Landscape* (The University of Chicago Press; Chicago and London, 1997), p. 206. Some authors who have promoted the historicist view are: Jan Gympel, 'Ab ins Museum? Zur Zukunft der Denkmäler in der DDR', *Zitty*, vol. 18, August-September 1990, pp. 30-33; Sergiusz Michalski, *Public Monuments: Art in Political Bondage 1870-1997* (Reaktion Books; London, 1998), p. 147; and Svenja Moor, 'Marx-Engels-Forum 1977-1986', in Hans Dickel and Uwe Fleckner (eds.), *Kunst in der Stadt: Skulpturen in Berlin 1980-2000* (Nicolai; Berlin, 2003), p. 67.
- 45 Eugen Blume and Roland März, 'Utopie und Realität - Vom Scheitern in der Geschichte', in idem. (eds.), *Kunst in der DDR. Eine Retrospektive der Nationalgalerie* (exh. cat.), Neue Nationalgalerie, Berlin, 2003, p. 293.
- 46 Sibylle Bergemann's photographs have been reproduced several places, including in Barron and Eckmann, *Art of Two Germanys*, cover, p. 345; Heiner Müller, *Ein Gespenst verlässt Europa* (Kiepenheuer & Witsch; Berlin, 1990); 'Götterklein / Morcels [sic] of Gods', photographs by Sibylle Bergemann, *Daidalos*, vol. 49, September 1993, pp. 100-03.

- 47 Blume and März, 'Utopie', p. 293.
- 48 Barron and Eckmann, *Art of Two Germanys*, p. 344.
- 49 Ministerium, *Marx-Engels-Forum*.
- 50 'Götterklein / Morcels', pp. 100-03.
- 51 Peter Voigt, 'Nachwort', in Müller, *Ein Gespenst verlässt Europa*, n.p..
- 52 Paret, *An Artist*, pp. 39-48.
- 53 Müller, *Ein Gespenst verlässt Europa*.
- 54 Voigt, 'Nachwort', n.p.. Peter Voigt and Arno Fischer were given permission and funds to travel to Paris, Amsterdam, London and New York City, with their wives, in the 1980s to do research for the Marx and Engels monument installations and collect photographs depicting international revolutionary struggle. This caused significant hostility toward these favoured members among other artists. SAPMO-BA, DŸ30/vorl. SED 38790, 'Brief von Gen. Hoffmann an Gen. Hager, 14.11.1984, "Zum Stand der Arbeiten am Marx-Engels-Denkmal der Hauptstadt Berlin"; BA, DR/1/1757, folios 97, 100, 133 and 138.
- 55 Christiane Mennicke, 'Kunst im Stadtraum - Hegemonie und Öffentlichkeit', in Lindner et al., *Kunst im Stadtraum*, pp. 12-13.
- 56 Bernd Lindner, *Verstellter, offener Blick. Eine Rezeptionsgeschichte bildender Kunst im Osten Deutschlands 1945-1995* (Böhlau; Cologne, Weimar and Vienna, 1998 [PhD diss., 1995]), p. 156.



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# TOTALITARIAN SOCIETY VISUALISED

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## 6 VEILED MODERNITY IN NATIONAL SOCIALIST MUSEUM PRACTICES

SANDRA ESSLINGER

National-socialism desires that the art play a befitting part in the life of the German people again, that the people come into close contact with the art. May the House of German Art serve always and in loyalty this high and ideal task.

Catalogue for the *Grosse Deutsche Kunst Ausstellung*, 1937<sup>1</sup>

### INTRODUCTION

Nazi propaganda ministry policies were notorious for rejecting and attacking modernist avant-garde artistic practices in the name of constructing a true 'German Identity'; yet, they used them to display the undesirable. Thus, the Nazi relationship to modernity was both complex and contradictory. Jeffrey Herf, in a sociological investigation of the Weimar period through the Nazi regime, identifies this complexity as 'reactionary modernism', a right-wing, politically conservative movement that takes place within the framework of modernism.<sup>2</sup> Reactionary modernism describes an ideological trend in early 20th century Germany, when technology was embraced and Enlightenment reason was rejected.<sup>3</sup> The rejection of Enlightenment reason is coupled with what Joseph Goebbels termed a 'steel like romanticism' (*stählernde Romanticism*),<sup>4</sup> the pastoral being paired with the industrial aspects of the modern nation state. According to Herf, reactionary modernists were modernist in two ways: 1) as technological modernists, and 2) as modernists who believed in 'the triumph of the spirit and will over reason and the subsequent fusion of this will to an aesthetic mode.'<sup>5</sup> He continues that 'modernism celebrated the self, when modernists turned to politics, they sought engagement, commitment, and authenticity, experiences the Fascists and Nazis promised to provide.'<sup>6</sup> The attempt to bring modernisation technologically into line with the romantic or mythological idea of the Nazi *völkisch* ideology is well illustrated by Goebbels in the following passage:

[...] National Socialism never rejected or struggled against technology. Rather, one of its main tasks was to consciously affirm it, to fill it inwardly with soul, to discipline it and to place it in the service of our people and their cultural level.<sup>7</sup>

The romantic was linked with an irrationality that rejected the Enlightenment ideals. Yet, romanticism was a modern movement. The complexity of linking a 'forward-looking' or modern perspective with the 'backward-looking' or romantic is evident in Nazi museal practices. Indeed, the concept of a reactionary modernism is very useful in studying the complex form of modernity presented in the Nazi art world itself.

To examine the reactionary modernism of the Nazis, we turn to modern museal<sup>8</sup> practices utilised in the 1937 *Great German Art Exhibition* (*GAE*, *Grosse Deutsche Kunst Ausstellung*) in Munich, which was the first exhibition of official Nazi art. Nazi museological practices embraced the most modern display techniques of the day, employing hanging and lighting techniques that are still used today. Despite their rejection of the modernist or avant-garde artistic vocabulary, practices and lifestyles, modern elements were hidden under the visual cues of romantic, conservative, populist, realist and classical 'German' artistic practices. In order to make visible modern elements in museum practices, the architecture as well as the art-work and hangings in the *GAE* are addressed, including a comparison with the *Degenerate Art Exhibition* held at the same time across the park, suggesting a contradictory and complementary dialogue. What are seen as ubiquitous and conservative museal conventions used in the *GAE* were also part of new museal practices.

The practices that relate to the display and production of art work in Nazi Germany are often dismissed as a 'rupture' in or anomalous to the historical 'progression' of artistic production. Most art historical surveys focus on the notorious *Degenerate Art Exhibition* and dismiss the official Nazi exhibitions as retrograde or propaganda. The *GAE* was an official annual exhibition. If the official Nazi art works are acknowledged, it is usually to show the contrast between the official works and the 'degenerate' works.<sup>9</sup> However, the work displayed in the *GAE* was considered to be art by the Nazis and was displayed as such. Thus, it seems fitting to deal with these works as art and not to dismiss them in order to see what impact they may have had theoretically. Furthermore, these official works were woven into the modern German institution of the museum, which displayed art to the public.

### THE TEMPLE OF GERMAN ART

The importance of art to the Third Reich is clear when one is aware that the *Temple of German Art* (ill. 6.1) was the first structure that the Nazi party ordered to be built after coming to power, a building which became a domicile for Party-endorsed art.<sup>10</sup> According to the Party's chief racial theorist Alfred Rosenberg, the *Temple* was the place in which art was to be used to 'reawaken' the *volk*-spirit and religion.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, the museum was to be a part of the community's cultural as well as spiritual education.<sup>12</sup> Rosenberg claimed that the duty



6.1. Paul Ludwig Troost, *Temple of German Art* (1937). Munich.

of the artist was, in part, to give the community an ideal image of itself. The ‘Nordic’ viewer should lose track of time, place and distance. The viewer was put into an environment where (s)he would be able to contemplate the greater meaning of the artistic message.<sup>13</sup>

The official exhibitions held there were ‘blockbusters’ in today’s rhetoric – in other words, they were exceptionally well attended. The walls of the *Temple of German Art* functioned as physical boundaries within which the viewer was to leave behind the ‘secular’ or ‘real world’ atmosphere and its corresponding patterns of behaviour and progress to a ‘spiritual’ or ‘ideal’ environment, adopting the behaviour and manners of a virtuous citizen. In short, the museum acted as a frame in which a prescribed process of forming the ideal citizen, a subscriber to Aryan spirituality, the *volk*, was catalysed. In a compelling environment, the visitors were educated in their comportment while being surveyed and controlled; they were to leave transformed into ideal citizens, a development which was not unusual as such knowledge and power functions are those of the modern museum. The *Temple of German Art* was the archetypal setting for this process.<sup>14</sup>

Nazi political philosophy and practice, largely involving the recycling of already existing cultural traits and values, was directed toward constructing a power base, the Nazi *volk*. This articulation of a romanticised mythological *volk* and its historical roots occurred in the *Great German Art Exhibition*, where further performative space was provided. 'Space' included the general architectural environment, the ways in which the objects were hung, ordered and labelled, and the social events, souvenirs and media which surrounded the exhibits. The latter extended the museum space outside to the lives of the people, providing sites for socially and politically elicited behaviour and an epistemology. The museum was the context that constructed the objects and *volk* as 'art'; the museum attempted to direct the appropriate behaviour of the viewers, which reified the status of the objects and *volk* as 'art' works. These associated values and meanings not only provided a signifying structure that corresponded to the works of art but also transposed onto a different signified, the actual groups or individuals that correlated to the works of art. The display was a narcissistic presentation to and of the visitor, i.e. only the 'attractive' elements of the Nazi *volk* ideology were represented within the frame of the museum. Thus, a semiological system was constructed within the space of the *Temple of German Art* that created a mythology for the 'True German Identity', a type of mirror for the viewer and an ideal of the 'virtuous German citizen'.

The *GAE* provided an arena in which the audience could (per)form an identity of the citizenry in a modern national museum. The performance relied heavily upon pre-existing protocol and signifying systems, tropes, which were in place prior to the exhibitions. The exhibitions then served the purpose of manipulating ideas which were already familiar and acceptable to the audience. Carol Duncan relates this manipulative and 'constructive' power of the modern museum in the following:

To control a museum means precisely to control the representation of a community and some of its highest, most authoritative truths. It also means the power to define and rank people, to declare some as having a greater share than others in the community's common heritage – in its very identity. Those who are in the greatest accord with the museum's version of what is beautiful and good may partake of this greater identity.<sup>15</sup>

## REACTIONARY MODERN MUSEUM PRACTICES: THE GREAT GERMAN ART EXHIBITION

It should be recognised from the outset that the *Temple of German Art* was not only a kind of spiritual sanctuary, but also a museum with an overall environment associated with modern museum practices. A desire to be a member of the *volk* was promoted by the ideological framework of the museum, where science and technology were used to frame an exhibition in the interest of constructing a myth and identity of the citizen. What makes this exhibition a reactionary modern exhibition is that the myth constructed was romantic, which in turn necessitates a rejection of Enlightenment reason. Modern Nazi museum practices promoted a romantic ideal, the *volk*,<sup>16</sup> an aspect of romanticism. However, the development of the modern museum itself was guided by Enlightenment principles. Stylistic and institutional breaks with established traditions in the name of progress may be seen as a progeny of the Enlightenment, which provided the epistemology that became naturalised in the modern nation state and a subject of postmodern critical evaluation. The major strategy arising out of this Enlightenment mode of thinking is the idea of a unitary end of history and of the subject, a master-narrative which tells the universally 'true' story and legitimises this 'truth' through the consensus of authorities in their respective fields. This aspect of modernity is one way of starting to understand the development of modern museal practices.

The ultimate realisation of Enlightenment ideals has been seen in the revolutionary fervour which swept through the United States, France and the UK in the last quarter of the 18th century, when the modern nation-state came into being. At that time there was a series of legitimising 'myths' or 'cultural fictions' that rose to the service of the modern nation-state. The two main 'cultural fictions' were the mystery novel and the museum.<sup>17</sup> The museum and its sister institution, art history, were the cultural fictions formed as part of the nation-state's need to create and maintain power. As a result of serving the needs of the nation-state, there were modern forces and powers at play that were part of the covert existence of these two institutions. It is these covert forces and aims, residing at the very heart of modern practices, that were exemplified in the general practice of art history and museology in the Third Reich and were present at the *GAE*.

The policies which controlled art in the Third Reich were strictly based on racism. Furthermore, this racism was governed by evolutionistic ideas which are today considered at least partly pseudo-scientific. This discourse comprised modern ideas such as genetics and natural progressive evolution, which were widespread in many Western contexts, but took a particularly sinister form in Nazi Germany.<sup>18</sup> The following quote from *Mein Kampf* should illustrate the use of this modern discourse and vocabulary within the context of Nazi thought:

Every animal mates only with a member of the same species [...]. Any crossing of two beings not at exactly the same level produces a medium between the level of the two parents. This means: the offspring will probably stand higher than the racially lower parent, but not as high as the higher one [...] No more than Nature desires the mating of weaker with strong individuals, even less does she desire the blending of a higher with a lower race, since, if she did, her whole work of higher breeding, over perhaps hundreds of thousands of years, might be ruined with one blow [...]. It shows with terrifying clarity that in every mingling of Aryan blood with that of lower peoples the result was the end of the cultured people [...].<sup>19</sup>

The progressive leitmotiv of modernity considered the evolution of humanity to move from 'rude' simplicity to 'civilised' complexity. Thus, the ultimate aim of evolution was that all the peoples of the planet would eventually catch up with the white European. It seems, however, that one difference between the democratic Enlightenment thought of human evolution and Hitler's reactionary modernity is that Hitler dared to overtly pronounce the pinnacle of evolution in his own time rather than 'politely' implying it; and that he also linked this pinnacle exclusively with race rather than culture.

The National Socialist movement set out to redefine the *volk* as a *totality*, which was a race, a government, a set of customs and traditions, including a religion based on romanticised origins and the uniqueness and predispositions of the Aryan race and soul.<sup>20</sup> Modernity was the frame for Nazi myth, asserting that there was a unitary end of history and of the subject as well as a master-narrative, describing the totalised and true story of the totalitarian state. The art of the Third Reich was employed in a modern fashion in order to foster the Nazi racial myth. Dr. Paul Schutze-Naumburg and Dr. Hans Guenther, both Nazi art historians, promoted the notion that classic or Hellenic beauty was Nordic and any deviation was degen-

erate – applying principles of eugenics. They believed that works of art reflected the artist, and specifically his or her race. If an artist was of inferior racial strain or suffered from mental or physical illness, their art work would have identifiable ‘degenerate’ features. People of a ‘pure’ blood line would produce classical beauty, a reflection of themselves.<sup>21</sup> Dr. Walter Darre, a colleague of Schultze-Naumburg, furthered this doctrine of racial art by fostering the idea that art should serve eugenic racial selection and promote the birth rate. All of this was solidified and made party doctrine with the publication of Rosenberg’s *Myth of the Twentieth Century* in 1930. Thus, a work of true German art became a form of evidence or ‘scientific proof’ of the genetic make-up of the artist, demonstrating that which is beautiful and desirable as an ‘ideal-I’ or depicting the proper Aryan mate for the propagation of the Nazi race. Thus, by utilising the modern myth of proof and evidence, relating to the pseudo-scientific foundations of genetics and evolution, the Nazi myth was seemingly not only legitimated but also propagated.

The uses of art within the institution of the museum acted as an educational instrument of modern ‘totalising’ and homogenising in the Third Reich. This was further articulated by the appointed Nazi director of German art education, Robert Boettcher,<sup>22</sup> who promoted the ideas that art was the ‘social cement’ of society and that art should reflect the collective mentality of the people. He viewed art as important in the promotion of patriotism through an appreciation of German history, beauty and myth and in combating social unrest by providing enjoyment for Germans through exhibitions and museum tours.

The idea of art and the museum as educational tools or institutions is not an uncommon modern notion. In fact, the following quote is a description of the British Museum of the 18th century: ‘the Museum was endeavoring to educate all classes. A predominant concern of those interested in the education and the ‘civilizing’ of the public was the use of the Museum as a means for providing an aesthetic education.’<sup>23</sup> The prime example of the use of Nazi art as ‘education’ of the people is exactly seen in the 1937 *Great German Art Exhibition*. It was the beginning of the artistic legitimisation of the new Reich, which required the building of a cultural myth and legitimising the Nazis as cultural benefactors and leaders of the new state by demonstrating what it meant to be German through art.

Donald Preziosi views modern museums as performing ‘the basic historical gesture of *separating out of the present* a certain specific ‘past’ so as to collect and recompose (to *re-member*) its displaced and dismembered relics as elements in a *genealogy* of and for the present.’<sup>24</sup> This was evidenced clearly in the opening of the *GAE*. In Hitler’s dedication speech, he referred to the museum as a ‘Temple’ – ‘a House of Art for the German People’ housing an art that corresponded ‘to the ever-increasing homogeneity of our racial composition, and that would then in itself present the characteristics of unity and homogeneity [...] what it means to be German’.<sup>25</sup>

Further, Preziosi states that the modern museum teaches us how to solve things, how to think and how to piece the world together in a coherent, rational and orderly manner – the natural – and that the present job of the museum seems to be to tie identity and cultural patrimony to a historical or mythical past. In short, the museum evokes and enacts ‘a desire for panoptic or panoramic points of view from which it may be seen that all things may indeed fit together in a true, natural, real or proper order [...] convincing us that each of us could ‘really’ occupy privileged synoptic positions [...] The use of prefabricated materials and vocabularies [...] [and provide] demonstration and proof, and techniques of stagecraft and dramaturgy’,<sup>26</sup> and this is exactly what occurred in the lavish historical parade offered during the *Days of German Art* and within the frame of the *GAE*. To be extended a role in history or myth gave individuals the illusion that they occupied a panoptic position. What was meant by ‘to be German’ was offered in the events which surrounded the opening of the exhibition as well as in the exhibition, itself.

For the Nazis, the *GAE* was the elixir that would heal a great society gone astray. It was a demonstration of what was beautiful and what it meant to be an ideal citizen in Nazi society. The ideal citizen was a highly romanticised version of the German, which is the key to reactionary modernism in Nazi museum practices. The romanticised German was based on heroism, exaltation of their ‘primitive’ roots and an association with nature – an imaginary notion of the Aryan race. Major representative categories of the German exhibition of 1937 were Hitler and his leaders, womanhood, manhood and rural landscapes. Landscapes were used to represent an idealised rural Germany, while womanhood and manhood displayed idealised Aryans and Nazis divided along gender lines. Men held public offices and military positions – they were bread winners or farmers and pro-

viders. In short, men dominated the public sphere; and the art works depicted men in such activities. Women dominated the private sphere. They were mothers, farmers<sup>27</sup> and housewives. The German Madonna and Child or 'mother happily nurturing her children' were the most frequently seen female images. The woman's role was in the household or as an allegory. Reproduction was the ultimate function of the woman. The woman held the 'natural' or 'biological' position in society. Farmers and landscapes were representations that naturalised the Aryan subject and associated the identity with nature, fertility and fecundity,<sup>28</sup> while (re)presentations of Hitler and the leaders not only acted as venerable icons but also possessed a surveying panoptic gaze. This kind of categorisation typifies the exhibits displayed by modern museums: 'for every people and ethnicity, for every class and gender, for every individual no less than for every race, there may be projected a legitimate 'art' with its own unique spirit and soul; its own history and prehistory; its own future potential; its own respectability; and its own style of representational adequacy.'<sup>29</sup> In fact, this following discussion of the modern museum by Preziosi seems to describe that of the *GAE*:

The institution places its user in anamorphic positions from which it may be seen that a certain historical dramaturgy unfolds with seamless naturalism [...] what one is distracted from is of course the larger picture and the determinations of these storied spaces: the overall social effects of these ritual performances, which (a) instantiate an ideology of the nation as but an individual subject writ large, and (b) reduce all differences and disjunctions between individuals and cultures to variations on the same; two different but commensurate versions of the same substance and identity. In such a regime, we are all relatives in this Family-of-Man-and/as-Its-Works.<sup>30</sup>

With this view of the modern museum, society can be united under aesthetic preferences and schooling that are administered by the state. In the case of the Nazis, the art was overtly used in order to control and direct the 'desire' of an ego ideal as well as of the mate one desires. The ego ideal was comprised of gender identity and all of the accoutrement required of that subject position. The controlling and directing of taste also affected the way in which people chose a mate, for the mate had to be aesthetically pleasing in order to be desired. The notion of beauty in the Third Reich was primarily physical,<sup>31</sup> for beauty was the result of purity of the race. This beauty directly correlated to the reproduction practices in Nazi society,

which had as their ultimate goal the production of a pure Aryan race: a eugenic and sometimes modern concept.

To promote this education and these aesthetic preferences, the modern museum offered each object as a trap for the gaze. The art work ought to speak directly to the viewer with a minimum of interference and distraction. In the *GAE* museum space, the pieces were hung at eye-level with limited commentary. This, accompanied by the clear representational form of the sculpture or the painting in question, framed the work in a context of clear legibility. The frame of the entire exhibition and surrounding events disallowed any free-play of meaning.

Furthermore, the intense interaction between the art works and the individual viewer provided the ultimate opportunity to 'personalise' the education. There were varied representations in the exhibition, catering to individual differences and diverse stations in society. Diversity is a strange term to use for the representations of the Aryan race; however, some diversity within the 'race' was recognised – diversity in careers, Germanic cultural groups, age and geographical locations. Thus, any Aryan was sure to find a painting that communicated to her/him and presumably offered an ego ideal or a desirable ideal mate. The masses could be tamed and educated in a museum space which trapped and spoke directly to the viewers in personal terms. In sum, the *GAE* offered, in a modern environment, an organised, deliberate and 'enlightened' synoptic view of what it meant to be German and what it meant to be a German man or woman, stereotypical gender roles.

In sum, the art displayed in the *GAE* deliberately wove a myth of the German ideal which the Nazis claimed was based on scientific reasoning, but this reasoning was distorted for the purpose of developing the romantic myth. Thus, Enlightenment reason was rejected in deference to romanticism. The displays presented were, in fact, those of reactionary modernism with myths being offered within the most technologically advanced environment of the museum.

#### **REACTIONARY MODERN MUSEUM PRACTICES: THE ENVIRONMENT OF THE *GREAT GERMAN ART EXHIBITION***

The *Temple of German Art* was described as follows in the official Nazi 1934 booklet, *The Temple of German Art Munich*, written for English-speaking tourists to introduce and justify its construction, location and historical significance:

The “Temple of German Art” now to be erected in place of the old “Glass Palace” which was destroyed by a fearful conflagration will not merely signify the outer symbol of this indomitable will of the new government and the German people to rejuvenate that veritable German Art, but is, in the first place, to be its lasting domicile, its permanent home, by its works ever proclaiming at home and abroad the innermost substance of the German soul.<sup>32</sup>

The *Temple*, the place in which the ‘true German soul’ was to be embodied for eternity, was a symbolic limestone domicile. But why should Munich be the chosen city for the *Temple*? The booklet tells us about the art historical mythology of the location:

The race, populating the south-German towns and villages, so deeply rooted in its ancient, purely German traditions, so warm-hearted and hospitable, so fervent and nature-loving and genuine, has ever singly influenced art, has always occupied itself with its promotion and has at all times considered art as the reflector of its racial soul.<sup>33</sup>

Along these lines, the *volk* is romanticised as a culture closer to its pure origins. The whole Nazi artistic programme was set out in this 24-page booklet. It begins by stating the importance of art and art museums to the national identity:

Works of art are not a dispensable luxury for any nation [...] as the art activity of a country unveils a people’s common soul, thus, this artistic utterance reflects upon the view of life of all those who open their hearts and minds to its influence. Thus, the furtherance of a genuine, unadulterated German art must be and is one of the principal tasks of the national state, of the whole German people.<sup>34</sup>

The text reveals the art which is to be valued by the ‘German people’, and introduces the polarisation of ‘Degenerate art’ versus ‘German art’, without using the term ‘degenerate’. Art as a ‘reflector’ of the people is taken into a logical circularity in which ‘the art productions of a people are the criterion according to which the vitality of a people can be judged, the instrument by means of which its vigor can be tested: art is the ‘breath of a nation’s nostrils.’<sup>35</sup> Therefore, Nazi art is a reflection of the people; and the people are a reflection of their art.

The second significant publication which was part of the museum’s propagandistic machine was the German catalogue for the 1937 GAE, *Grosse Deutsche Kunstausstellung 1937: Im Haus der Deutschen Kunst zu Muenchen*, which further sets<sup>36</sup> the stage with regard to how this art came to be exhibited. The selection of the paintings was done

in the academic tradition. According to the catalogue, a request was made public for German artists from everywhere in the world to submit paintings for 'examination'. 25,000 pieces were submitted; 15,000 were sent on to Munich; and 900 were exhibited, an almost democratic process. The criteria for exhibition were as follows:

It is clear that only the most complete, finished and best can be shown of what German art is able to achieve in this unique United German Art exhibition [...] Problematic and incomplete art will not now or ever have a chance of acceptance in the House of German Art.<sup>37</sup>

These criteria are met out of '[...] the obligation which lies in the architecture of the House of German Art! It is a building of the most perfect National Socialistic architecture.'<sup>38</sup> The building is seen as a gift from the Führer and Paul Ludwig Troost, the architect, to the German artists and people and the culture of the (Aryan) world. Again, this is a process of exclusion, laying claim to Aryan representative art. It sets up a power structure which puts the Nazis in a position of judgment and recognition. They demonstrate by example 'good taste' and 'virtuous citizenship'.

The 'Foreword' in this catalogue concludes with a powerful statement of an exclusive, unified German identity that shares a common history or deep history of the German past:

In the Führer's words which stand above the entrance of the House of German Art, "Art is an obligating mission of fanaticism, superior to one's fate." May this sentence always stay in sight of the German artistic genius in all their works; that it [art] may be the fanatic fulfillment of their [the artists] superior mission – from these highest artistic achievements, which are worthy of the great artistic German past and which are incomparable, a newly arisen highest expression of the greatness of [German] blood and earth, of the National Socialist position and of a world perception, a new German era is born.<sup>39</sup>

Thus, good taste, which is a trait held by the most exemplary of citizens, is institutionalised in the *GAE*. If one desires to be part of the 'virtuous citizenry' and partake in the 'community's common heritage [...] in its very identity', one must accept the 'highest and most authoritative [Aryan] truths', consecrated (constructed and romanticised) within the walls of the Nazi museum or temple.

The catalogue section on 'The House of German Art in Munich' delves deeper into the architecture of the building than the booklet the *Temple of German Art*.

The catalogue description of the museum offers a mould or boundary within which aspects of the 'modern' are absorbed or exiled. The text elaborately describes the museum's appearance (colonnades, stairways and materials), thereby attempting to illustrate the enormous but simple construction. It begins with a visitor crossing the street and walking up the front steps into the entry hall, detailing the minimal architectural embellishments (limestone, marble and mosaics). One is given the sense of an austere classical building, grandeur being expressed in the materials, space and light.<sup>40</sup> The plain, austere geometric architectural elements gave one the impression that the Nazis truly had not completely escaped modernist artistic vernacular. What was avoided was any actual display of technology and any direct use of an obviously modernist or avant-garde elevation or style.

For the Nazis, there was a conflict between using current technologies in the museum and being perceived as avant-garde. As we know, the 'temple' for the romantic myth of the *volk* could not allow technology to be visible in the architecture or it would approximate an avant-garde building style. From this perspective, the strengths, weaknesses and constructive power of the frame become apparent. The concept of the *volk* was constructed within the walls of the museum. The concept of the *volk* was defined through exiling those things that were seen as not being part of the concept, i.e. things that were othered. The modernist or avant-garde was seen as anarchistic, Marxist, Jewish and degenerate. However, the Nazis were not able to exile all the constitutive elements of 'modern' – and nor was this desirable. The Nazis attempted to construct the 'modernist' or avant-garde as an 'other', which was equated with the rise in metropolitanism and avant-garde artistic styles. But they also wanted to be seen as progressive and superior to their 'modernist other', which disallowed the exclusion of technological advancement. This conflict forced them to negotiate their position. The negotiation was present in the architecture of the museum, which looked to antiquity for its design and materials in its elevation and to the modern for its displays, which included not only the way the objects were hung, but also the lighting and climate control.

Technology was embraced through the lighting in the museum. The description in the catalogue gave lighting great importance by highlighting the care given to the tone and tint of the glazing. The light in the major exhibition rooms was provided mainly by great

skylights, resulting in subdued natural light. In addition, special lighting fixtures were set behind the skylights for use in the evening or during poor weather. Despite the importance of the innovative lighting system – the matt glass plates and huge metal frames into which these plates were set – it was obscured from the outside of the building by the architrave. Incorporating this technology into the building façade would have betrayed the mythological or romantic history the museum was to narrate: ‘Important and modern, *in the best sense*, is the extraordinarily clearly ordered rooms that benefit the visitor and make it impossible to get lost and tired.’<sup>41</sup>

Overtly, this statement demonstrates how the modern was carefully inserted into the texts. Nazi progress was also affirmed through the description of the technology housed in the basement, that of climate controls and a bomb shelter: ‘It may be said that the technical installations are among the most modern; however, the technical aspects are not visible from the outside.’<sup>42</sup> This ‘modern’ technology was the ‘right’ kind of modern, the kind of modern associated with a progressive ‘first’ world identity, while the aesthetics of the modernist or avant-garde were associated with the ‘degenerate’.

Thus, the exhibition catalogue description of the museum architecture acted as a frame in which the objects were to be experienced by the viewers. The museum frame embraced the ‘romantic’, looking back to the Greeks and Romans. It embraced the eternal in its use of ‘permanent’ materials such as marble and limestone. It embraced the notion of progress in its ‘modern only in the best sense’. It rejected ‘modern in its worst sense’ (anarchy, Marxism, Judaism and degeneracy). By virtue of the catalogue, the mould or frame was, in part, provided by the architecture of the museum for the construction of Aryan/*volk* mythology/identity and the kind of modernism that appeared acceptable in the construction of an industrialised society.

The catalogue directly acknowledged the visitors within the frame of the museum. The rooms were said to be organised so that fatigue and confusion were impossible. The comfort of the visitor was emphasised, providing an accessible environment. A mention of the ‘elegant’ restaurant and the ‘cosy’ basement *Bierstube* informed the visitor that these facilities were open to the general public. The ‘elegant’ restaurant was ‘for everybody, [and was] accessible outside of exhibition hours [...] they [the visitors] should arise from the spirit of the House, an exemplary place of *groomed cultural expression*.’<sup>43</sup> In a surprisingly overt manner, the museum guide tells its visitors their

appropriate 'cultural expression', behaviour and comportment. The 'spirit of the House' in its 'inclusive' language, i.e., 'for everybody', applies to a very specific group of people, those who are *claimants* to the *volk* mythology and identity.<sup>44</sup>

The end of the text reiterates that the museum is a reflection of the art and that the art is a reflection of the German soul and the museum. It states that

National-Socialism is not a revolution. An immense German national feeling is being awakened. The overcoming of class distinctions and the joyful subordination of individuality under the singular German idea is constructive and not revolutionary. Only the clearing of the materialistic-Marxist rubble is revolutionary [...] the actual nature of National-Socialism is consciousness of the deepest German values: a reorganisation of the German soul and its goal as an organic growth of the German culture.<sup>45</sup>

This 'constructive' German idea was seen as a natural occurrence. The growth, development and existence were 'organic'. There was no reason to question the German ideal because it was natural, just as God intended. It implied that the German ideal followed 'natural laws' without question. Everything that fell outside this natural category was unnatural or aberrant (cf. the punishment for not complying).

Thus, the museum publications not only provided an architectural frame for the construction of the *volk* mythology and identity, but also described the environment and appropriate behaviour for a *Temple of Art*. The texts themselves utilise language which placed limits on the audience or defined the appropriate subject (visitor). The texts 'historically documented' that the German/Aryan subjects had fought for their rights to exist: the polarisation of 'us, the Aryan' and 'them, the degenerate' was definitively constructed. The *Temple of German Art* and its contents and contexts were solely intended for 'us' to the exclusion of 'them'. The text spoke to the Aryan audience; therefore, the voice spoke of an 'us'. It spoke of a common desire for 'our' Aryan representation.

#### **CONTRAST OF THE GREAT GERMAN ART EXHIBITION AND THE DEGENERATE ART EXHIBITION: AVANT-GARDE MUSEUM PRACTICE**

The Aryan and 'us' mythology and identity and the highly technical environment of the *GAE* are further enhanced when one compares the 'us' exhibition, the *GAE*, to the 'them' exhibition, the *Degenerate Art Exhibition*. This contrast illuminates the acceptable (reactionary

modern art practices), with the *Degenerate Art Exhibition* offering examples of the undesirable through the display of the unacceptable and the use of artistic avant-garde practices.

The Nazi value placed on the two exhibitions is initially suggested by the inscription over the doors of the buildings that housed these two exhibitions. Over the door of the *Degenerate Art Exhibition* was inscribed 'Eintritt Frei' or 'Entrance Free', which implied that everything displayed here had been excised from our 'national identity' or 'that which has no positive value is here' (ill. 6.2). In contrast, the inscription over the *Temple of German Art* read 'Art is an obligating mission of fanaticism, superior to one's fate.' The corresponding valuation of the exhibitions is further highlighted with respect to who did the honours of opening the exhibitions. The *Degenerate Art Exhibition* was opened by Adolf Ziegler, president of the Reich chamber of visual arts, one day after the *GAE* was opened by Hitler himself, on 18 July 1937.

The museum housing the *Degenerate Art Exhibition* also acted as a frame in which objects of disrepute (both people and works of art) were defined. The works of art were actually classified 'degenerate' (their taxonomy), and were offered as visible 'evidence' of the 'degeneration' that was genetically undermining the German culture. Since art was the highest reflection of its people, according to the Nazis, the *Degenerate Art Exhibition* did not display 'art' but 'artifacts' of a dead or dying culture within the walls of an archaeological museum; while the *GAE* displayed works which were considered the highest and noblest reflection of the German *volk*. The *GAE* offered images of 'genetically strong and healthy' Germans and displayed them as the 'highest' art form in the new *Temple of Art*. The *Degenerate Art Exhibition* labelled in a condemnatory manner several groups of people, e.g. the Jews, the mentally ill, the congenitally malformed and the Bolsheviks; while by contrast the *GAE* moulded the viewer into an *ideal citizen*, the *volk*, an important resource for the state.

The dialogue between the two exhibitions continued, bringing to the fore other important aspects necessary in moulding a concept of the *volk*. The *Degenerate Art Exhibition* was somewhat like a cabinet of curiosities that did not highlight individual pieces to be contemplated. In fact, the museum space was 'refashioned into a 'conversible space', a place where the exhibition of nature's curiosities served as 'a prelude to conversing about natural history' in a heavily ritual-



**6.2.** Entrance to *The Degenerate Art Exhibit* (1937). Munich, Archäologisches Institut.

ised manner that was calculated to forge and strengthen bonds of civic solidarity.<sup>46</sup> Civic solidarity was formed by the interactions of the viewers with one another, creating a boundary between themselves and that which was 'degenerate'. This is similar to the dialogue between the *GAE* and the *Degenerate Art Exhibition*. According to one visitor, '[t]he large number of people pushing and ridiculing and proclaiming their dislike for the works of art created the impression of a stage performance intended to promote an atmosphere of aggressiveness and anger. Over and over again people read aloud the pur-

chase prices and laughed, shook their heads, or demanded 'their' money back.'<sup>47</sup> In this 'conversable space', the crowd spoke loudly, sacrilegiously, commenting and laughing over the pieces represented. This was not the appropriate, reverent bourgeois behaviour required for viewing the *GAE*.

On the other hand, one could look at the *Degenerate Art Exhibition* as masterfully appropriating the Dadaist exhibiting strategy of the First International Dada Exhibition, which displayed art works in avant-garde modernist fashion, pointing to the 'meaningless' nature of art (the 'Dada Wall', for instance). The Dadaists were engaged in displaying their avant-garde work in an avant-garde setting, which is much like installation practices of the contemporary art world. In the *Degenerate Art Exhibition*, the avant-garde strategies of exhibiting works of art was appropriated by the Nazis to demonstrate to the crowd the lack of value associated with the avant-garde art on display. The idea was to reject the avant-garde artistic practices, and in so doing the avant-garde exhibition strategies were utilised in order to demonstrate that the art works had no value in themselves.

The *Degenerate Art Exhibition* was a 'disease' that triggered an immune reaction in the healthy German. It introduced a pathological strain (the 'degenerates') that, in its full power and strength, threatened the existence of the 'true' German culture. In contrast to the 'healthy' romantic offerings of the *GAE*, the work of the *Degenerate Art Exhibition* evoked the destructive 'degenerate other' and not the visible progressiveness of the nation as represented in the *GAE*. The apex of evolution was to be represented in art in the *GAE*. The works were from one period (the Thousand Year Reich), and little or no explanation of the works seemed necessary. On their own, the works spoke to the audience. The meaning was determined as firmly as it was in the *Degenerate Art Exhibition*; it was just not overt. It gave the impression that interpretive power was in the hands of the viewer.

The two exhibitions could also be viewed as working in concert to construct identities within community and national contexts. With the construction of the Aryan identity, a violent polarisation was created; the Aryan category was defined by constructing and assaulting the identity of the 'inferior' Other. Hitler saw the architecture and art programme as 'a tonic against the inferiority complex of the German people [...] He who would educate a people must give to it visible grounds for pride. This is not to show off but to give self-confidence to the nation.'<sup>48</sup> This construction of the concept of the *volk* was as-

sociated with both visible grounds for public pride and for shame (the *GAE* and the *Degenerate Art Exhibition* respectively). One visitor at the *Degenerate Art Exhibition* observed that '[t]he rooms were quite narrow, as were the openings from one room to another, and the ceilings much lower than in the House of German Art.'<sup>49</sup> Certainly, what is being described is a space that inspired little awe and respect for the art works. In the *Temple of German Art*, the ceilings were high; the rooms were large; and the natural light was plentiful. The limestone material from which the museum was constructed was permanent, implying that the objects within were eternal and living, creating a discursive space charged with meaning and value proper to these works (ill. 6.3). The objects within this space were highly regarded in contrast to those in the *Degenerate Art Exhibition*.

Furthermore, the hanging of the works in the two exhibitions differed dramatically. In the *Degenerate Art Exhibition*, the initial installation took only two weeks; the works were rashly hung.<sup>50</sup> They occupied almost every centimetre of wall space. Many of the pieces were unframed and were hung upside down or crooked. Peter Guenther recalls that the paintings were 'hung very closely together, some above others, some over the doorways', resulting in a 'chaotic impression'.<sup>51</sup> The art works were 'organised' in the first rooms according to vague themes. As one progressed to the last rooms, those on the ground floor, there were no thematic or iconographical classifications to help the visitor in ordering the information received or making any individual identifications. The lack of order and of rationality and the vagueness and discontinuity of themes were significant parts of the manipulative strategies put into motion in this exhibition to alienate the viewer from the works and construct the opposing concept to the *volk*, the 'degenerate' other, the very devil himself. It was clear that the major goal of the *Degenerate Art Exhibition* was to demonstrate that the works of these artists were not rational or comprehensible.

The deliberately cluttered and fragmented disorganisation of the paintings displayed in this exhibition presented the viewer with a constant visually chaotic bombardment of images, the fragmentation and visual discontinuities creating an alienating and hostile space.<sup>52</sup> Seemingly, the Third Reich believed that, from this experience, the viewers would desire sanity, security and the restoration of their mental health by rejecting 'degenerate' art. In contrast, the *Great German Art Exhibition* was presented in a clear, comprehen-

sible manner – months had been spent on its planning and execution. Care and consideration were given to each individual display. The exhibition was not organised in a strictly thematic manner. The paintings were mainly limited in subject matter to Hitler, the leaders, womanhood and manhood and rural landscapes. The exhibition escaped any obvious narrative structure, representing the 1,000-year Reich. Thus, the ‘perfection’ of the Aryan race ‘reflected’ in the works of art did not consist of temporal manifestations but represented the fully evolved example of the race. The clarity of the exhibits remained with the individual works, which were shallow and over-determined in terms of their iconography. Complexity was strictly avoided; nonsense and confusion were left to the *Degenerate Art Exhibit*. Each painting was showcased by good lighting, correct orientation and comfortable spacing so that the audience could reverently contemplate the work, the most significant audience activity in aesthetic appreciation, which was facilitated by modern museum practices. Contemplation is an activity reserved for the appreciation of ‘high’ culture and for ‘fine’ art museum spaces such as the *Temple of German Art*.<sup>53</sup> The aim of contemplation in such a desirable environment was to persuade visitors that this was the type of person and life they should embrace and seek to truly desire and identify with.<sup>54</sup>

The labelling and commentaries were mutually defining in these two exhibitions owing to their stark contrast. One exhibition was clearly defined as undesirable, while the other was defined as desirable. With such a polarisation, the high regard for the *volk* as well as the construction of the concept of the *volk* were further established. Commentaries and labels in *The Degenerate Exhibition* were smeared freehand across the walls, providing reasons for and ‘rational’ causes of the viewer’s confusion, disorientation and hostility.<sup>55</sup> There was no standard format, size or script. There was no narrative to follow that would assist the audience in ‘understanding’ the meaning of the objects – only the artists’ names, titles, museums from which the works were taken, years of acquisition and prices paid. The prices were often those paid in the inflationary period of the 1920s, preposterous prices offered without an explanation of the economy.<sup>56</sup> Furthermore, to add to the assaults on the works, there were often stickers next to many of the works which read, ‘Paid by the taxes of the working German people’.<sup>57</sup> This was intended to communicate the ‘degeneracy’ of the works of art and to create outrage in the audiences at the thought of public funds being squandered by former



administrations for the purchase, display and veneration of such objects. The meaninglessness of this exhibition (and, therefore, art) was rationalised as a result of an intrinsically confusing art (rather than exhibition space), products of 'degenerates' (people who do not conform to the currently evolving concept of the *volk*, who lack the German soul). Furthermore, the cramped space and clutter created an environment that promoted disrespectful behaviour rather than contemplation and veneration.

Georg Simmel theorised individual reactions to crowded metropolitan space: '[t]he innerside of this external reserve is not only indifference but more frequently than we believe, it is a slight aversion, a mutual strangeness and repulsion which, in close contact, has arisen anyway whatever, can break out into hatred and conflict.'<sup>58</sup> There were approximately two million visitors in a four-month period, and most days twenty thousand visitors attended.<sup>59</sup> As Peter Guenther observed, there were large numbers of people crowded into the rooms while he was there.<sup>60</sup> He noted that '[...] people pressed up against one another to see the badly lighted works; the atmosphere was dense.'<sup>61</sup> Thus, the cluttered atmosphere of paintings and crowding of people seemed instrumental in establishing a hostile audience reaction, and served to promote curiosity in the people – a circus side show presenting the deviants of society.

In contrast to the *Degenerate Art Exhibition*, the uncluttered *volk* exhibition, the *GAE*, was offered in airy and antiseptic spaces. The thoughtfully hung works of art were labelled in carefully printed script with the artists, titles and requested sale prices. The works of art were left to speak for themselves, implying that the meaning and value were inherent qualities. Rather than establishing an atmosphere of alienation and hostility, the *GAE* attempted to be spacious, comfortable and accommodating to its visitors. Labelling and commentaries were part of the defining strategies for the value and regard given the works of art in their respective exhibits, which in turn were operative in defining the concepts of the 'degenerate' or other and the Aryan *volk* respectively.

## CONCLUSION

It should be apparent from the aforementioned discussion that the Munich art exhibitions of 1937 served as major artistic events that were to define for 'the German *volk*' the difference between 'good' and 'bad' or 'high' and 'low' or 'healthy' and 'degenerate' art.

However, these two exhibitions not only demonstrated these qualities but were also operative in constructing a category with associated qualities called the *volk*. As was demonstrated through the exhibition strategies and art work, the *Degenerate Art Exhibition* operated as the antithesis of the moulded German *volk* and represented those aspects of the cutting-edge modern that were unacceptable: the metropolitan, the avant-garde, the Bolshevik etc. It was by such a contrast in museological strategies that the *volk* concept was well established. Without such a remarkable contrast, a strong sense of what the concept *volk* should include could not have occurred.

Through these two concurrent exhibitions, an inside and outside of German culture were created. The inside of German culture was found in the *Temple of German Art*, embodying the 'right kind of modern', reactionary modern. This highlighted the 'German Soul' and the associated values of health, strength, industriousness, good taste, high art, and a sense of community, unity and nationalism; and was offered through aesthetic technology at its most virtuoso. The outside was (re)presented in an old archaeological museum, where the associated values of 'the wrong kind of modern', avant-garde, poor taste, low art, madness, illness, anarchy, Bolshevism, Judaism and 'degeneracy' were manifested. All the art work was housed in an aging, outdated museum and displayed in Dadaist avant-garde fashion. The 'virtuous' citizen was forced to turn to the works across the park housed in the Temple of German Art for identification; this is where the truly desirable qualities could be found. Hence, both displays encompassed complex and different uses of modern strategies. The *GAE* provided a modified form of modernity, reactionary modernity that presented a mythology of the German *volk*, where romanticism was predominant and over-ruled Enlightenment reason, but where the art was displayed in the most technically advanced museum and associated practices of the day. In contrast, the *Degenerate Art Exhibition* offered starkly realistic presentations that lacked the use of modern technology, but were offered in the Dadaist avant-garde fashion of modernism. Thus, some form of modernity (although veiled and differing) was present in both of the Nazi 1937 art exhibitions held in Munich.

## NOTES

- 1 *Grosse Deutsche Kunstausstellung 1937 im Haus der Deutschen Kunst zu München* (exh. cat.), Haus der Deutschen Kunst, Munich, 1937, p. 25.
- 2 Jeffrey Herf, *Reactionary Modernism: Technology, culture, and politics in Weimar and the Third Reich* (Cambridge University Press; Cambridge, 1984), pp. 1–11. Quote on p. 3.
- 3 This is where the stark difference between reactionary modernism and the multiple characterisations of modernism lie. Many forms of modernism embrace Enlightenment ideals and rational scientific progress.
- 4 Herf, *Reactionary Modernism*, pp. 1–11.
- 5 Herf, *Reactionary Modernism*, p. 12. This can also be seen as a form of individualism.
- 6 Herf, *Reactionary Modernism*, p. 12.
- 7 From *Deutsche Technik* (March 1939), pp. 105–06 (speech at the opening of the Berlin Auto Show, 17 February 1939). Quoted by Herf, *Reactionary Modernism*, p. 196.
- 8 Modern refers to the museum practices that emerge out of the Enlightenment model, in which the public museum was born and the princely collection was in decline.
- 9 Note that this is a modernist polemic in which the discourse that involves the *Grosse Deutsche Kunstausstellung* is often steeped. It allows official Nazi art to be dismissed as inferior or 'low' art, in contrast to the 'high' art that was incorrectly labelled 'degenerate'. Thus, 'true' art was eclipsed, by a period of propagandistic schlock that was propagated by a conservative/fascist regime.
- 10 The 'Temple of German Art' is what the Haus der Deutschen Kunst, or House of German Art, is referred to in the museum guide produced for English-speaking visitors. Karl Drechsel, MA, *The Temple of German Art Munich* (F. Bruckmann; Munich, 1934).
- 11 James Whisker, *Social, Political and Religious Thought of Alfred Rosenberg* (University Press of America; Washington, 1982), pp. 121–22.
- 12 Cultural and spiritual educations are not mutually exclusive concepts.
- 13 Whisker, *Social, Political and Religious Thought*, pp. 120–22.
- 14 See Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum* (Routledge; New York and London, 1995). Note that the modern museum was born out of the Enlightenment, under which a citizen could be educated on cultural subjects as well as becoming a better or ideal citizen. Please see the next section for a more complete discussion; 'Modern Museum Practices'.
- 15 Carol Duncan, 'Art Museums and the Ritual of Citizenship', in Ivan Karp and Steven Lavine (eds.), *Exhibiting Cultures: the poetics and politics of museum display* (Smithsonian Institution Press; Washington and London, 1991), p. 101.
- 16 This analysis of the *volk* as romantic can also be seen as related to the modernist use of the romanticisation of the primitive, à la Gauguin, in which a notion of the 'uncontaminated' 'original' of a culture is idealised. This is a very difficult line to argue as this is a retreat into the past that many avant-garde artists enjoyed. The Nazis ambivalently embraced industrialisation and selective and strategic aspects of modernist practices, while the avant-garde and modernism were perceived as 'degenerating', 'contaminating' the Aryan origin myth.
- 17 Donald Preziosi (ed.), *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology* (Oxford University Press; Oxford and New York, 1998), p. 508.
- 18 See Sander L. Gilman, *Difference and Pathology: Stereotype of Sexuality, Race and Madness* (Cornell University Press; Ithaca and London, 1985). Note: The United States preceded the Nazis in their eugenics programmes and provided the basis for the Nazi programme. The intellectual and scientific legitimisation of the eugenics programme was provided by such major institutions as the Carnegie Institute, the University of Chicago, Harvard, Princeton, Yale, Perdue, Northwestern, UC Berkeley, NYU, and Stanford. The eugenic programme was integrated into the college curriculum between 1910 and 1940. It was viewed as progressive and was the model for the Nazi eugenics and genocide programmes. Edwin Black, *The War Against the Weak: Eugenics and America's Campaign to Create a Master Race* (Thunder's Mouth Press; New York, 2003), pp. 75 and 259–60.
- 19 Adolf, Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, trans. Ralph Manheim (Houghton Mifflin Company; Boston, 1971; German 1st edn. 1927).
- 20 Alfred Rosenberg, *Myth of the Twentieth Century*, trans. Vivian Bird (Noontide Press; Torrance, CA, 1982; German 1st edn. 1930), pp. 428–43.
- 21 Hans F.K. Günther, *Rassenkunde des deutschen Volkes* (J.F. Lehmann; Munich, 1923) and idem., *Rasse und Stil: Gedanken über ihre Beziehungen im Leben und in der Geistesgeschichte der europäischen Völker* (J.F. Lehmann; Munich, 1926), 2nd edn.; Paul Schultze-Naumburg, *Gestaltung der Landschaft durch den Menschen* (George D.W. Callway; Munich, 1928).
- 22 Who published *Kunst und Kunsterverziehung in dritten Reich* in 1933.
- 23 Inderpal Grewal, *The Guidebook and the Museum: Aesthetics, Education and Nationalism in the British Museum* (ms. 1989), p. 2.
- 24 Preziosi, *The Art of Art History*, p. 511. It should be noted that Preziosi also says: 'In no small measure, modernity itself is the museum's collective product and artefact; the supreme museographic fiction.' p. 509 [original italics].
- 25 'Hitler's Speech Dedicating the House of German Art', *Völkischer Beobachter*, 19 July 1937, in Benjamin Sax and Dieter Kuntz (eds.), *Inside Hitler's Germany: A Documentary History of Life in the Third Reich* (D.C. Heath and Company; Lexington (Mass.), 1992).
- 26 Preziosi, *The Art of Art History*, p. 512.
- 27 Women depicted as farmers were usually mothers or associated with the land or nature - Heimat.

- 28 This not only addressed the primitivising myth of the German farmer, untouched by the degenerate, but promoted the 'progressive' idea of eugenics – a genetically constructed ideal citizen.
- 29 Preziosi, *The Art of Art History*, p. 513.
- 30 Preziosi, *The Art of Art History*, p. 514.
- 31 The Nazi physical ideal of beauty was derived from classical models. One might note that higher education in Germany at the time took place in the Gymnasium. The Gymnasium was where Socrates trained young minds and where a beautiful body reflected a beautiful mind.
- 32 Drechsel, *The Temple of German Art*, p. 10.
- 33 Drechsel, *The Temple of German Art*, pp. 13–14.
- 34 Drechsel, *The Temple of German Art*, p. 5.
- 35 Drechsel, *The Temple of German Art*, p. 6.
- 36 *Grosse Deutsche Kunstausstellung* (cf. note 1).
- 37 *Grosse Deutsche Kunstausstellung*, p. 5.
- 38 *Grosse Deutsche Kunstausstellung*, p. 5.
- 39 *Grosse Deutsche Kunstausstellung*, p. 6.
- 40 Duncan discusses the connection of the Greek and Roman temple architecture, which was adopted as fitting for the museum. It marks off the museum space as secular and ritualised, a place where a culture's identity is performed. Duncan, 'Art Museums and the Ritual of Citizenship', pp. 91–92.
- 41 *Grosse Deutsche Kunstausstellung*, p. 22 [italics mine].
- 42 *Grosse Deutsche Kunstausstellung*, p. 24.
- 43 *Grosse Deutsche Kunstausstellung*, pp. 22–23 [italics mine].
- 44 This refers to Deleuze's definition of grounding, in which he states: 'The operation of grounding renders the claimant *similar* to the ground, endowing it with resemblance from within and thereby allowing it to participate in the quality or the object which it claims. As similar to the same, the claimant is said to *resemble* – this, however, is not an external resemblance to the object but an internal resemblance to the ground itself.' Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (Columbia University Press; New York, 1994; Fr. 1st edn. 1968), p. 272.
- 45 *Grosse Deutsche Kunstausstellung*, p. 25.
- 46 Tony Bennett, 'Pedagogic Objects, Clean Eyes, and Popular Instruction: On Sensory Regimes and Museum Didactics', *Configurations: A Journal of Literature, Science and Technology*, vol. 6, no. 3, 1998, p. 2.
- 47 Peter Guenther, 'Three Days in Munich, July 1937', in Stephanie Barron (ed.), *"Degenerate Art": The Fate of the Avant-Garde in Nazi Germany* (exh. cat.), Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, 1991, p. 38.
- 48 Peter Adam, *Art of the Third Reich* (Harry Abrams Publishers; New York, 1992), p. 211. Quote from Hitler at Nuremberg, in *Volkischer Beobachter*, 9 September 1937.
- 49 Guenther, 'Three Days in Munich', p. 36.
- 50 Stephanie Barron, '1937: Modern Art and Politics in Prewar Germany', in idem., *"Degenerate Art"*, p. 20.
- 51 Guenther, 'Three Days in Munich', p. 38.
- 52 Note similarities in terms of alienating space in Georg Simmel, 'Metropolis and Mental Life', in Donald N. Levine (ed.), *On Individuality and Social Forms: Selected Writing* (University of Chicago Press; Chicago, 1971).
- 53 Kant, Cassirer, Collingwood and Aristotle are just a few of the philosophers who think that the act of contemplation is central to aesthetic appreciation.
- 54 The classifications of 'high' and 'low' art were subverted. The 'high' art of Nazi Germany was the popular art, while the 'low' art was the art of the 'elite' brought down to its 'true' 'degenerate' origins.
- 55 Note that the dialogue written freehand in cartoons generally appeals to the audience in a more personal manner than mechanically produced script. This type of freehand lettering provided a more (psychologically) immediate form of communication, which effectively elicits emotion.
- 56 Mario-Andreas von Luettichau, 'Entartete Kunst: Munich 1937: A Reconstruction', in Barron, *"Degenerate Art"*, p. 45.
- 57 'Bezahlt von den Steuergroschen des arbeitenden deutschen Volkes'.
- 58 Georg Simmel, 'Metropolis and Mental Life', p. 331.
- 59 Barron, '1937: Modern Art and Politics in Prewar Germany', p. 9.
- 60 Guenther, 'Three Days in Munich', p. 38.
- 61 Guenther, 'Three Days in Munich', p. 36.

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## 7 THE ART OF COLLECTIVISATION

### The 1939 All-Union Agricultural Exhibition

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K. ANDREA RUSNOCK

The fine arts are an active participant in our building of socialism.<sup>1</sup>

#### INTRODUCTION

The intent of this essay is to examine the 1939 All-Union Agricultural Exhibition in order to analyse the role of Socialist Realist art in Soviet culture during the early Stalinist epoch. Traditionally, in the West, Socialist Realism has been discussed as solely propaganda; but this essay will argue that it was both propaganda and fine art as the two are not mutually exclusive in the Soviet case. Moreover, the multivalency of Stalinist art extended into representing the alleged successes of the Soviet present and, at the same time, the 'great' socialist future.<sup>2</sup> The 1939 exhibition will thus be used as a means of analysing Socialist Realist art of the early Stalinist period both as art and propaganda, and as a representation of the present and the future.

Exhibitions, both in major museums and those that travelled to smaller venues, brought the visual arts to the attention of the Soviet populace. Through both the execution of the shows and the objects displayed they were one of the ways in which the government recreated the alleged achievements of the Soviet Union.<sup>3</sup> Exhibitions were in fact a hallmark for Stalinist indoctrination because the 'government liberally finance[d] art and arrange[d] big exhibitions, [...] to foster art on a huge, national scale.'<sup>4</sup> Works centring on a particular theme or themes were often grouped together for art shows that toured a variety of venues.<sup>5</sup> These exhibitions were sent on tours to industrial cities, factories, remote towns, workers' clubs and collective farms in an active effort to take art directly to the masses.<sup>6</sup> The non-traditional venues of such exhibitions fostered a new kind of connection between artist and audience, as 'the artist needs to come into direct contact with the chief spectator to whom he is addressing [his art]'.<sup>7</sup>

Socialist Realist exhibitions brought art to the people in a fashion similar to 'The Society of Travelling Art Exhibitions', known as the *Peredvizhniki*, an organisation of Russian realist artists of the mid-to-late 19th century whose association was established in 1870 and included such luminaries as Ilya Repin and Ivan Kramskoi.<sup>8</sup> The *Peredvizhniki* travelled the countryside exhibiting their works in order to reach as broad a spectrum of the public as possible. However, their exhibitions, unlike Socialist Realist travelling exhibitions, were not intended for the masses and, additionally, the admission price was too expensive for the average Russian; consequently, there

was a limited audience for these shows.<sup>9</sup> Socialist Realist exhibitions, by contrast, were created for the masses and were affordable so that the populace could experience artistic displays that illustrated the ostensible glories of Soviet society, for example collectivisation.

Art shows were held not just in large and small cities but were 'sent out to the remote borderlands, to workers' clubs and to collective farms.'<sup>10</sup> The official art press characterised the masses as displaying an 'active interest [...] in art [...] [that] is astounding. Visitors' books at exhibitions are filled with thousands of spirited entries.'<sup>11</sup> The masses did attend the exhibitions, even if we take into account inflated attendance statistics, as such shows offered a diversion to the populace, particularly in the rural areas.<sup>12</sup> Exhibitions, such as the seminal 1939 All-Union Agricultural Exhibition, were leisure activities that, concomitantly, innocuously educated the masses about the achievements of Stalinist society through Socialist Realist art and other sanctioned visual material.

This indoctrination was achieved, in part, because the Soviet people were said to collectively own the works (after all, they were hung in public museums), and because individual citizens could also possess the art through reproductions of these same works. The original paintings functioned in their role as high art not only by holding a special place in museum collections but also because they had been created by professional artists. These same paintings, reproduced in a variety of media such as postcards and leaflets in publications, gave the populace wide access to the images, and, in this way, permitted the works to operate as mass art. After an exhibition the high art works were, presumably, to be sent to museums and in this way the Soviet public would then, collectively, own these paintings.

### THE 1939 ALL-UNION AGRICULTURAL EXHIBITION

The 1939 All-Union Agricultural Exhibition, the embodiment of the ideal Stalinist agricultural space, was both a massive spectacle that showcased the alleged successes of Soviet farming and an immense display of Stalin's power (ill. 7.1).<sup>13</sup> The exhibition, important not only to the 'history' of the development of collectivisation but also to Socialist Realist art, occurred during the tenth anniversary of the inception of collectivisation. The show, which opened on 1 August, was 'conceived as a one-time state fair that would sell peasants on the wonders of collectivisation.'<sup>14</sup> Vyacheslav Molotov, President of the Council of People's Commissars, was quoted in *Pravda* (*Truth*,



**7.1.** Crowds at the All-Union Agricultural Exhibition, photograph (1939).

the official party newspaper) as referring to the exhibition as a ‘demonstration of the Great Victory [of collectivisation]’,<sup>15</sup> while a further claim was made that the people came in order to ‘drink in the methods and practices of the gigantic success of collectivisation’.<sup>16</sup> The show reinforced, as noted, the alleged successes of Soviet farming not just through the presentation of fine art works, with themes of collectivisation, but also thanks to the availability of affordable reproductions of these same works; both high art and mass art thus functioned in a propagandistic sense. The All-Union Agricultural Exhibition, through the visual images displayed, reflected the real and mythical farm life; real because at least a few farms functioned as reported – although perhaps not as grandly as displayed in the art – and mythical because most of the farms did not work as reported through the Party’s propaganda machine. The exhibition’s visual language therefore served as an important venue for shaping public perceptions about art and, consequently, Soviet society.<sup>17</sup>

The exhibition seems to have been intended to encourage the fulfilment of the third five-year plan in farming. The collectivisation

process that began with the first five-year plan continued to be an integral part of Stalin's five-year plans during the 1930s.<sup>18</sup> The three guiding principles of the second five-year plan (1933-38) were effective operation of industry and farms, mastering techniques for both industrialisation and collectivisation, and improving Soviet living standards.<sup>19</sup> While the collective farm was not, by any means, a fully accepted fact of life in rural Russia, in the post de-kulakisation and post famine era of the early thirties the kolkhoz did stabilise as an institution by the mid thirties, although not with the success wished for by the party.<sup>20</sup> Unlike the ad-hoc approach to collectivisation during the first five-year plan, in the thirties more systematic methods for collective farm planning became the focus of the five-year plan.<sup>21</sup> At the Seventeenth Party Congress held in January 1934, Stalin declared that the Soviet Union had been turned into a country of large-scale mechanised collective farms.<sup>22</sup>

Stalin announced at the conference of officials on collectivisation, held in June 1934, that 'in order to ensure the uninterrupted growth of collectivisation, there should be a tightening of the tax screw on the individual peasants',<sup>23</sup> which economic historian Alec Nove asserts was because outside of the collectives there still remained some nine million peasants - a sizable enough number for Stalin to issue such an edict.<sup>24</sup> The Model Charter for Collective Farms of 1935, which issued statutes referring to the kolkhoz as a 'voluntary co-op', granted state-owned land rent-free to the collective.<sup>25</sup> An elected chairman and board ran the collective and oversaw the dispensing of all grain and monetary obligations. In opposition to the collective's actual yields, the projected yields, referred to as biological yields, became the method for establishing crop prices by the end of the thirties.<sup>26</sup> The economic outcome was that the rates paid to the collective, and hence the individual farmers, were lower given the skewed statistics of the biological yields.<sup>27</sup> A decree by the Central Committee on 8 July 1939 mandated that peasant households should augment livestock herds at their own expense and incorporate land from the private plots back into the collective.<sup>28</sup> After the farms' expenditures, the remaining grain and money were divided between the farmers on the basis of their 'labour-day unit', which varied according to the tasks performed, with the more skilled workers garnering a greater share of the compensation.<sup>29</sup> Farmers, however, made the bulk of their money through the legal sale of their private crops and livestock at special kolkhoz markets.<sup>30</sup> Not surprisingly, the peasants

concentrated their efforts on the private plots and the collective suffered as a result, a situation that would effect changes in the collective farm regulations later in the decade.

Tractors played an important role in attesting to the modernisation and progress of Soviet collective farms, as the mechanisation of the kolkhoz was an important goal of the state. Grain procurements were increased in the early 1930s, with payments owed by collectives to the Machine Tractor Stations (MTS), the place from which the farmers obtained their tractors, rising concurrently.<sup>31</sup> The MTS, organised after a decree of 5 June 1929, initially allowed the peasants to have shares in the stations; however, by the early thirties these stations were completely state run.<sup>32</sup> However, tractors could only be found on 11.2 % of the 1930 collective farms, while MTS comprised only 13.6 % of industry.<sup>33</sup> If tractor factories still had a particularly high priority, it was not only due to collectivisation but also because these plants could easily be converted into factories for tank production. Tractors, Victoria Bonnell argues, took the place of the traditional scythe as a symbol for farming and rural life.<sup>34</sup> In addition, newspaper photographs represented farmers driving tractors, such as the example in *Pravda* of a female Stakhonovite, one of those collective farmers who produced in excess of the prescribed quotas, on a Belorussian MTS. Showing a woman on a tractor subtly implied that on the collective, as in society at large, Soviet citizens enjoyed gender equality. In fact, images of tractors played not only a vital part in Socialist Realist art but also a crucial role in the 1939 exhibition.

According to *Pravda*, the All-Union Agricultural Exhibition inauguration day, 1 August 1939, 'became in reality a people's celebration, an all-peoples' festival',<sup>35</sup> which, to a degree, can be said to be accurate given that the many visitors came from all the republics of the Soviet Union. Those who went to the exhibition were supposed to be transformed by encountering the greatness of collectivisation. 'Collective famers make the display and the whole people observe it [...]. [it is a] great school', wrote David Zaslavskii in a review of the exhibition for *Pravda*.<sup>36</sup> Opening day had the 'modest count of at least 10,000 people and they continue[d] to arrive'<sup>37</sup> with estimated figures on subsequent days of 20-30,000 people a day.<sup>38</sup> The opening celebrations were noted in *Pravda* as consisting of 'thousands of guests [...] walk[ing] along the alley. Among them you can see deputies of the Supreme Soviet [...] members of the Central Committee [...] people's commissars, scientists, cultural figures and artists.'<sup>39</sup> In addi-

tion, important persons from the collective farms went to the opening, among them 'many with gleaming orders and medals on their chests, which were awards for Stakhonovite work in the collective fields.'<sup>40</sup> As farmers who garnered such prizes would have been pleased to display them on an average day, it can be surmised that at an exhibition honouring collective farms these medals were worn with particular pride.<sup>41</sup>

Molotov, in his inaugural speech for the opening of the exhibition, reviewed the many accomplishments in the production of agriculture.<sup>42</sup> The exhibition, according to Molotov, would demonstrate the highest achievements of collectivisation, which were selected on the basis of scientific criteria as monitored over a two-year period (1937-39). While these criteria were not specifically explained by Molotov, it can be presumed that they were based on Soviet scientific methods similar to so-called developments in agriculture such as the biological yields discussed above. Molotov noted that 'hundreds of thousands and millions of people from the peasantry have been transformed over these years [of collectivisation] into experienced organisers of large-scale agriculture on collective farms, in collective farm teams and brigades.'<sup>43</sup> The speech concluded with panegyrics to the Party of Lenin and Stalin, the Soviet Union, and, of course, to Stalin as the creator of collectivisation.

The massive exhibition space, similar in size to a world fair or even a small town, was created on specially consecrated ground solely for displaying the supposed achievements of Soviet farming. While there is scant extant evidence, it is to be presumed that there were strict guidelines for the various displays, as with so many other areas of Soviet art and life. Walkways, designed as grand boulevards with cultivated foliage on either side, accommodated large crowds who could stroll down them with ease. Benches lined the promenade areas for visitors to relax and, at the same time, take time to contemplate the glories of collectivisation. Fountains with sculptures were found on the exhibition grounds, completing the aura of grandeur. Even the amazingly tall lights that graced the exhibition space bear the shape of wheat sheaves, further enhancing the agricultural paradigm.<sup>44</sup> The majority of the pavilions, those that housed the various achievements of collectivisation, such as tractor displays and those housing 'unique' farming methods and products of the Soviet republics, were classical post and lintel structures and often faced with rounded arches.<sup>45</sup> There were even working models of farms that



**7.2.** Tower with P.N. Budulov's *Tractor Driver and Collective Farm Woman* (1939).

were more than mere replicas but rather substantial enclosures in which Soviet citizens could walk as if strolling along a collective farm. The entire atmosphere of the exhibition space displayed monumentality, reinforcing the show's glorification of the monumental achievements of Soviet collectivisation.

Visitors were prepared for the monumentality of the exhibition at the very start of their viewing experience, as the entrance to the grounds was through a large triumphal arch.<sup>46</sup> The massive arch, created by the architect L.M. Polyakov and the sculptor G.I. Motovilov,<sup>47</sup> was reminiscent of those employed by Ancient Roman emperors to extol their exploits, virtues and superiority. It was flanked on either side by huge piers, each of which had a relief sculpture at the top depicting collective farmers. The arch itself had high relief sculpture of the various food products generated by collective farms throughout the Soviet empire. Adding to the grandiosity of the entrance, 'a passage' leading to the arch was 'lined with wooden ears of wheat, topped with bouquets of flags'<sup>48</sup>, an obvious visual reinforcement of the collectivisation theme of the exhibition.

'The Tower for Sculpture,' as it was termed, lay just beyond the arch and was topped by a monumental work titled *Tractor Driver and Collective Farm Woman* (ill. 7.2), by P.N. Budulov, assisted by A.A. Strekavin, and a 'brigade of sculptors' whose robust figures, each holding aloft a bundle of wheat, stride forward confidently.<sup>49</sup> In fact, it was so close to the entrance that it could be seen from beyond the entry way. The prominent placement of this statue, which was just after the entry arch to the show along with the reproduction of the statue in the catalogue, signalled that all the art in the show would be thematically aligned to collectivisation. But while this work served as the emblem for the exhibition, as it designated the two main venues of collectivisation - machinery and produce - it did not receive the same press coverage or accolades reaped by the famous Vera Mukhina statue, *Worker and Collective Farm Woman*, which also stood in the exhibition grounds.<sup>50</sup> In fact, in an article by Iu. Zhukov in the journal *Nasha strana* (Our country), while paying particular attention to the Mukhina statue he only briefly noted the *Tractor Driver and Collective Farm Woman* sculpture and did not even mention the name of the sculptors of the artwork that stood as the signifier of the exhibition.<sup>51</sup>

A colossal statue of Stalin (ill. 7.3) by Sergei Merkurov was situated at the crossing of the show's two main walkways, so not only literally but also figuratively Stalin dominated the exhibition space as well as all the participants in and visitors to the show. From his great height Stalin, dressed in a long greatcoat, looks down on the populace with a slight smile as if to signal that he was the benevolent father of Soviet farms and farming. The fact that the statue stood



**7.3.** Statue of Stalin by S. Merkurov in front of the Mechanics Pavilion (1939).

directly in front of the Pavilion of the Mechanics, one of the few architectural structures not made from marble but rather from steel to signify both the industrial prowess and modernity of Soviet agrarian life, underscores Stalin's supposed role in making Soviet agriculture a modern miracle. Merkurov's massive sculpture, and its primary position on the exhibition grounds, indicated that everything about collectivisation radiated out from Stalin.

While Stalin's statue dominated the grounds and the *Tractor Driver and Collective Farm Woman* was the symbol of the show, the critical reception regarding statuary at the exhibition was occupied, as

has been noted, with Mukhina's famous statue, which had 'brought fame to the artist [...] already in 1937, in the days of the International Exhibition in Paris.'<sup>52</sup> The figures of the tractor driver and farm woman, which 'from far away you could see, glittering in the sun',<sup>53</sup> seem to soar vertically into the air. Mukhina's sculpture, displayed near the entrance, shows a sturdily built peasant woman carrying a sickle high over her head alongside a man with a hammer, as both stride forward signifying the progress of collectivisation and industrialisation.<sup>54</sup> Erected in front of a shimmering pool of water, *Worker and Collective Farm Woman* could be seen as a monumental testament to viewers that Soviet collectivisation had conquered the air, land and sea. Mukhina's statue, on which 'the sun's rays sparkle and shine on the shapely and courageous faces of the worker and collective farm woman',<sup>55</sup> was positively discussed in many of the published accounts of the exhibition both in the popular press and in art journals. The amount of press given to the Mukhina statue may have been because it was a well known and well respected work of art, but also because the figures held 'high the symbols of the motherland – the sickle and the hammer.'<sup>56</sup>

*Pravda* called the exhibition a 'holiday of the people',<sup>57</sup> as each republic had its own pavilion, including the non-Russian peoples. In fact, visitors 'all speaking different languages',<sup>58</sup> from all regions of the Soviet Union were present at the inaugural ceremonies of the opening day. In what may be seen as an imperialistic, condescending stance, it was noted in *Pravda* that even if you did not know the languages, you could tell that the people were from republics other than Russia by the 'rapt light in their eyes and their beaming faces'.<sup>59</sup> The pavilions of non-Russian republics were erected in connection to their alleged agricultural glories, with each edifice bearing unmistakable attributes of the region the building represented. The Uzbek pavilion, which still stands in all its dishevelled splendour, signals its heritage through the faux nomadic tent of tall, willowy columns capped by a geometric star-like pattern standing at the entrance to the building. Aniconic designs of blue and white glazed ceramic tiles decorate both the preliminary structure and the pavilion itself. Given that it was not until 1936 that the Soviet East was hailed as having achieved the victory of collectivisation, the inclusion of pavilions celebrating the non-Russian republics signalled that the Soviet Union, through this exhibition, now celebrated itself as a multinational state.<sup>60</sup>

The catalogue, with a publication run of 500,000 copies, reinforced the breadth of the exhibition, not to mention the enormous financial undertaking involved, as it was a 621-page hard-backed tome replete with photographs of the pavilions and their various displays, produce and livestock, modern farm equipment, awards, Stakhanovite farmers, and reproductions of sculptures, frescoes and paintings. Detailed discussions of each pavilion, articles on the achievements of collectivisation and other myriad 'facts' about Soviet farming and awards given at the exhibition were also included in the catalogue. At the back of the catalogue there is a section on the various participants of the exhibition with accompanying statistical charts, to further attest to the progress of collectivisation. Important speeches included in the catalogue were Molotov's opening-day speech along with a speech on the Laws of the All-Union Agricultural Exhibition by Mikhail Kalinin and A. Gorkin. A February presentation to the central committee, signed by Stalin and Molotov, described the organisation of the exhibition and, being *de rigueur* for anything by Stalin, was included in the catalogue. An article by the director of the exhibition, N.V. Tsitsin, reviewed the victory of Socialism as it was alleged to exist in the countryside, attesting to his importance not only as director of the exhibition but also as an 'expert' in the arena of collectivisation.<sup>61</sup> The catalogue for the show reinforced the massive scale of both the exhibition and of Soviet collectivisation.

Molotov's inauguration speech, reprinted in its entirety, was accompanied by a foldout photo of the gala opening with Molotov and others standing on a dais, greeting participants of the exhibition. Another photograph shows Molotov and Tsitsin at what was called the 'Triumphant Opening', cutting a ribbon to the entrance of the show signalling the exhibition's opening. Another photographic fold-out shows Andrei Andreev,<sup>62</sup> Georgy Malenkov<sup>63</sup> and Andrei Zhdanov,<sup>64</sup> all wearing white suits reminiscent of those favoured by Stalin, talking with exhibition participants. Those who purchased catalogues could thus excise these images from the book and thereby 'own' these important photographs, a form of socialist art. It is also within the realm of reason to surmise that these photographs would have been available at the fair for separate purchase by the Soviet populace.

Original works were displayed at the exhibition for all the people of the Soviet Union to see; in this manner paintings played the part of fine art. The works also functioned as mass art because individ-



**7.4.** A. Bubnov, T. Gaponenko, D. Shmarinov, *Masters of Stalinist Productivity* (1939).

uals could ‘own’ the works by keeping the reproductions in the catalogue. *Masters of Stalinist Productivity* (ill. 7.4), by A. Bubnov, T. Gaponenko and D. Shmarinov, depicts the different peoples of the Soviet republics and is reproduced in the catalogue in conjunction with the entry on the main pavilion.<sup>65</sup> The various nationalities were represented by their idealised stereotypes, according to Soviet standards, for each cultural group. These figures, bathed in light, stride forward smiling proudly as they carry the produce reaped from their bountiful collectives. The collectives, in all parts of the Soviet Republic, were acknowledged in this image as successful and therefore all peoples of the nation were able to take part in the ‘success’ of Soviet achievements. The painting is reproduced as a fold-out that could be taken out of the catalogue and either hung in homes for individual ownership of the work or displayed in kolkhoz clubs for ownership by all the farm’s members; thus the reputed success of collectivisation in all regions of the Soviet Union was reinforced through the *Masters of Stalinist Productivity*.

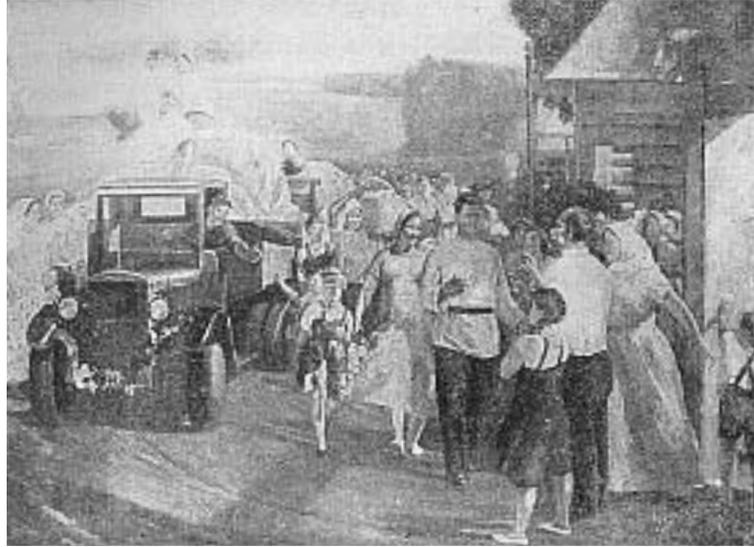
The interaction of high art and mass art had its roots in various artistic movements throughout the late 19th and early 20th centuries in Russian history. The intersection of high and mass art continued into the Soviet period, when this amalgamation was promoted by the government as mass culture constructed, promoted and financed by the state.<sup>66</sup> Society as a whole, according to the Soviet artistic paradigm, was the ‘owner’ of the works because the original oil paintings hung in museums. At the same time, individual Soviet citizens could own these same works themselves because they were



**7.5.** V. Pukirev, *Debt Collection* (c. 1860s-70s), oil painting.

available to the public through a variety of reproductions such as postcards and posters. In this way popular culture allowed citizens access to the propagandistic message of the alleged advancements of Soviet society in a manner familiar to the masses.<sup>67</sup> The reproductions could be hung in people's homes and were often hung in factories, workers' clubs, kolkhoz clubs, classrooms, and other places where the Soviet public convened, the visual material serving as a constant reminder of what the government termed the 'glories of collectivisation.' In addition, other areas of high culture provided people with access to works on collectivisation, for example Mikhail Sholokov's classic socialist realist novel *Virgin Soil Upturned*; in this way the visual arts reinforced general trends in the cultural and social life of Soviet citizens.

*Debt Collection* (ill. 7.5), by V. Pukirev, and *Bringing of the Bread for the Day's Work* (ill. 7.6), by I. Evstigneev, were juxtaposed in the catalogue to illustrate the basic difference not only between Russian Realism and Socialist Realism but also between the Russian and Soviet systems of governance. *Debt Collection* is described as being set in the countryside of Czarist Russia, and *Bringing of the Bread for the Day's Work* is noted as taking place on a kolkhoz in the countryside. The painting by Pukirev depicts a peasant woman, on bended



**7.6.** I. Evstigneev, *Bringing of the Bread for the Day's Work* (c. 1937), oil painting.

knee, pleading with a well-dressed landowner not to take the family's only cow. The other peasants are ineffectual as they merely stand around with their hats in their hands in front of and next to ramshackle dwellings. The pathos evidenced in this work signals that no good can come of the woman's pleading to the landowner, who looks at her disdainfully. The inclusion of this painting in the catalogue was because the work was indicative of 19th century realism's critique of Czarist society by showing the cruelty and indifference the landed gentry had toward the peasants. Soviet art historians during the Stalinist epoch hailed such 19th century paintings, but generally left aside any discussion of those realist works from this same period that were not critical of the Czarist regime.

*Bringing of the Bread for the Day's Work* shows the splendour of Socialist construction in stark contrast to *Debt Collection*. Evstigneev's work depicts a happy family emerging from the doorway of a well-constructed, modern house. The collective's other farmers, led by a man in a dressy peasant tunic followed by a pregnant woman and a young girl holding flowers, stride with confidence towards the family. Off to the side is a truck laden with bread for the peasant family. The scene is one of joy as everyone smiles and the sun shines brightly over the abundant yields of the collective farm. In addition,

the pregnant woman helps to underscore the fertility of the collective. The comparison of the paintings highlights not only the artistic differences between Russian Realism and Soviet Realism, as evidenced in the gloomy tone and pessimism of the Pukirev contrasted with the sun-drenched optimistic aura of the Evstigneev, but also the harshness and tribulations of Czarist society versus the alleged joy and richness to be found in Socialist society. Reinforcing the theme of the exhibition, Evstigneev's work represented the care the government, under the guiding force of Stalin, had for its people by signaling assurance of the masses that no-one would suffer from want because of the alleged success of Soviet collectivisation.

Photographs reproduced in the catalogue were also used to display the glories and achievements of Soviet collectivisation. Extraordinary yields from the collective were shown, both of animals and crops, to illustrate that Soviet farms had the biggest and healthiest livestock and the most fecund produce. An example in the catalogue of this photographic propaganda shows a man dressed in casual garb presenting the corn produced by his collective to a stylishly dressed urban woman. The two are strolling along a path next to corn stalks that are larger than twice the normal size. Yet if one looks closely at the shadows cast by the people versus that of the corn a problem is detected. Had the photographer actually captured this scene at the same point in time, the shadows of the corn and the people would be pointing in the same direction; however, in this photo they are cast in opposite directions, thereby indicating how photographs were intentionally altered for propagandistic purposes.<sup>68</sup> Similar tell-tale signs occur in most of the photographs in the catalogue, such as the woman holding a cabbage two to three times the size of her head and the pig whose girth fills up the entire frame of the image. Photography, like painting, manipulated the scene to present collectivisation in all its glory or, in other words, what was alleged to be Soviet contemporary reality, a reality that would surely continue in the great socialist future.

The individuals involved in the exhibition or honoured in the show were people who were said to have led to the success of the collective farm. Reproduced in the catalogue is a photo of one such admired figure, a smiling Maria Demchenko surrounded by Ukrainian farmers, who had been handpicked by Stalin as the winner of a State prize. *Pravda*, which also listed a number of these individuals, likewise took special note of Demchenko as 'one of the important peo-

ple of the splendid movement of collective farm women for a big harvest of sugar beets.<sup>69</sup> In addition, Angelina, the founder of the first Soviet all-female tractor brigade and hero of Socialist Labour, was a gold-medal winner at the exhibition.<sup>70</sup> Ibragim Rakhmatov, who 'bravely raised the flag of struggle for breaking the world record for cotton yields', was also hailed as a hero of collectivisation in *Pravda*.<sup>71</sup> Yet while many 'heroes' of collectivisation were feted at the exhibition, there were still some people associated with the show that did not escape Soviet-style justice. Two key examples come from the Sychevka district with the director of the state farm and the regional veterinarian. The former was charged with leading a conspiracy to destroy the farm's livestock, as some 80% of the animals were allegedly infected with disease, and the veterinarian was accused of spreading the epidemic throughout the country by sending animals from the infected herd to the agricultural exhibition.<sup>72</sup> Thus despite myriad accolades given to numerous individuals associated with agriculture, some exhibition participants were clearly not immune to the denunciations and arrests so common in the Stalinist era.

## CONCLUSION

The exhibitions illustrate that Socialist Realism was utilised by the Soviet government as an extensive programme of fine arts coupled with adroit propaganda. High art and the masses, which intersected at exhibitions, had allegedly a symbiotic relationship. Fine art functioned to edify the public and, concurrently, to inform them, while at the same time it was intimated that it was this very public that had created the high art culture and Soviet accomplishments on display in the works of art. Soviet exhibitions were thus the polar opposite of exhibitions of modern art, not only in the style of art but also as these shows in the West were meant to show the unique talents of individuals, and not a collective enterprise as in the Soviet Union. Here, paintings and sculptures, endowed with socialist content and rendered with the appropriate style of Soviet realism, helped express Party ideology and display the avowed achievements of collectivisation through their inclusion in exhibitions and in the attendant catalogues.

The 1939 All-Union Agricultural Exhibition remains a premier example of the Soviet government's utilisation of Socialist Realism as a tool for extolling the alleged glorious successes of collectivisation and, hence, the postulated achievements of Stalin's Soviet Union.<sup>73</sup>

## NOTES

- 1 Sergei Gerasimov, 'Zametki o khudozhestvennoi shkole', *Iskusstvo*, vol. 4, 1939, p. 52.
- 2 Katerina Clark in her seminal work, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual* (University of Chicago Press; Chicago, 1985 [1981]) makes this same argument for literature, claiming that it represents both the present and the future. Prior to the author's dissertation and subsequent works, this argument had not been made regarding the visual arts.
- 3 The prototype for Socialist Realist art exhibitions during the Stalinist era was the 1933 Moscow exhibition, *Fifteen Years of Soviet Art*.
- 4 Introductory text to the Soviet pavilion at the 1939 world fair reprinted in Miranda Banks (ed.), *The Aesthetic Arsenal: Socialist Realism Under Stalin* (exh. cat.), Institute for Contemporary Art, P.S.1 Museum, New York, 1993, p. 10.
- 5 Igor Golomstock, *Totalitarian Art in the Soviet Union, the Third Reich, Fascist Italy, and the People's Republic of China*, trans. R. Chandler (Icon Edition; New York, 1990), p. 95.
- 6 *Soviet Painting: 32 Reproductions by Soviet Masters* (State Art Publishers; Moscow, 1939), p. 1.
- 7 Osip Beskin, *The Place of Art in the Soviet Union* (The American Russian Institute for Cultural Relations with the Soviet Union, Inc.; New York, 1936), p. 17.
- 8 The Society of Travelling Art Exhibitions established in 1870, known as the Peredvizhniki, solidified the unity of the secession artists; those artists who, under Kramskoi, had seceded from the Imperial Art Academy on 9 November 1863. Valkenier argues that the establishment of the Peredvizhniki coincided with the emergence of full-fledged realism in Russian art. Elizabeth Valkenier, 'The Intelligentia and Art', in Theofanis Stavrou (ed.), *Art and Culture in Nineteenth-Century Russia* (Indiana University Press; Bloomington, 1983), p. 164.
- 9 Stavrou, *Art and Culture in Nineteenth-Century Russia*, p. 164.
- 10 From the pamphlet for the Soviet pavilion at the 1939 world fair as reproduced in Banks, *Aesthetic Arsenal*, p. 8.
- 11 Banks, *Aesthetic Arsenal*, p. 8.
- 12 There is no extant evidence to indicate whether the populace truly regarded such exhibitions as entertaining diversions for their spare time.
- 13 Jeffrey Brooks, *Thank You, Comrade Stalin: Soviet Public Culture from Revolution to Cold War* (Princeton University Press; Princeton, 2000), p. 74.
- 14 'Monumental Oddities', *The Moscow Times*, 28 July-3 August 2006, p. 1. It should be noted that the author of this article is anonymous and he/she has not cited from where they got this information. However, it stands to reason that this quote is accurate in its understanding of the exhibition.
- 15 Brooks, *Thank You*, p. 75.
- 16 Zheleznov and L. Brontman, 'Flag podniat', *Pravda*, 2 August 1939, p. 3.
- 17 Industry also had an artistic exhibition proclaiming its glories. The important *Industrial Socialism* exhibition, organised by the People's Commissariat of Heavy Industry, opened on 18 March 1939. The exhibition was held to 'represent the success of socialist industry with the art to show the vast success of the Stalinist five-year plans.' *Industriia sotsializma* (Iskusstvo; Moscow, 1939), pp. 4-5. There were images in this exhibition that centred on collectivisation, such as Arkady Plastov's *Collective-Farm Celebration* and Sergei Gerasimov's *Collective Farm Festival*, as well as lesser known works.
- 18 J. Arch Getty, *Origins of the Great Purges, The Soviet Communist Party Reconsidered, 1933-1938* (Cambridge University Press; New York, 1991 [1985]), p. 17.
- 19 Alec Nove, *An Economic History of the USSR* (Penguin Books; New York, 1982), p. 228. Food, a symbol of plenty, became an object of commodity to be celebrated with articles in the press extolling the new food products, many of which were due to farm abundance and products made with new technologies. Shelia Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism, Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s* (Oxford University Press; London, 1999), pp. 90-91.
- 20 Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Stalin's Peasant, Resistance & Survival in the Russian Village After Collectivization* (Oxford University Press; New York, 1994), pp. 6 and 9.
- 21 Nove, *Economic History*, p. 225.
- 22 Statistics show that 70% of households were collectivised in this year and 90% just two years later. Chris Ward, *Stalin's Russia* (Edward Arnold; London, 1993), p. 50.
- 23 Nove, *Economic History*, p. 181.
- 24 Nove, *Economic History*, p. 181; and Ward, *Stalin's Russia*, p. 50. Interestingly, it was during this same period that monetary investments in agriculture actually declined. Nove, in Chris Ward (ed.), *The Stalinist Dictatorship* (Edward Arnold; London, 1998), p. 156; and Nove, *Economic History*, p. 241.
- 25 This charter came about due to the Great Retreat. Victoria E. Bonnell, *Iconography of Power: Soviet Political Posters Under Lenin and Stalin* (University of California Press; Berkeley, 1999 [1997]), p. 115; Ward, *Stalin's Russia*, p. 50; and Nove, *Economic History*, p. 241. Small private plots were restored to the collective farmer, the ownership of some livestock allowed, and other various regulations loosened. Also, by 1935, 75% of households were collectivised. Ward, *Stalin's Russia*, pp. 50-51.
- 26 Ward, *Stalin's Russia*, p. 52; and Nove, *Economic History*, p. 185. The biological yield referred to the alleged production of crops as opposed to the amount of grain that was actually produced.
- 27 In 1934 the biological yield was to be 89.4% of land vs. the real grain harvest, which was 67.6; while in 1935 the biological yield was alleged to

- be 90.1 while the actual production was 75.0. Nove, *Economic History*, pp. 185–86. See also Moshe Lewin, *Russian Peasants and Soviet Power, A Study of Collectivization*, trans. Irene Nove (W.W. Norton & Company; New York, 1975; Fr. 1st edn. 1966) for statistics on grain production.
- 28 Ward, *Stalin's Russia*, p. 52; and Nove, *Economic History*, p. 258.
- 29 Ward, *Stalin's Russia*, p. 51.
- 30 Ward, *Stalin's Russia*, p. 51.
- 31 Nove, *Economic History*, p. 240.
- 32 Nove, *Economic History*, p. 182.
- 33 Robert Conquest, *The Harvest of Sorrow: Soviet Collectivization and the Terror-Famine* (Oxford University Press; New York, 1986), p. 180.
- 34 Bonnell, *Iconography of Power*, p. 106.
- 35 Zheleznov and Brontman, 'Flag podniat', p. 3.
- 36 Brooks, *Thank You*, p. 75.
- 37 Zheleznov and Brontman, 'Flag podniat', p. 3.
- 38 Richard Stites, *Revolutionary Popular Culture, Entertainment and Society Since 1900* (Cambridge University Press; Cambridge, 1992), p. 84.
- 39 Zheleznov and Brontman, 'Flag podniat', p. 3.
- 40 Zheleznov and Brontman, 'Flag podniat', p. 3.
- 41 Additional prizes, claimed by the anonymous author of 'Monumental Oddities', p. 1, were 10,000 rubles and a car. As to whether this pride was genuine, no extant evidence of uncensored responses to the show has yet to be unearthed.
- 42 Molotov's speech had been presented to the Supreme Soviet on 21 August 1938. While discussing the significance of the projected exhibition for the advancement of socialist agriculture, the members of the Supreme Soviet nonetheless note that there were several shortcomings in preparations for the exhibition and proposed the opening be postponed until the mistakes could be rectified. Thus, the exhibition was not opened until 1 August 1939.
- 43 P.N. Pospelov, A.V. Gritsenko and N.V. Tsitsin (eds.), *Vsesoiuznaia sel'skokhoziaistvennaia vystavka 1939* (OGIZ; Moscow: 1939), p. 15.
- 44 I thank Katy Turton for this astute observation.
- 45 One notable exception to the classical structures was the Mechanics Pavilion, which was made of modern steel, signifying both the industrial prowess and modernity of agrarian life in the Soviet Union.
- 46 The original arch still stands, but the massive piers, with a relief sculpture displaying various elements involved in farming, are a replacement from the post World War II era along with new fountains and new pavilions. 'Monumental Oddities', p. 1.
- 47 Nikolai V. Tsitsin (ed.), *Vsesoiuznaia sel'skokhoziaistvennaia vystavka putevoditel'* (OGIZ; Moscow: 1940), p. 5.
- 48 Zheleznov and Brontman, 'Flag podniat', p. 3.
- 49 B. Ternovets, 'Skul'ptura na vystavke', *Iskusstvo*, vol. 6, 1939, p. 78. Ternovets claims the statue stood at fifty-five metres, while other primary sources claim that it was sixty-six metres high.
- 50 The Mukhina statue had been reconstructed for this exhibition. It was originally displayed at the 1937 International Decorative Arts Exhibition held in Paris. In fact, this statue acted as a signifier for the Soviet Union at this exhibition.
- 51 Iu. Zhukov, 'Vysshiaia shkola opyta', *Nasha strana*, 7 July 1939, p. 4.
- 52 Zheleznov and Brontman, 'Flag podniat', p. 3. The Mukhina statue has been removed for extensive repairs. I would like to thank Kristen Harkness for first bringing this information to my attention.
- 53 Zheleznov and Brontman, 'Flag podniat', p. 3.
- 54 Stites argues that the use of a woman for Mukhina's sculpture allowed her to function as an idiom for the collective. Stites, *Revolutionary Popular Culture*, pp. 83–84.
- 55 Zheleznov and Brontman, 'Flag podniat', p. 3.
- 56 Zheleznov and Brontman, 'Flag podniat', p. 3.
- 57 Brooks, *Thank You*, p. 75.
- 58 Zheleznov and Brontman, 'Flag podniat', p. 3.
- 59 Zheleznov and Brontman, 'Flag podniat', p. 3.
- 60 M. Moskalev (ed.), *Geroini sotsialisticheskogo truda* (Partizdat TsK VKP(b); Leningrad, 1936), p. vi; Brooks, *Thank You*, p. 76.
- 61 Tsitsin's article was a reprint from the journal *Bolshevik*, vol. 14, 1939.
- 62 Andreev was the chair of the USSR Supreme Soviet and became the USSR People's Commissar for Agriculture from 1943 to 1946. Martin McCauley, *Who's Who in Russia Since 1900* (Routledge; New York, 1997), p. 17.
- 63 Malenkov was responsible for party cadres and was intimately involved with the purges. Stalin, during his last years, regarded Malenkov as his right-hand man. McCauley, *Who's Who*, pp. 138–39.
- 64 Zhdanov (1896–1948) was an important cultural figure, particularly as regarded the visual arts. A political commissar during the Civil War, he was elected a secretary of the Central Committee at the XVIIth Party Congress in 1934 and a member of the Organisational Bureau. After Kirov's death in 1934 Stalin chose Zhdanov to become Leningrad Party leader. Elected to the Politburo in 1939 in addition to being made cultural chair in 1937, his cultural authority reached its zenith after World War II until his death in 1948, when Soviet art entered what has come to be known as the Zhdanovshchina, an era in which all cultural institutions in the Soviet Union were to follow the dictates of Zhdanov. Most of these dictates curtailed even the few freedoms artists had during the 1930s, taking the propagandistic enterprise of the Stalinist epoch to untold heights. This period of Soviet cultural history demands further study.

- 65 Pospelov et al., *Vsesoiuznaia sel'skokhoziaistvennaia vystavka*, p. 40.
- 66 Stites, *Revolutionary Popular Culture*, pp. 3-5.
- 67 Socialist Realism was even exported to other countries through international exhibitions, allowing the paintings to become familiar to the masses worldwide.
- 68 I am grateful to Mark Konechny for bringing this observation to my attention.
- 69 Brooks, *Thank You*, p. 75.
- 70 Angelina even had her memoirs published in the forties. Shelia Fitzpatrick and Yuri Slezkine (eds.), *In the Shadow of Revolution, Life Stories of Russian Women From 1917 to the Second World War*, trans. Yuri Slezkine (Princeton University Press; Princeton, 2000), pp. 304 and 306.
- 71 Brooks, *Thank You*, p. 75.
- 72 Fitzpatrick, *Stalin's Peasants*, pp. 306-07. Fitzpatrick provides a thorough discussion of a number of show trials for various reasons in 1937. It is assumed by this author that the 'infected herds' being sent to the show were at this time because the show was in its pre-planning stages.
- 73 Currently the grounds of the exhibition are utilised as a park with amusement rides, items for sale and skateboarders, with many of the original buildings in some disrepair. It is of interest to note that the Russian government is undertaking a project to refurbish the exhibition grounds and return them to their original 1939 appearance, as well as ridding the grounds of the rides, stores and other such enterprises. This information is thanks to Dr. John Bowlt, with whom the author was discussing the 1939 exhibition. In addition, this was noted in the English edition of *The Moscow Times*, 'Monumental Oddities', 28 July-3 August 2006, pp. 1 and 3. It is of interest to note that even this article only mentioned the Mukhina statue and not the *Tractor Driver and Collective Farm Woman*, which still exists and was the emblem for the original show.

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## 8 TOTALITARIAN MODEL OR FASCIST EXCEPTION? The Political Economy of Hitler's State Architecture

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PAUL B. JASKOT

### INTRODUCTION

The study of political economy has seemingly been implicit in much of the art history of recent decades. State and party policies and institutions have interested art historians as much as markets, patronage and other economic factors. And yet, the real essence of political economy in its emphasis on the permeation of economic conditions with political and social actions has rarely been taken up in all of its complexity by art historical scholarship. Focusing rather on the explication of movements, artists and objects, art history remains interested primarily in the significance of culture rather than in the functional relationship between cultural work and political economic forces. Such a functionalist art history still deals with questions of particular artists, objects and aesthetic choices. But these are merely the starting points of the analysis. An art historical political economy must use cultural work as a means of explaining the legitimisation and conflict of broader conditions of society, thus breaking free of the very limitations analytically imposed on a focused study of culture per se. This, too, is a crucial art historical project.

Given this necessity of political economic analysis, the question of totalitarianism as a descriptive term for art of fascist and communist regimes in the modern era is central. It has been made abundantly clear that limiting ourselves to a view of art produced under Hitler or Stalin (and Ulbricht, Ceausescu, Pol Pot or Mao, to extend the usual parameters of debate) cannot be analysed transparently, that is as a clear, formal expression of state and party power and ideology. While the forms of state art are, obviously, crucial, it is their complex and variable relationship to state policy, economic change and the political mobilisation of the masses that brings the question of totalitarianism to the fore. Indeed, the variable relationship between art and the state in these regimes seems to undermine the very use of a static and generalised term such as totalitarianism. Analysing this issue – the validity of the term totalitarianism as it is used in relation to art production under fascism – is what I wish to do here.

This essay revisits several themes previously published in my contribution to Julie F. Codell (ed.), *The Political Economy of Art* (2008).

My thanks to Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen and Jacob Wamberg. Additional thanks to Michael Thad Allen, Olaf Peters and Julie Codell for their comments on various versions of this text. My work in this field was originally inspired and continues to be informed by the work of O.K. Werckmeister, to whom I am particularly grateful for his critical comments on the manuscript.

For this analysis, the case of the monumental building projects of the National Socialist Party and state is crucial. The monumental buildings constructed under the design or control of Hitler's main architect Albert Speer have been interpreted by scholars as the most overt examples of the attempt to depoliticise the German population through aestheticising their participation as a 'Volk' in the support of the government, i.e. as a manifestation of totalitarianism. But the building industry was not only of central ideological import - it also had great economic value to the National Socialist government upon coming to power. As a means of helping Germany recover from the Depression, the building trades and state or Party projects provided employment and a concentration of production and resources on a massive scale. And in the monumental projects for such prestige sites as the Party Rally Grounds at Nuremberg and the rebuilding of Berlin, the building industry prospered under the ideological projections of various Party institutions and leaders wishing to connect themselves to Hitler's favourite peacetime programme. While not the largest industry in the Third Reich, building production was nevertheless one of the most high-profile state and Party tasks and thus became a key point for consensus among leading institutions and for the power-politics that occurred between these institutions.

### **BUILDING TECHNOLOGIES AND AESTHETICS**

Building technologies - or, more precisely, the question of what kind of construction techniques to use - became a central point of departure for the consensus and conflict that marked the building industry. Engineers and architects, bureaucrats and labour leaders made decisions for particular sites and made arguments against each other based on the developing building policies of the state and the contingent economic plans occurring because of rearmament. These discussions and debates intensified with the very public promotion of monumental building projects that increased dramatically in the late 1930s and into the war. Monumental projects favoured by Hitler not only had an intense propagandistic value but also provided a high-profile symbolic focus to contemporary discussions concerning the integration of building technologies with the increasing strength and militarisation of the German economy. Architects used changes in building policy and ideological interpretations of built forms to legitimise economic strategies and conditions that were pushed and pulled by the development of state policy. As one of Hitler's major

peacetime initiatives, the reconstruction of specific cities on a massive scale and with particular aesthetic materials (above all, stone) helped revive particular segments of the building economy, a revival that was thoroughly aligned with the broader policies of the state.

It is this alignment of monumental building aesthetics and technologies with state economic and military policy which is the subject here. The integration of culture with repressive state policy is taken as a hallmark of the totalitarian impulse. Analysing the conforming of the Nazi monumental building with political economy must work from such valuable early studies as that of the New Reich Chancellery by Angela Schönberger, Alex Scobie's investigation of the meaning of neoclassicism in the buildings of Hitler's Germany, and the work of Joachim Thies, in which the integration of architectural policy with state and Party concerns was first thematised.<sup>1</sup> However, while each of these authors and those who have followed them have noted the conjunction of building and broader political goals, nevertheless scholars have most often been interested in either: 1) how such a synchronism helps to explain the ideological significance of built forms; or 2) how additional generalised evidence indicates the integration of economic and political goals in the development of Nazi Germany. In either case, the specific political economy of state architecture remains peripheral to the main argument. Reintegrating political economy with our analysis of culture allows us to examine whether National Socialist Germany can be usefully incorporated into a study of totalitarian regimes, or whether we need to consider the fascist particularity of its policies and structural conditions.

Certainly, in the case of monumental architecture, political economy must be part of our analysis, as such architecture involves the mobilisation of vast resources and labour that so often was influenced, shaped, or directed by other political goals. The question revolves around how unstable economic variables like available resources are subjected to compelling or conflicting policies, institutions and agents, and what function culture has within this historical dynamic. Or, as Charles Maier has stated, political economy can most effectively be used 'not to account for politics according to criteria of alleged economic rationality, but to analyse economic choices in terms of political forces. Those who advocate this approach [...] ask what power relations underlie economic outcomes.'<sup>2</sup> This historical political economy also poses a challenge for art history, as it

means extending our investigations beyond an explanation of the significance of particular forms or the biographies of specific artists or artistic institutions. Historical political economy as an analytic tool thus allows us to explore not only how buildings get built or artworks get made but also what effects the production of works of art and architecture have on other, seemingly non-artistic state and economic policies. That is to say, I would argue that historical political economy necessitates breaking away from an elite and isolating focus on objects or artists towards a more synthetic – and hence historical – understanding of the function of culture. Nowhere is this question more necessary than in analysing the link between culture and state policy in the development of National Socialist Germany. A failure to examine the political economic significance of culture in this period is a failure to analyse more completely the oppressive function of architecture, and to leave our analysis of totalitarianism at the level of mere generality.

The importance of such specificity becomes clear if we consider the crucial years of 1937–39. Following Hermann Göring's pronouncement in late 1936 of the Four-Year Plan regulations for the building industry, debates concerning building materials went through a decided shift towards a promotion of masonry construction. In conjunction with this, it was precisely in these years that Hitler and Speer dramatically increased the number of monumental building projects to be undertaken in peace-time Germany and to be built mostly with limestone and granite. Hence, this moment in which the building industry was further centralised under state regulation and in which key high-profile privileged projects were promoted almost daily in Party speeches and the press is a moment in which architects and engineers reconsidered construction techniques and redefined the importance particularly of stone construction for state and Party goals. At no other point in Nazi Germany were design decisions, technological considerations and economic factors so thoroughly and broadly integrated with one another. Analysing the debate concerning the ideological significance and economic possibilities of masonry construction in these years clarifies this moment of concomitant interests. Further, it also indicates the ways in which the choices for monumental state and Party architecture were at the heart of many of the central policy decisions and goals of the building industry in general as well as Hitler's goals for a peace-time Nazi state.

## TOTALITARIANISM, ART AND POLITICAL ECONOMY

Before looking at the material development of the building economy and the legitimisation of specific aspects of that economy in the architectural press, it is worth reminding ourselves of some of the important features of the debate on totalitarianism and art, and how political economy fits within that debate. As detailed in the works of Karl Popper, Leonard Shapiro and Hannah Arendt, for example, totalitarianism describes those single-party regimes that mobilise all social, economic and political means to implement and realise the utopic goals of a complete transformation of society in line with a dominant ideological programme. So, for instance, Hitler's drive towards making a state free of Jews and Stalin's claimed interest in creating a classless society can be compared in this model. But, of course, the other necessary factor that allows us to describe these states as totalitarian rests on the question of the acquiescence and consensus of a mass population, either manufactured by the state or real. For this factor, the Nuremberg Party Rallies have become iconic as examples. The monopolisation of cultural production – from the mass media to the architectural monument – in the hands of the elite of the state allows for the linkage between the idealist goals and the participation of the masses as a legitimating body that is politically disenfranchised.

Crucial to both its original meaning as well as in its later philosophical and social scientific development is the political authoritarianism required to make this link between policy and mass participation. So, for example, we can see this figured in such relatively early works as that of Herbert Marcuse in his 1934 essay, 'The Struggle Against Liberalism in the Totalitarian View of the State':

The separation of state and society, which liberalism had attempted to carry out in the nineteenth century, is abolished: the state takes over the political integration of society. And, in the process of the existentialization and totalization of the political sphere, the state also becomes the bearer of the authentic potentialities of existence itself. It is not the state that is responsible to man but man who is responsible to the state; he is delivered over to it. At the level on which political existentialism moves, there can be absolutely no question whether that state in its "total" form is right in making such demands, whether the system of domination that it defends with all available means guarantees anything like the possibility of more than illusory fulfillment for most men. The existentiality of the political structure is removed from such "rationalistic" questions; even asking them is a crime.<sup>3</sup>

Again, it is the relation of state policy to human action that is emphasised and particularly how human action is negated and mystified by the totalitarian state. The power of the state (in fact, its very reason to exist) rests in its ability to project an ontological argument of its natural and complete right to rule, backed up by the total ability to criminalise and punish any who would question the state's existence. But further, the crucial distinction that marks a totalitarian government for Marcuse is the total authoritarian power of the state to act and manipulate the mass population, so that the rhetorical or ideological legitimisation of the state blends seamlessly with policy and developing structural conditions. For Marcuse, this definition of the state corresponds to both the Italian and German fascist regimes and is based firmly on the protection of bourgeois private property and interests, which the state leaves relatively intact.

But it is precisely these factors that a materialist understanding of the building economy and its legitimisation through the architectural press throws into question: 1) did the state have total authority to manipulate, unimpeded by questions of structural crisis and human agency? 2) can fascism be seen as preserving capitalist structures particularly of private property and labour relations? 3) and, if so, is it not more appropriate to describe the political economy of Hitler's state architecture as fascist rather than as totalitarian, given the very different relation of property and labour rights in other totalitarian states?

### THE MONUMENTAL BUILDING ECONOMY

These are the central questions that need to be resolved by turning to the monumental building economy. In terms of a focus on the years 1937-39, the specific decisions made obviously did not rise out of thin air but rather developed from the particular limitations and conditions of the broader German building economy. In this regard, we can identify roughly three distinct phases in the building industry which correspond to the German economic recovery, militarisation, and the conditions of war: 1) the early years of Nazi rule up to full employment in 1936, characterised by a concern with getting labourers into jobs and promoting autarkic state policy; 2) the conjunction of the military economy and the monumental building economy before the outbreak of war in September 1939 based on specific goals of worker allocation as well as the division of key material

resources for privileged architectural sites; and 3) the prioritisation of architectural goals to complement the Blitzkrieg strategy during the early war years and up to the turn in the war on the Eastern Front beginning in 1942. In this last phase, labour allocation and the use of war-important materials like steel were the major concerns. Notably, in each phase, the two key factors were available workers and choices of materials for construction.<sup>4</sup>

Keeping these factors in mind, a brief overview of the German building economy up to 1937 helps to clarify the kinds of changes in building technologies that were promoted in those years.<sup>5</sup> The German economy in general began sluggishly but significantly to pull out of its 1929 crash in the fall of 1932, months before Hitler came to power. In the initial recovery, however, unemployment remained high, and National Socialist candidates made the issue central to their campaign promises and criticism of the Weimar Republic. Employment had significant political importance because by 1932-3 only two out of every five people with a job in 1929 were still working. This ratio was even higher in some geographical areas of Germany with strong building industries. In Bavaria, for example, rural crises and a disenchantment with the parliamentary democratic system proved influential in turning citizens to vote for the National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP) in the 1932 elections (with support at just over 37 per cent in July 1932). But economic distress and unemployment became important factors as well for voters rejecting the republican political parties.<sup>6</sup> A crucial campaign issue, the unemployment situation provided fodder for the NSDAP leaders in general, and for sectors of the building economy in particular.

As a major concern of the new NSDAP regime, the unemployment situation and stimulation of production formed the core of economic policy as they had in the previous republican governments. From 1933-6, work-creation schemes and the stimulation of trade were astonishingly successful in the recovery of the German economy. Furthermore, Hitler promoted the construction industry as a central component of this directed government spending effort. In this regard, while no one sector of the economy was sufficient on its own to cause the recovery, construction nevertheless grew at a much greater rate than the economy as a whole. The bulk of this construction was in new housing and road construction (particularly the Autobahn), but industrial and commercial construction as well as a

few high-profile public buildings formed a significant contribution to the overall economic effect. Government expenditure in the construction industry not only had the desired economic impact of stimulating businesses related to and reliant on building activity, but also helped achieve the political goal of marking the NSDAP as the party that had brought Germany back from the economic brink.<sup>7</sup>

Through such means as work creation and directed state investment, the employment situation was eventually stabilised by 1936. At that time, the reverse problem arose of an increasing demand for the available labour pool. Public works projects (particularly the Autobahn and building construction) and the growing importance of armaments production as a percentage of total economic output strained the labour market even further.<sup>8</sup> The competition for labour in these years had considerable influence on decisions concerning state and Party construction projects, and on the infighting over labour allocation between government administrations pursuing individual and institutional interests.

Monumental Party and state construction prospered from the initial impetus generated by direct government spending towards building; yet after 1936, such construction was also restricted by the crisis in the unregulated labour markets and limitations on materials. Hence, aesthetic choices began to combine with political economic policies. This situation can be elucidated by looking at the stone industry, stone being the key aesthetic material promoted by Hitler and his architects. Paul Ludwig Troost's Temple of German Art in Munich (ill. 6.1), Hitler's first major commission after he came to power in 1933, relied on vast quantities of German limestone for its façade, a material Hitler had chosen himself. In these cases as in others, Hitler's belief in the permanence of stone and its connection (unlike modernist structures) to a craft tradition which he associated with powerful political regimes and a 'German' style obviously influenced aesthetic choices made by state and Party architects. Though many different materials were used throughout the National Socialist period, the high-profile projects of the Party and state remained exclusively stone buildings with modified neo-classical forms, and they influenced a broad range of building types including major residential and public structures.<sup>9</sup>

And yet, before the end of 1936, the ideological justifications for using stone were generally distinct from arguments for an autarkic

economic policy and work-creation measures. As an example, in May of 1936 a provincial building official (Landesbaurat), one G. Steinlein, wrote a revealing article in the pages of *Der Deutsche Baumeister*, the main professional journal for architects and engineers. By this point, the labour issue provoked less concern in the industry due to growing employment. Not surprisingly, then, Steinlein framed his discussion of the kinds of stone and their potential use with a nationalist economic interest instead. Notably, the potential ideological significance of masonry remains outside of this promotion of particular economic policies. The building economy in this early period functioned on a continuum with the broader German economy, in which political and industrial energy was spent on protecting national markets and ensuring employment. With little monumental building underway, the aesthetic influence on the building economy was not as yet felt or seen as a priority.

Steinlein begins with a statistical report on how Hitler's regime had increased the reliance of German builders on stone quarried in Germany, an economic goal reversing the reliance on imported stone in the Weimar Republic but not yet achieving its potential of employing the entire stone industry within the country. In this context, the only buildings specifically mentioned are Troost's Temple of German Art and his proposals for the Königsplatz in Munich, i.e. monumental projects privileged by Hitler. Steinlein then detailed the technological aspects of using stone including resistance to pressure of different kinds of stone, the use of stone as facing material, etc. Noteworthy in this discussion is the emphasis on the nationalist economic policy, but also the assumption that the main use of stone would be as a facing or decorative material, not as structural material for the building's core. Steinlein's article thus develops out of this period of recovery in the building industry in which nationalist economic goals are being pursued and the use of stone is defined predominantly as an aesthetic element derived from Hitler's taste but not yet affected by limitations on structural steel frames.<sup>10</sup> The linkage between the ideologically-driven cultural significance of a building and the economic or technical choices architects faced is not a part of the early promotions of masonry construction.

However, by the end of 1936 it was becoming more evident that the intensification of production in certain sectors of the economy was leading to shortages of key materials and a renewed need to

focus on labour allocation. As preparations for war began to dominate state economic policy, attempts were made to correct these problems through the centralisation of the distribution of material resources as well as the regulation of the work force. In April 1936, Hitler appointed Göring to organise the economy and put all available state and Party institutions at his disposal. This resulted in Göring's Four-Year Plan (announced at the Party Rally in September 1936), which promoted a rapid militarisation of industry including the production of structural steel. The German economy continued to operate under competitive market conditions, but the conjunction of increased political control over resources and the labour market as well as the interests of large private conglomerates tended towards a highly managed economic system.<sup>11</sup> The same process of centralisation affected the building industry, most intensely by the reduction of its access to iron and cement as well as the stricter control of labour.

The Four-Year Plan came at a time when Hitler was formulating a much more high-profile role for monumental projects in the German building economy. While Hitler's architectural commitments were clear as early as the writing of *Mein Kampf*, it was not until the privileging of the new projects connected with the so-called 'Hitler Cities' in 1937 that the influence of this aesthetic became so strongly felt in the general building economy.<sup>12</sup> From that point, the most important monumental projects were constructed almost in their entirety - including structural support - from granite, limestone and marble with a brick core. But while monumental buildings were a very public focus, the promotion of stone as a structural material also led to other large-scale uses, above all the many residential estates. The preference for stone caused a strong revival of the quarrying industry up to the outbreak of war in 1939, but only for specific types of stone.<sup>13</sup> When it came to stone, architects and contractors depended on aesthetic decisions made by Party and state leaders who, in turn, took their cues from Hitler and Speer. These aesthetic decisions were concomitant with the economic limitations on the use of steel promoted by Göring's Four-Year Plan. This strengthened position of masonry within the building materials market allowed architects to avoid structural steel as well as aligning themselves with Hitler's stated preferences, even if it did not solve the crunch in the work force (stone quarrying in particular being a labour-intensive industry).

Hence, by 1937 the building industry was subject to political manipulation by state and Party institutions which were greatly stressed by the huge demands of rearmament and the aesthetic debates surrounding monumental architectural policy. Gradual centralisation of the industry allowed for the protection of fewer and fewer projects and for a concentration on those enterprises deemed absolutely crucial to the state. Further, the pressure on employment markets left the private economy and state projects eager for ways to maximise the output of a limited labour force. It was in the context of these conditions that architects and engineers turned to synthesising the ideological *and economic* arguments for the use of masonry technology as the ideal building material (outside of industrial concerns) for the German building industry. Concomitantly, this synthesis legitimised the reality of the redistribution of materials for a militarising economy and naturalised the function of stone within the construction industry.

It is worth emphasising the main point here: after the introduction of the material restrictions of the Four-Year Plan and the stepped-up privileging of high-profile monumental projects by Hitler and Speer, masonry building technologies were ideologically and economically promoted as a means of avoiding the use of steel and supporting the developing cultural goals of the state. The cultural significance of building could be used to affirm the militarisation of the economy, and the armaments build-up in turn conditioned interpretations of monumental construction. But further, state political economic goals concerning the building industry were influenced by decisions made concerning the privileged cultural work of monumental architecture.

This dialectic relation between political economy and architecture came about only gradually after the introduction of the Four-Year Plan and culminated in the focused promotion and pursuit of architectural and militarist economic goals in 1939. In the initial stages, architects and state officials tended to weigh the dual problems of access to labour and choice of materials differently. From the point of view of the economic authorities in the state, the crisis in labour markets remained the main problem to be resolved in 1936-37. Released in November 1936, the fourth order from the Office of the Four-Year Plan made clear that labour allocation was the top priority for the building industries as well as the need to link these industries to the policy of rearmament.<sup>14</sup>

However, material regulation – and above all the need to cut back on the use of iron and steel – occupied the very different concern of those in the professional architectural press. A typical example is the anonymous article concerning ‘The Direction of the Building Economy’ from June 1937 in *Der Deutsche Baumeister*. Here, the author’s concerns centred on the need to provide different kinds of building technologies; notable, however, is the focus not on monumental building but rather on the much larger project of residential construction. For the author, steel frames must be avoided at all costs, to be replaced by such methods as reinforced concrete. But better still would be the use of wood and stone. In this early pronouncement, economic considerations related to resource distribution sound the dominant note.<sup>15</sup> Here, the influence of state economic policy is one-way: architects and engineers are being asked to think about alternative materials for the good of rearmament. The cultural significance of specific forms and aesthetics is of course crucial for Hitler or state and Party architects, but has not yet been integrated into the discussion of economic limitations and possibilities.

Speer makes this unreconciled tension between ideological projections and economic needs clear in his one major pronouncement concerning materials and the building economy. He authored an article on the subject written in the autumn of 1937 for *Der Vierjahresplan*, the main organ coming out of Göring’s office. The article was presciently entitled ‘Stone Instead of Iron’ (‘Stein statt Eisen’).<sup>16</sup> Speer is certainly interested here in the ideological significance of masonry construction that follows from Hitler’s own writing in *Mein Kampf*. So, for example, in the second paragraph of the article he mounts a defence of stone as *superior* to iron in relation to its superior ability to represent a powerful people:

While only a few consistently used iron bridges or halls have lasted more than fifty years, the thousand year-old stone structures of Egypt and Rome still stand today as powerful reminders [Bauzeugen] of the past of these great peoples [Völk]. These structures are in many cases ruins because the human destructive mania has made them so. Nature alone could hardly have harmed them.<sup>17</sup>

At first glance, this seems to be the same argument Hitler made in his autobiography that politically admirable societies construct the best monumental architecture. And yet Speer is not specific here about the political function of masonry – instead, he emphasises its



**8.1.** Albert Speer, Model of the German Stadium, Nuremberg (1937). Source: G. Troost, *Bauen im neuen Reich*, 1938.

permanence. Ideological claims are broad and vague, at best, with no mention of particular buildings or even the monumental projects on which he was working such as the German Stadium at the Nuremberg Party Rally Grounds (ill. 8.1). Rather, his focus is made clear in the remainder of the article, which discusses the great flexibility of masonry construction as well as its proven worth in buildings that remain over time. Emphasising how turning to masonry (particularly stone) allows for a conservation of steel needed for armaments work, Speer ends the article with a revival of the argument concerning autarkic policies, a goal dominant in the early years of the National Socialist state, as we have seen. He reminds the reader not of stone's ideological significance but rather of the variety of clay and stone deposits available for exploitation within Nazi Germany itself. In the pages of Göring's journal, Speer is clearly indicating that the architects are falling into line with economic policy through their choice of aesthetics and building technologies.

### 1937-39 AND AFTER

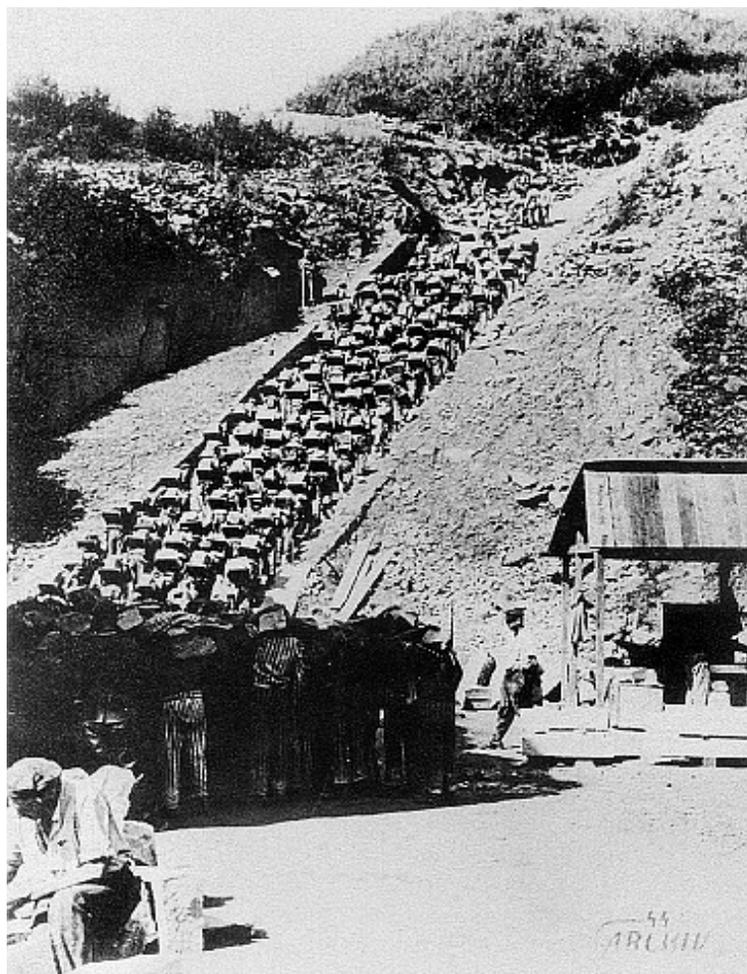
Within the next two years, however, the pace of high-profile monumental building projects rapidly increased as more and more officials attempted to tie themselves to what by then was clearly Hitler's main peace-time interest. The privileging of key architectural sites began to demand a similar kind of centralised management of the building economy as the Four-Year Plan, if on a smaller scale. The expansion of building projects, architects and sites required a different definition of how privileged architectural projects were going to have access to the key resources of labour and materials. But, further, it required some flexibility of Göring and other administrators to make their economic principles fall into line with architectural policy. Hence, by 1939, economic rationales alone are no longer what architects are using to define their relation to state policy. Rather, economic needs have been clearly combined with the forceful interest in and influence of the monumental building projects. The ideological legitimisation of particularly building technologies has become itself an influential policy on the broader direction of the German building economy.

Erich Simon, an architect in the German Labour Front (DAF, Deutsche Arbeitsfront), made this clear in an article in *Der Deutsche Baumeister*. Certainly, for Simon, economic efficiency and the rationalisation of the building industry in line with armaments concerns were still a priority (the article appeared in March, many months before the outbreak of war): 'For architects the connection to the material resources [of the national economy (Volkswirtschaft)] plays a completely decisive role.'<sup>18</sup> But just as significant for Simon was the promotion of the ideological use of specific masonry techniques, above all stone and its association with particularly classical Roman building. He goes so far as to articulate the argument that the renunciation of steel technology allows for the rediscovery of the beauty of vaulted masonry construction.<sup>19</sup> Thus, within a relatively short span of time, it is not simply that issues of efficiency dictated alternative building materials; rather, it is also the case that the need for these materials was promoted in public pronouncements and state policy as both economically efficient and culturally significant. Such a shift is accounted for by the massive influence of the high-profile architectural concerns of the Party and state on the building economy as both the economy and architecture were integrated into the milita-

rist and expansionist goals of a Germany on the brink of war. Hence, the building economy was not just subject to state objectives but rather part of those very political economic goals.

This integration of the political economy of the state with cultural production by 1939 can be exemplified in the extreme case of the involvement of the SS with monumental building. When Heinrich Himmler's administrative chief, Oswald Pohl, reoriented the forced labour production in the concentration camp system in 1937, he and economic bureaucrats within the SS decided to devote the majority of inmate production to bricks and stone. In an important meeting between Hitler, Himmler and Speer, it was decided that these building materials could be used for the monumental structures of the Party and state. It is significant that the first contract Speer signed with the SS-run firm, the Deutsche Erd- und Steinwerk (DEST), was for structural bricks. In 1937-38, only the brick-making operations at the camps of Sachsenhausen and Buchenwald were being constructed. But, by the spring of 1938 Pohl and his advisors had extended those operations to include two new camps set up at Flossenbürg and Mauthausen. These camps were established around high-quality granite deposits, suitable as structural and facing material for monumental projects. By the beginning of the war, these camps were already producing materials for such high-profile projects as Wilhelm Kreis's Soldiers Hall on Speer's monumental Berlin north-south axis (ill. 8.2). In the process, however, the production of granite was also literally killing tens of thousands of inmates designated for political and social reasons as supposed enemies of the state. At these camps, the aesthetic goals of the state led to a linkage between the authoritarian need to suppress and control unwanted populations and the political economy of building production. By the outbreak of World War II, four of the six existing camps were thus geared to Hitler's major peace-time initiative, a clear case in which state cultural policy influenced the development of other politically oppressive goals.<sup>20</sup>

The coming of war in September 1939 led, however, to a very different set of conditions and policies in the building industry. The difference between pre- and post-1939 was significant: not only were certain production costs fixed, but the state also implemented increasingly stringent measures in terms of the prioritisation of 'useful' projects. The building economy was not excepted from these



**8.2.** View of Prisoners carrying stones on the steps of the quarry, KL Mauthausen (SS photo, c. 1942). Source: Rijksinstituut voor Oorlogsdocumentatie (Courtesy of the US Holocaust Memorial Museum Source Archive).

measures even while Hitler pushed to have specific monumental projects continued in spite of restrictions. In the optimistic war years before 1942, articles in the architectural trade journal of *Der Deutsche Baumeister* emphasised the need of architects to become more knowledgeable about the use of diverse building technologies, the availability of building materials, and the relation between the building economy and the war effort. But as most materials were by this

time already carefully regulated, the variable of greatest concern to the building economy was the labour force. Already within the first war year, the state encouraged architects and construction professionals to maximise labour output at all costs. While the curtailment of peace-time building projects during the war (excepting after June 1940 Hitler's favoured projects for Berlin, Nuremberg, Munich, Linz and Hamburg) led to some relief from the worker shortage in other areas of the building economy, construction was seriously threatened by the loss of skilled and unskilled workers to military conscription. Replacements needed to be found, and state officials discussed publicly the use of more foreign civilian labour from occupied territories and the use of prisoners of war. In article after article, professionals focused on the quantity and quality of the labour force as the most pressing need in the war economy, and (until 1942) for the presumed postwar needs of the monumental building projects, which seemed to be only a battle victory or two away.<sup>21</sup> Thus, in the early war years, the efficient use of regulated materials like steel was still a factor – but the focus of economic development shifted to the expansion and maximisation of labour productivity. Labour became the concern that dominated the interests of the state and its architects. It was precisely in these years that DEST prospered most, expanding its operations to include camps and quarrying concerns inside Germany and in occupied Europe. For DEST administrators, the optimism of the early war years as well as their ability to manage and expand their control over thousands of forced labourers from throughout the continent seemed to guarantee their eventual dominant political role in Hitler's postwar artistic policies. With the conjunction of political oppressive and artistic goals, it is not surprising that precisely the early war years proved to be most deadly in terms of the labour conditions for the majority of the prisoners in the quarry concentration camps.

However, the conjunction of the ideological significance of masonry technology with the needs of the militarised economy had lost much of its impact even though work on monumental state and Party projects continued at least up until the clear military setbacks on the Eastern Front. Even before the military defeats, Speer had signalled a clear direction in the interpretation of architectural production during the war by making broad associations between the history of architecture through the centuries, the Nazi buildings then planned and under construction, and vague claims as to architec-

ture's role in an expansionist Germany.<sup>22</sup> In this sense, a narrower interest in justifying and using certain kinds of building technologies like masonry became of less interest; in its stead, newer and more brutal ideological goals became the focus of government regulation even as the war led to further regulation of the economy and expansion of extreme labour policies. Here too, the building industry worked with state policy as a key component in the military expansion and policies of oppression particularly against the European Jews.<sup>23</sup> In essence, thus, a reconsideration of historical political economy in relation to Hitler's state architecture indicates that aesthetic debates and the use of particular building materials or technologies became subject to and part of the gradual radicalisation of all major government policies dealing with militarisation and resource management most forcefully in the years leading up to World War II.

#### TOTALITARIAN OR FASCIST?

Which returns us to the question of whether this integration of culture and politics is best described as totalitarian or fascist: it seems to me that based on the evidence presented here, one can speak (following Marcuse) of the clear totalitarian impulse of the state to use and manipulate all elements of society including culture to achieve its ends. This extends to the use of the most oppressive institutions of the concentration camps. And yet, precisely here at the camps, we also see elements in the political economy which question this assessment. DEST, as an SS firm, was always registered as a private concern. In addition to its extreme control over labour and its access to specific contracts, it competed on the building materials market as a private firm subject to the variables of pricing, supply and demand. That is to say, the building economy of Nazi Germany was highly managed and politically influenced but still preserved the economic relations of pre-fascist society. In fact, it was precisely the SS administrator's ability to engage in the private economy that allowed for the alignment of political goals of oppression and cultural goals of architecture. And yet, of course, its authoritarian practices legitimised by state policy and conditioned economically by regulations on markets tend to temper this assessment as well. Still, in this respect, it does seem to me valid to distinguish the mobilisation of a capitalist political economy for authoritarian political goals as being closer to a particular fascist model rather than

a general totalitarian one. In terms of structural conditions, our analysis allows for greater clarity in terms of the multiple ways in which political economy works in relation to cultural production.

While crucial for understanding the debates around masonry in 1937-39, this is also a lesson that should make us look carefully at the political economy of other historical periods in order to assess more completely the relationship between art and the distribution of resources in a given society. Resources (labour, materials and also time) are variable components that influence every art historical problem whether it is that of the individual painter or the institutional goals of a state cultural apparatus. Seeing the functional relationship between cultural work and resources points us squarely to the intersection between art history and political economy. This intersection reveals the embeddedness of art in broader structural relations, a condition that can be used analytically to open up the opportunity for art history to perform a radical critique of society. Such a critique is dependent on the question of whether art history should argue from within the box of problems raised exclusively by the artist and her or his work. Seeing this hermeneutic box as itself a construct rather than as an historical condition allows for new questions concerning the functional role of cultural work in relation to specific objects and institutions as well as to the broader social, economic and political forces seemingly beyond the realm of art historical investigation.

## NOTES

1. Angela Schönberger, *Die Neue Reichskanzlei von Albert Speer: Zum Zusammenhang von nationalsozialistischer Architektur und Ideologie* (Gebr. Mann; Berlin, 1981); Alexander Scobie, *Hitler's State Architecture: the Impact of Classical Antiquity* (Pennsylvania State University Press; University Park, 1990); Jochen Thies, *Architekt der Weltherrschaft: Die "Endziele" Hitlers* (Droste; Düsseldorf, 1976).
2. Charles S. Maier, *In Search of Stability. Explorations in Historical Political Economy* (Cambridge University Press; Cambridge, 1987), p. 3. See also the excellent essay in this volume on comparative fascist economics (pp. 70-120).
3. Herbert Marcuse, 'The Struggle against Liberalism in the Totalitarian View of the State', reprinted in *Negations: Essays in Critical Theory* (Beacon Press; Boston, 1968), pp. 36-37.
4. For the institutional and cultural development (separate from concerns of the building industry) of the professions of architect and engineer in Nazi Germany, see Eduard H. Führ, 'Über die Kultur der Architekten und Ingenieure im 'Dritten' Deutschen Reich', in Ulrich Kuder (ed.), *Archi-*

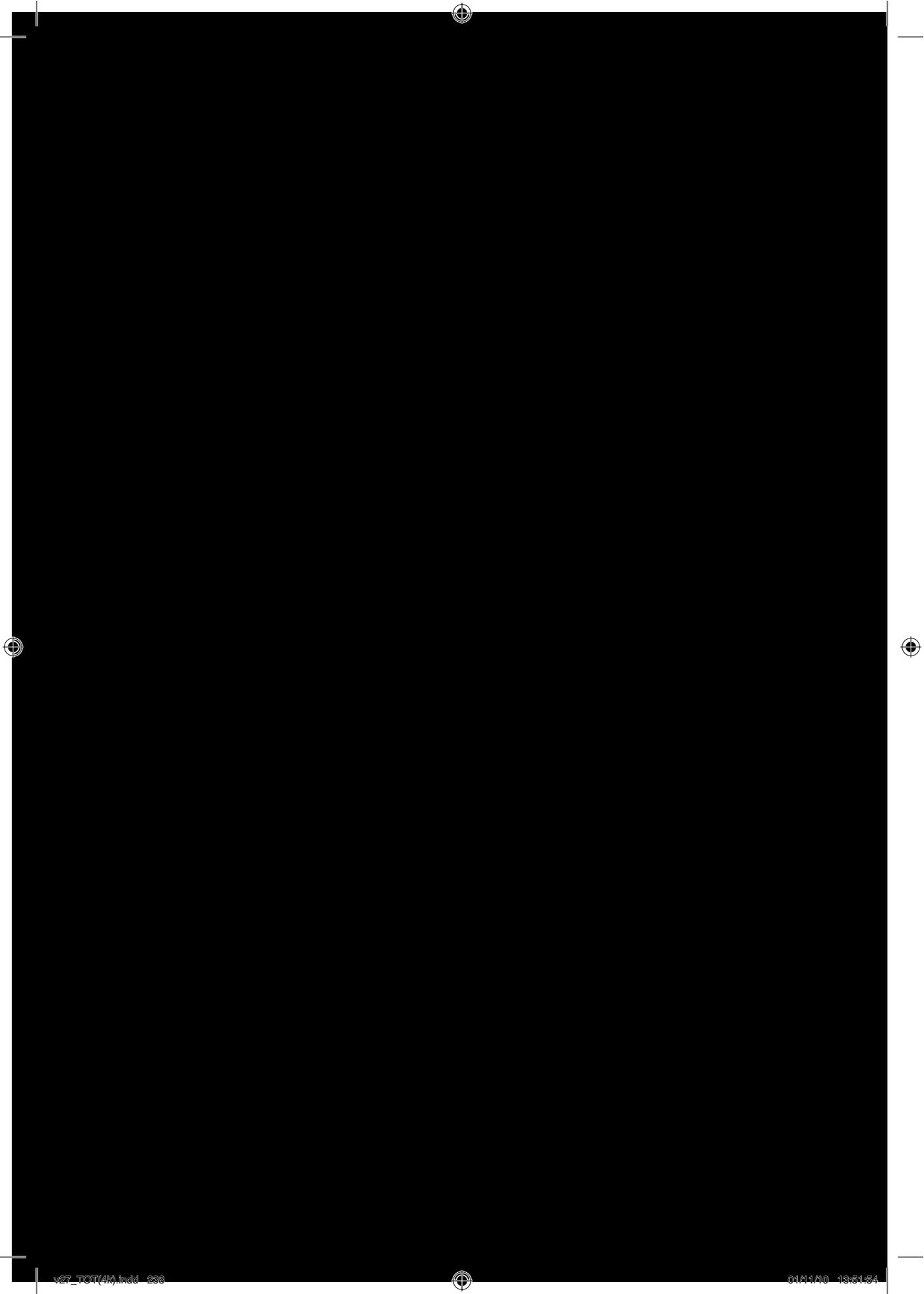
- tektur und Ingenieurwesen zur Zeit der nationalsozialistischen Gewaltherrschaft 1933-1945 (Gebr. Mann; Berlin, 1997), pp. 53-68.
5. This brief overview of the German building economy summarises information I have presented elsewhere. For a more extended account of the building economy, see Paul B. Jaskot, *Architecture of Oppression* (Routledge; London, 2000), pp. 15-19 and 25-34.
  6. As the largest sector of the Bavarian industrial economy, the building trades suffered from the Depression at even greater rates than many other comparable industries; according to the 1933 census, 39% of building trade workers were unemployed. See the discussion of the Bavarian situation and voter patterns before and after 1933, in Ian Kershaw, *Popular Opinion and Political Dissent in the Third Reich: Bavaria 1933-1945* (Clarendon Press; Oxford, 1983), pp. 10-110. Although due to the usual slow down in the winter months as well as the general unemployment problem, one report from January 1932 produced by the building trades for the government listed the rate of unemployment in their industry at 88.6%. See the report on the 'Beschäftigungsgrad im Baugewerbe', BA (Bundesarchiv), R13/VIII, p. 27.
  7. Richard J. Overy, *The Nazi Economic Recovery, 1932-1938* (Cambridge University Press; Cambridge, 1996 [1982]), revised 2nd edn., pp. 36-51. See also Dan P. Silverman, *Hitler's Economy. Nazi Work Creation Programs, 1933-1936* (Harvard University Press; Cambridge (Mass.), 1998).
  8. Franz W. Seidler, *Fritz Todt: Baumeister des Dritten Reiches* (F.A. Herbig; Munich, 1986), pp. 97-159. Seidler's neoconservative approach should be viewed with caution. Nevertheless, his general observations on the building economy are backed up by contemporary pronouncements. For example, NSDAP Reichsschatzmeister Franz Xaver Schwarz pointed out the continuing problem in a memorandum of 1939: 'The lack of manpower, especially in the building economy, demands a planned use of the available manpower.' See the Schwarz memorandum of 19 July 1939, in BA (Bundesarchiv), NS3/436, p. 30. See also other orders by Schwarz sent to the SS economic administrators from 1939 to 1941 in this file discussing similar problems.
  9. Klaus Backes, *Hitler und die bildenden Künste: Kulturverständnis und Kunstpolitik im Dritten Reich* (DuMont; Cologne, 1988), pp. 126-27 and 153-59. See the survey of different building types, in Barbara Miller Lane, *Architecture and Politics in Germany, 1918-1945* (Harvard University Press; Cambridge (Mass.), 1968), pp. 185-216. For the most complete account of the ideological significance of neoclassicism and stone, see Scobie, *Hitler's State Architecture*. The most compelling analysis of the political instrumentalisation of masonry from the Weimar into the early Nazi period remains Christian Fuhrmeister, *Beton, Klinker, Granit: Material, Macht, Politik: eine Materialikonographie* (Bauwesen; Berlin, 2001).
  10. G. Steinlein, 'Vorkommen, Eigenschaften und Verwendungsarten deutscher natürlicher Gesteine', *Beilage zum 'Baumeister'*, no. 5, 1936, pp. B91-93. See also Overy's (*Nazi Economic Recovery*) discussion of the attempt to cut down on foreign financing and production in the German economy.
  11. Hans-Erich Volkman, 'Die NS-Wirtschaft in Vorbereitung des Krieges', in Wilhelm Deist et al. (eds.), *Ursachen und Voraussetzungen des Zweiten Weltkrieges* (Fischer Taschenbuch; Frankfurt a.M., 1989), pp. 329-52. For the nature of this managed economy, see Overy, *Nazi Economic Recovery*, pp. 36-51 and 66-67. See also the interpretation of the significance for the building economy of the first 6 orders from Göring's office in: 'Vierjahresplan und Bauwesen', *Beilage zum 'Baumeister'*, vol. 1, 1937, p. B14.
  12. See the general overview of the five 'Hitler Cities' - Berlin, Munich, Linz, Nuremberg (the Party Rally Grounds), and Hamburg - as well as reprinted documentation, in Jost Dülffer, Jochen Thies, and Josef Henke (eds.), *Hitlers Städte: Baupolitik im Dritten Reich* (Böhlmann; Cologne, 1978). For Hitler's pronouncements on architecture, see in particular Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, trans. Ludwig Lore (Stackpole Sons Publishers; New York, 1939; German 1st edn. 1927), pp. 257-63.
  13. See Scobie's discussion of the relevance of stone to Hitler and the theory of 'ruin value' (Scobie, *Hitler's State Architecture*, pp. 93-96). For specific examples of the influence of Speer and Hitler on aesthetic decisions concerning the choice of stone, see the discussion of the Nuremberg Party Rally Grounds and the rebuilding of Berlin, in Jaskot, *The Architecture of Oppression*.
  14. 'Vierjahresplan und Bauwesen', p. B14.
  15. 'Die Lenkung des Baumarktes', *Beilage zum 'Baumeister'*, no. 6, 1937, pp. B132-33.
  16. Albert Speer, 'Stein statt Eisen', *Der Vierjahresplan*, vol. 1, no. 3, 1937, pp. 135-37.
  17. Speer, 'Stein statt Eisen', p. 136 [author's translation].
  18. E. Simon, 'Baugestaltung und Bauwirtschaft', *Der Deutsche Baumeister*, no. 3, 1939, p. 5 [author's translation].
  19. Simon, 'Baugestaltung und Bauwirtschaft', pp. 5-8.
  20. Jaskot, *The Architecture of Oppression*, pp. 11-46.
  21. A review of *Der Deutsche Baumeister* reveals the prioritisation of wartime and monumental building projects as well as the focus on key wartime issues like material acquisition and labour policy. See for example

J. Steffens, 'Die gegenwärtigen und zukünftigen Möglichkeiten des Bauschaffens', *Der Deutsche Baumeister*, vol. 1, 1942, pp. 7-12. Christian Fuhrmeister's excellent book on the political significance of materials for specific monuments in the Weimar and Nazi period also has a useful last chapter on the ideological significance of stone in the Third

Reich and its continued use during the war (Fuhrmeister, *Beton, Klinker, Granit*).

22. Albert Speer and Rudolf Wolters, *Neue Deutsche Baukunst* (Volk und Reich; Berlin, 1941).
23. Debórah Dwork and Robert Jan van Pelt, *Auschwitz: 1270 to the Present* (W.W. Norton and Company; New York, 1996). See also the overview

of architecture's usefulness for anti-Semitic policy, in Paul B. Jaskot, 'Architecture and the Destruction of the European Jews', in Frederick C. DeCoste and Bernard Schwartz (eds.), *The Holocaust's Ghost: Writings on Art, Politics, Law and Education* (University of Alberta Press; Edmonton, 2000), pp. 145-64.



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TOTALITARIAN  
AND/OR  
MODERNIST ART?

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CHRISTINA KIAER

INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

On 11 December 1934, a notice appeared in the newspaper *Evening Moscow* announcing the departure of the thirty-five year-old artist Aleksandr Deineka for a three-month trip to the United States (ill. 9.1). The short text appeared below a photograph of the artist and a reproduction of one of his recent watercolours of the Crimean seaside, and explained that he had been sent abroad by the organisers of the major exhibition *Art of Soviet Russia* that was to open a two-year tour of North America later that month in Philadelphia. Deineka had left for Berlin to set sail for New York on the Hamburg-Amerika Line, travelling with the other Soviet representative of the exhibition, Osip Beskin, the powerful head of the Critics' Section of the Moscow Artists' Union. Deineka was an officially favoured figurative artist within the new Soviet art system – otherwise he would not have been chosen for the rare honour of travel to the West – and was actively involved in the debates about the formation of Socialist Realism, which had just been declared the official art form of the Soviet Union earlier that year at the First Soviet Writers' Congress.

As the very appearance of a notice like this in a popular newspaper suggests, Deineka was a well-known cultural figure, and Soviet cultural institutions promoted his trip abroad, and the 'Art of Soviet Russia' exhibition itself, as sources of national pride. In the standard histories of so-called totalitarian art, Socialist Realism is always judged and found lacking by the Western standards of advanced art. This essay will attempt to complicate this history by taking seriously



9.1. A notice in the newspaper *Vecherniaia Moskva* (*Evening Moscow*) on 11 December 1934 announcing the departure of Aleksandr Deineka for New York.

the Soviet side of the story: Deineka arrived in the United States confident that he was there to represent a vital new form of socialist art and culture, and to judge American art and culture by its standards – even though he spoke no English and had never travelled abroad before. The encounters of the *Soviet Art* exhibition, and of Deineka himself, with America challenge the East-West, Socialist Realist-modernist binaries that have been retroactively imposed on this period by Cold War critical models. Much of the art categorised as Socialist Realism in the 1930s, and in particular Deineka's work of that decade, can more productively be understood as variants of modernism, responding to Soviet modernity, than as coerced totalitarian art.<sup>2</sup> A study of Deineka's transcultural encounter with American modernity can sharpen and clarify our understanding of the shape and limits of this alternate modernism.

#### THE 'ART OF SOVIET RUSSIA' EXHIBITION

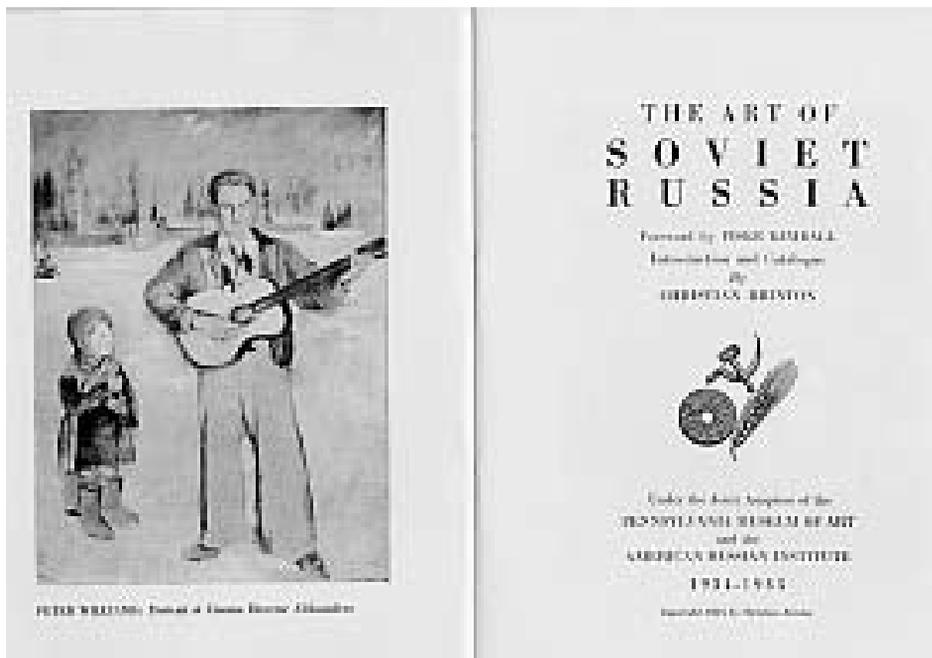
Despite its all-encompassing title, the *Art of Soviet Russia* exhibition that opened in Philadelphia in December 1934 failed to offer anything like a representative sample of the new doctrine of Socialist Realism, or even of the range of Soviet art as it was then practised. Organised on the Soviet side by VOKS (Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries), and on the US side by the Pennsylvania Museum of Art – now the Philadelphia Museum – in conjunction with the private American Russian Institute of Philadelphia, the exhibition ended up a disappointing compromise for both sides. It included only 50 oil paintings – one-third of the planned amount – and 190 works on paper. The archival records of the planning stages of the exhibition, held in the Russian State Archive, show that American organisers had begun with highly ambitious plans for the show, aiming for a 'comprehensive resume' of Soviet art over the previous fifteen years:

Whilst fifteen years is a brief space in which to alter the spirit, character, and complexion of a nation's art, we nevertheless trust that the coming exhibition may in some degree reveal the ferment of forces active today in the USSR [...] *What we now desire to see, mirrored in Russian painting, is the profound and far-reaching changes at present taking place in the ideology of the Russian masses.*<sup>3</sup>  
[emphasis in the original]

They hoped to base the Pennsylvania exhibition on the famous '15 Years of Art of the RSFSR' exhibition that had taken place in Moscow and Leningrad in 1932-33, and therefore requested works by a broad range of artists, including avant-garde artists such as Malevich, Tatlin and El Lissitzky as well as the figurative artists then favoured by Soviet art institutions.<sup>4</sup> But as the increasingly agitated internal correspondence between VOKS, the Philadelphia organisers, and the Russian embassy in Washington, DC reveals, none of the organisers was pleased with the final form of the exhibition.<sup>5</sup>

The failures of the exhibition make plain the dysfunction of many aspects of the new Soviet art bureaucracy, while at the same time its relative breadth and inclusiveness attest to the fluidity of the definition of the term 'Socialist Realism' at this moment.<sup>6</sup> There was no agreement as to what a Socialist Realist work would look like; rather, there were constant debates and arguments on the topic, in the Artists' Union and in the art press.<sup>7</sup> Although by 1934 there was no longer any possibility that the Soviet government would send works by avant-garde artists as representative of current Soviet art, as requested by the US organisers, VOKS otherwise set out to fulfil their requests for a broad range of works – and in the process, to further its own agenda of demonstrating the vitality of Soviet art after the Writers' Congress. The exhibition included hardly any examples of the kind of painting that would usually be associated in the West with Socialist Realism: the large-scale, sunny, optimistic image of groups of Soviet people enthusiastically greeting the communist leader. If anything, in its aim to emphasise the dynamism and modernity of Soviet art, VOKS did a better job of representing the new generation of officially recognised but still experimental figurative artists with roots in avant-garde painting of the 1920s, such as Deineka and Petr Viliams (Peter Williams, an artist of Welsh-Russian ancestry), whose works were illustrated in the catalogue (ills. 9.2 and 9.3).

Deineka's work was one of the exhibition's prime examples of Socialist Realism as a form of modern art. As a person, he fulfilled the role of socialist artist almost perfectly: an outspoken and enthusiastic supporter of his Soviet homeland, he had been born to semi-literate, working-class parents in 1899, and had immediately joined in with the Bolshevik cause in the revolution of 1917, becoming an artist attached to the Red Army during the Civil War before moving



**9.2.** Frontispiece and title page of the exhibition catalogue *The Art of Soviet Russia*, foreword by Fiske Kimball. Introduction and catalogue by Christian Brinton (The Pennsylvania Museum of Art and the American Russian Institute, Philadelphia; 1934).

**9.3.** First page listing paintings in the exhibition catalogue *The Art of Soviet Russia*, foreword by Fiske Kimball. Introduction and catalogue by Christian Brinton (The Pennsylvania Museum of Art and the American Russian Institute, Philadelphia; 1934).



to Moscow to attend art school. Starting around 1924, he became a prolific illustrator for the new communist journals, and in 1925 he began to produce overtly modernist oil paintings (such as *Before the Descent into the Mine* (1925), *Building New Factories* (1926), and *The Defense of Petrograd* (1928)). They were modernist in the most straightforward, Greenbergian definition of the term: they self-consciously questioned the forms by which they were made, as conventional two-dimensional marks organised on a canvas, as much as they conveyed a particular socialist content. He emerged from the famous VKhUTEMAS art school, where avant-garde figures such as the constructivist Aleksandr Rodchenko taught, to found the modernist-inspired but figurative painters' group OSt (Society of Easel Painters) in 1925; OSt was committed to developing new painterly forms for representing Soviet life and themes, in contrast to the 19th-century realist models promoted by the rival AKhRR group (Association of Artists of Revolutionary Russia). By the mid-1930s, however, Deineka's paintings had shed most of their earlier montage-like qualities, and even though their laconic, flattened and poster-like pictorial language continued to connect him more closely to the modernist tradition than to AKhRR-style realism, he was still considered a major player in the formulation of a new Soviet realism.<sup>8</sup>

Deineka's contribution to the 'Art of Soviet Russia' exhibition included his three recent oil sketches for a major mural project for the new building of the National Commissariat of Agriculture (Narkomzem); the one illustrated in the exhibition catalogue depicts the favourite Soviet theme of the old and the new, juxtaposing a horse-drawn cart with brand-new tractors, one of them driven by the iconic female tractor driver or *traktoristka* (see ill. 9.3, upper left). He also contributed a rather stiff oil painting of a father and son relaxing on a bench in a flower-filled park, *Rest*, illustrating Soviet leisure, and his important canvas *Goalkeeper* (1934), in which a soccer goalie seen from behind hurtles horizontally across the elongated picture surface, suspended in mid-air, in a spatially destabilised composition reminiscent of avant-garde works such as Lissitzky's *Prouns* (Russian acronym for 'Projects for the Affirmation of the New') of the early 1920s. The critic Abram Efros, writing in 1935, called Deineka the 'most 'modern' (*sovremennyi*) of the Soviet artists'.<sup>9</sup> The whiff of modernism that still permeated Deineka's form, denigrated as it had been in recent attacks on formalism and the

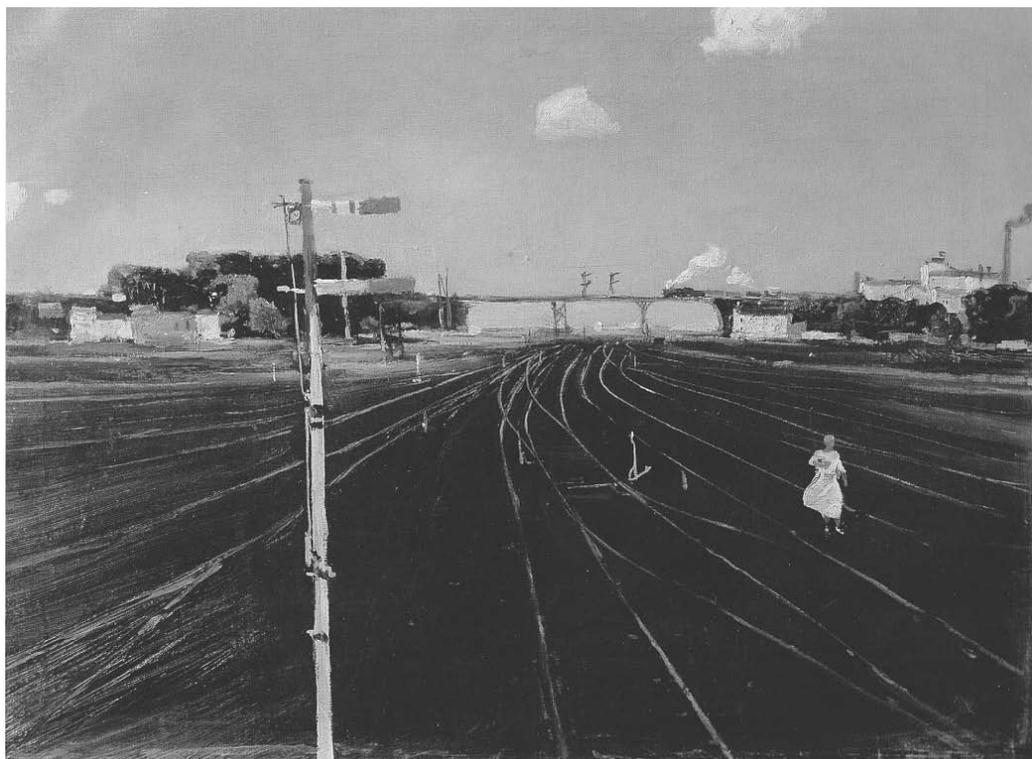
formulation of Socialist Realism, combined with his predilection for outdoor, sporty and even aeronautic imagery representing socialist ideals and achievements, gave his works their contemporary feel. This perception of Deineka's modernity – of both his work and his personal style – made him the ideal choice for bureaucrats faced with the choice of which artist to send to America for this high-profile mission.

Deineka's status as an official representative for the exhibition, and the fact that he himself would accompany his works to the US, made it possible for him to contribute representative examples of his work to the exhibition. In contrast, Williams and most other artists were inaccurately represented, because few of the artists solicited for the exhibition submitted major works. Williams, for example, who was known for his dynamic paintings of modern subjects as well as for his portraits, submitted only two portraits. Large-scale technological and industrial paintings such as, for example, his imposing *Assembling Workshop* (1932), were not available for the exhibition because they were already owned by government collections. Internal memoranda show the increasing frustration of VOKS officials:

The fundamental difficulty is the attempt to demonstrate the current situation of Soviet art exclusively through pictures belonging to the artists themselves; in recent years, all important Soviet painting gets done by commission or for organizations or institutions or museums. The museums refuse to loan their pictures.<sup>10</sup>

Even artists who had major works in their possession refused to lend them to the exhibition, not believing, as one official ruefully noted, that they would ever get them back from abroad.<sup>11</sup> Fully half of the paintings that made it into the exhibition were portraits, landscapes and modest domestic scenes, rather than the kinds of thematic paintings on new Soviet subject matter that had been desired by the organisers on both sides. For example, the catalogue illustrated an unusually domestic and almost Matisse-like modernist oil painting of female bathers by Iurii Pimenov, a young artist with origins, like Deineka and Williams, in Ost, who regularly painted more standard Soviet thematic compositions.

The paradox is that the very eclecticism of the 'Soviet Art' exhibition, with its mix of works on socialist themes and works on more traditional artistic subjects, and of low-key modernism with 19th-



**9.4.** Georgii Nisskii, *On the Railroad Tracks, May* (1933) oil on canvas. Volgograd, Museum of Arts.

century realism, contributed to the considerable success of the exhibition with American critics and audiences. The organisers may have been downright embarrassed by the show, but the public liked it. The venerable *New York Times* art critic Edward Alden Jewell enthused about the Philadelphia exhibition in two separate reviews, singling out Deineka, Williams and a few others, including Deineka's friend Georgii Nisskii. *On the Railroad Tracks, May* (1933), is typical of Nisskii's pared-down painterly language, capturing an alternative romantic vision of a Soviet industrial pastoral, as the billowing white dress of the woman is echoed in the puffs of smoke rising from the train behind her (ill. 9.4). Like many other American critics responding to the exhibition, Jewell emphasised that in spite of what audiences might have expected, the works were not propaganda:

Unless all of these artists have been cunningly 'bought' by a government determined that propaganda shall be spread abroad through the mediumship of an art that falsifies (and this must appear grotesquely improbable), we cannot but conclude that the work [...] represents the spirit of a people released; of a people free, at length, to warm itself at the hearth of human peace and comradeship and simple, spontaneous happiness.<sup>12</sup>

The language is flowery and more than a bit patronising, but its emphasis on the Soviet Union as a young country struggling for freedom also suggests the often noted affinity between America and Soviet Russia.

The affinity was also between two models of modern art that emphasised figuration over abstraction. It is well known that American art of the 1930s, like Soviet Socialist Realism, was less 'advanced' than European art according to the standard modernist paradigm; Jewell was himself a well-known partisan of homegrown figurative art in America, as opposed to the modernist tendencies that originated in Europe. Reviewers noted over and over the affinities between Soviet and American art: in the newspaper the *Philadelphia Inquirer* one critic wrote:

These Russian artists appeal to and are inspired by many of the subjects which delight the general run of American painters, attractive landscapes, village scenes, portraiture and sports. Visitors will look long and hard for the propaganda picture, which might have been even ardently expected.<sup>13</sup>

A critic for the *Baltimore Sun*, in the state of Maryland, pushed the affinity even further, zeroing in on Niskii's *On the Railroad Tracks* in particular:

There were pictures of bridge construction [...] of railroad yards with a woman in white running along the ties – a group of pictures which one visitor remarked 'might have been painted by a unit of the Engineers' Club of Baltimore.'<sup>14</sup>

Now this kind of praise, it must be admitted, is exactly the kind of evidence that has been used to deride Socialist Realism as a kind of amateurish non-art; but it suggests what it was that endeared the Soviet efforts to an American public that was largely suspicious of European modernism. An intelligent and well-informed review of the exhibition in *Fortune* magazine was subtitled 'how to tell Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Deyneka of Kursk, Ukraine from Thomas Hart Benton of Neosho, Missouri.' Specifically comparing Deineka

to Benton, the author enthused that ‘in no man more than Deyneka does the Russian painter’s kinship with the American appear.’ Putting forth the thesis that American and Russian art were similar because, despite political dissimilarities, both countries were ‘continental nations’, sharing the same earth and land, the author refused to dismiss the Soviet work as propaganda, claiming that ‘even in their propaganda the Russian painters and the American painters are not far apart.’<sup>15</sup> Given this reception, it is not surprising that after Philadelphia, the exhibition would travel to 17 more venues in the United States and Canada before returning to the USSR in December 1936, garnering significant interest and many more supportive reviews.<sup>16</sup>

#### **THE SOVIET ARTIST JUDGES AND REPORTS: DEINEKA'S ENCOUNTER WITH THE USA**

In a lecture he gave on his return to Moscow at the Central Artists’s House in May 1935, Deineka returned the favour, exhorting his listeners that American art, about which he said Russians knew nothing, merited far more attention than French art: ‘you think when you get to America, there is nothing to see, you can see it all easily, while in Paris there is so much that you will never see it all. This impression is the reverse of the truth.’<sup>17</sup> (After leaving the US in mid-March, he had gone on to visit Paris and Rome before returning to Moscow in May, so he was in a position to make this comparison.) He claimed to have visited dozens of exhibitions and collections in the US, and he sketched out for his audience an account of the various groupings of American artists. He admitted that Benton and the other regionalists were politically reactionary in their overt nationalism, but this did not change his admiration for Benton, whom he described as ‘terribly active’ and ‘terribly fertile’, capable of producing ‘great works’;<sup>18</sup> he was particularly taken with Benton’s mural programme *America Today* from 1930, which he had studied carefully at the New School for Social Research in New York (ill. 9.5). The other major American artistic group that Deineka discussed in detail during his Moscow lecture was, not surprisingly, the international communists of the John Reed Clubs. In the opposition Deineka sets up between the reactionary regionalists and the John Reed Club artists, as well as in his cursory discussion of the other major artistic groups in the US – the uninteresting ‘academics’ on the one hand, and the slavish followers of the French modernist masters on the other – he follows quite closely, and may have borrowed from,

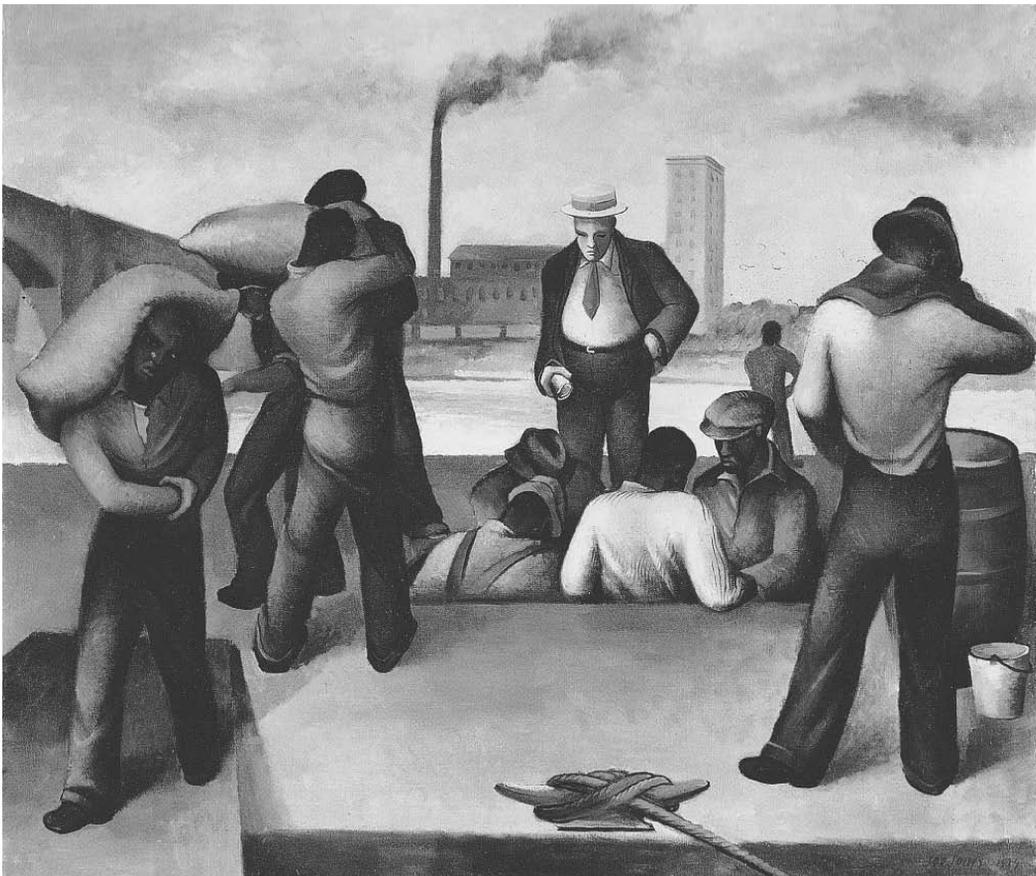


**9.5.** Thomas Hart Benton, *City Activities* from the *America Today* (1930) mural cycle. Originally New York, New School for Social Research; now New York, the lobby of the AXA building at 1290 Sixth Avenue.

the assessment of the American art scene made by the left critic Stephen Alexander in his art column in the communist journal *New Masses* in 1935. For Alexander, Benton's art was 'basically tabloid in character', conveying the message: 'American life has no meaning - don't try to figure it out.'<sup>19</sup> Alexander admired the direct and simple truths about class and race painted by proletarian John Reed Club artists - such as Joe Jones in his painting *Roustabouts* (1934), showing African American dock workers in St. Louis (ill. 9.6) - which he counterposed to the false consciousness and false vision of American life and history evoked by Benton's writhing forms and superficial energy.<sup>20</sup>

Yet contradicting the standard view of Socialist Realism as a univalent art form, Deineka - the model Socialist Realist sent abroad to judge and report back - objects to such oversimplified standards of authentic proletarian art. He acknowledges that Benton's work,

and most American art, is ultimately ‘in the service of advertising’, but applauds Benton’s formal means for bringing a ‘particular American posterness (*plakatnost*)’ to monumental art.<sup>21</sup> As Deineka had himself until recently been an active poster artist, and taught poster design at the Institute of Fine and Applied Arts in Moscow – and was himself known for the poster-like quality of his schematic, flattened paintings – this was significant praise. He claims more negatively, on the other hand, that the John Reed Club artists are ‘experiencing, if one can put it this way, their first RAPP period.’<sup>22</sup> RAPP was the Association of Proletarian Writers, whose proletarian militancy and combativeness toward all other groups led to Stalin’s infamous April Decree of 1932 dissolving all artists’ groups. By referring to RAPP, Deineka confidently describes American art in the terms of Soviet art,



9.6. Joe Jones, *Roustabouts* (1934), oil on canvas. Worcester (Mass.), Worcester Art Museum.

indicating that he refuses to perceive any kind of incontrovertible difference between modern art East and West. The John Reed Club artists have taken up earlier Soviet methods of fighting over art and arguing over the correct depictions of class struggle, Deineka tells his Moscow audience, at a point when 'we' Soviets have already moved beyond such methods – and in this case, the 'we' is a hopeful one, referring to himself and other artists who were attempting to avoid the worst factionalism, and the most rigid definitions of Socialist Realism, within the Moscow Artists' Union. In the John Reed Clubs, he sees the rigidity of RAPP's schematic portrayals of class struggle; for John Reed Club artists, 'the bourgeois is drawn this way, and the enslaved worker – this way.'<sup>23</sup>

Though he makes fun of the John Reed Club artists for their schematic depictions of class difference, the many sketches he made of America over the course of his three-month stay encompass, not surprisingly, plenty of well-dressed men in hats and women in fur collars, as well as images of African Americans, whom he romanticised and exoticised, but whom he also regarded as a kind of authentic working class ('Most importantly', he said, characterising African-Americans, 'they are workers') (ills. 9.7 and 9.8).<sup>24</sup> His uncharacteristically melancholy painting *Negro Concert* (1935), based on his American sketches, was exhibited, along with most of the other paintings based on his trip abroad, in his major one-man show that opened in Moscow in December of 1935. It was widely reproduced in the press and discussed approvingly by all critics; he was regarded as having fulfilled the brief of the critical, class-conscious Soviet artist dutifully reporting on the class and racial inequalities of the capitalist and imperialist West. But taken as a whole, his American drawings and paintings exceed this model of the critical Soviet, and reveal instead his engaged confrontation with American modernity that led him, in his own work, to diverge even more strongly than previously from the rigid model of 'the bourgeois is drawn this way.' The range of people in his drawings – from the young office worker standing a bit forlornly over her meagre meal in an ultra modern automat restaurant, to two older women sketched from behind as they listen attentively at a charity club meeting, to four different types of men engrossed in their newspapers – suggests a range of individual experiences of modern life that, judging by the interest and even sympathy that the sketches project, Deineka did not simply dismiss as 'bourgeois' (ills. 9.9, 9.10 and 9.11).



**9.7.** Aleksandr Deineka, *American Drawing: Well Dressed Figures* (1934-35), pencil on paper. Kursk, A.A. Deineka Picture Gallery of Kursk, Graphics Collection.



**9.8.** Aleksandr Deineka, *American Drawing: Negro Concert* (1934-35), pencil on paper. St. Petersburg, State Russian Museum, Department of Drawings.

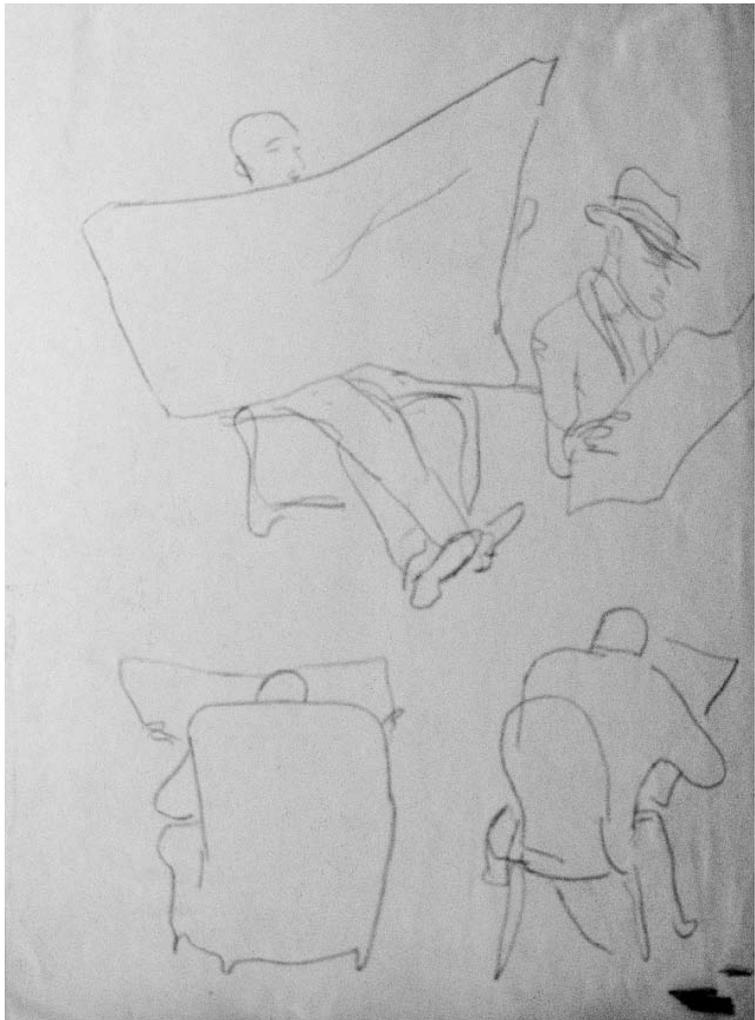
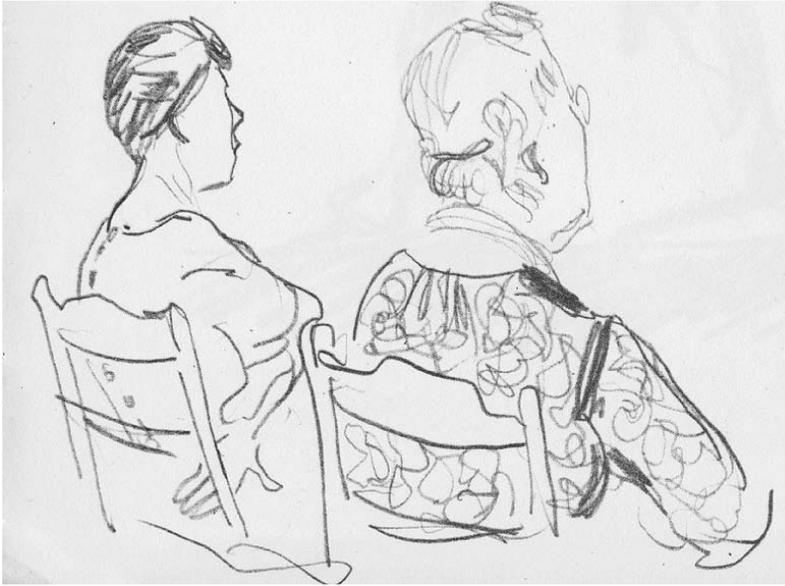
As the self-styled brash, ‘most modern’ of Soviet artists, he avidly sketched aspects of American technological modernity: not only the skyscrapers of New York and Philadelphia, but also the well kept roads and abundant automobiles. Just as Rodchenko, ten years earlier in 1925, had written rapturous letters home to Moscow from Paris about the wonders of modernity, Deineka wrote letters to his lover at the time in Moscow, Serafima Lycheva, in which he calls the American roads ‘stunning’, telling her that they are ‘wide and endlessly long.’<sup>25</sup> The roads appealed to his obsession with travel, movement and machines; in the Soviet Union too, where cars were infinitely more scarce, he loved to drive – even though he was never able to master the art of driving and had to be driven by a chauffeur.

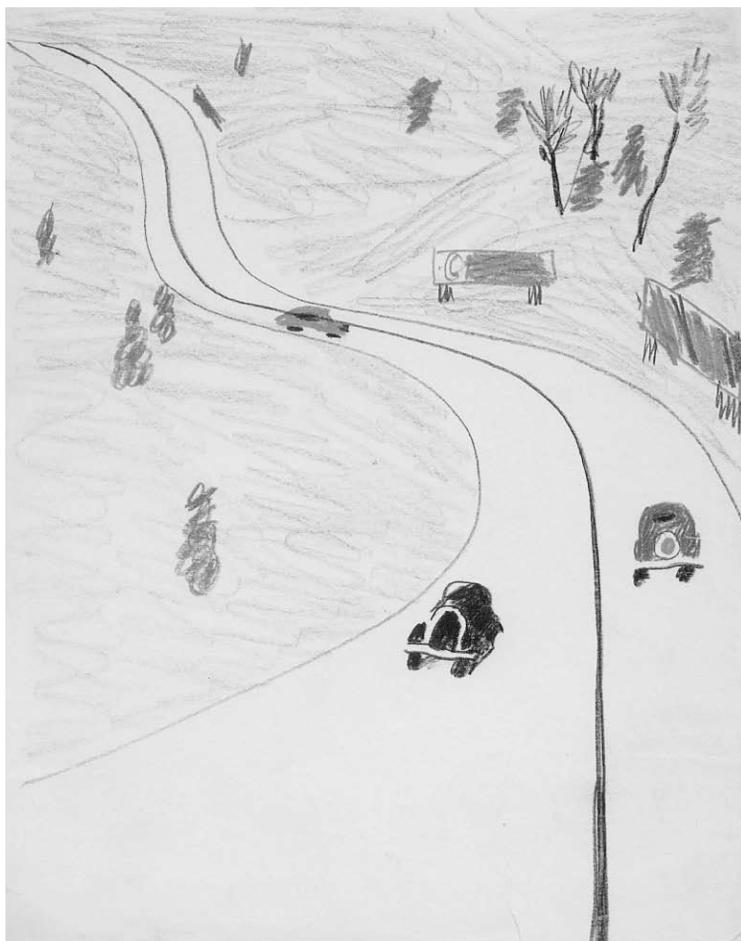


**9.9.** Aleksandr Deineka, *American Drawing: Women in Automat* (1934-35), pencil on paper. Kursk, A.A. Deineka Picture Gallery of Kursk, Graphics Collection.

**9.10.** Aleksandr Deineka, *American Drawing: Women at a Meeting of a Charity* (1934-35), pencil on paper. Kursk, A.A. Deineka Picture Gallery of Kursk, Graphics Collection.

**9.11.** Aleksandr Deineka, *American Drawing: Men with Newspapers* (1934-35), pencil on paper. Kursk, A.A. Deineka Picture Gallery of Kursk, Graphics Collection.





**9.12.** Aleksandr Deineka, *American Drawing: American Road* (1934-35), pencil on paper. Kursk, A.A. Deineka Picture Gallery of Kursk, Graphics Collection.

There is no doubt that in 1935 America represented the primary and dominant form of modernity, and that Deineka was keenly aware of observing it from the perspective of a Soviet who desired this level of technological modernity for his as yet still modernising country, but without the capitalist excess and inequality. Some of his driving scenes lovingly trace the path of the sleek road through the landscape, with the roadside billboards functioning as brightly coloured markers of the modern (ill. 9.12); while in others, the carcasses of abandoned cars litter the roadside and coloured billboards with their dollar signs as effective shorthand signs for capitalism seem

to intrude on the wintry landscape (we can assume that he zeroed in on the dollar signs because he had trouble reading and forming the Latin letters) (ill. 9.13). There is even a watercolour sketch from the outskirts of Philadelphia that captures the symbolic side-by-side placement of an automobile graveyard with a human graveyard, a juxtaposition that Deineka heightens by placing a shiny new car on the road in the foreground: we do not need to be unusually well-trained in Marxist rhetoric to understand from this picture that in capitalist America humans are equated with commodities, and discarded with the same heartlessness when they have outgrown their use. Just as his sketches of American people evince his interest in a range of subject positions, his landscape images show America as both a technological dreamworld and a wasteland.<sup>26</sup> They function not as a stock condemnation of capitalist modernity – as some of his Soviet reviewers would have it – but as a pictorial interrogation of the forms of alienation as well as exhilaration that he experienced



**9.13.** Aleksandr Deineka, *American Roadside* (1934-35), gouache on paper. St. Petersburg, State Russian Museum, Department of Drawings.

in America, especially as he shuttled back and forth on roads or trains between New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore (where the Soviet Art exhibition travelled in March), Washington, DC, (where he held a small exhibition in the Soviet embassy in early March), and even the winter resort of Lake Placid, New York, where he was sent on a commission by *Vanity Fair* magazine in late February.

Deineka staged direct encounters with American audiences in three small but largely well-received solo exhibitions during his stay: a two-week public exhibition at the Art Alliance gallery in Philadelphia in February 1935; a one-day exhibition at the Soviet embassy in Washington, DC, on 5 March, attended by invited guests and members of the press; and a three-week public exhibition at the Studio House Gallery in Washington, DC, held in March-April after Deineka had already departed for France. All three exhibitions consisted primarily of works on paper, mostly those he had brought with him from Moscow (apparently for just this purpose), and the rest were his brand-new American drawings and watercolours; in all he seems to have sold about a dozen works from these exhibitions. Deineka reported with no little pride that some Philadelphia viewers complained about the critical themes of his America sketches – downtrodden black people, bored rich women, dirty roadsides.<sup>27</sup> An affronted critic in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* wrote: ‘In *Motor Road* and *American Landscape* he does nothing more than has been done by the anti-billboard societies, and his persistent introduction of dollar signs is a further affront to our dear capitalistic system.’<sup>28</sup> Deineka seemed to relish his role as the trouble-making Soviet: ‘I show up here’ he boasted, ‘open an exhibition, and for three days I’m the “Moscow bear.” They even photographed us with Russian bears when we were at the zoo.’ In another fierce animal metaphor, he reported that a prominent Philadelphian had named him the ‘Philadelphia lion’.<sup>29</sup>

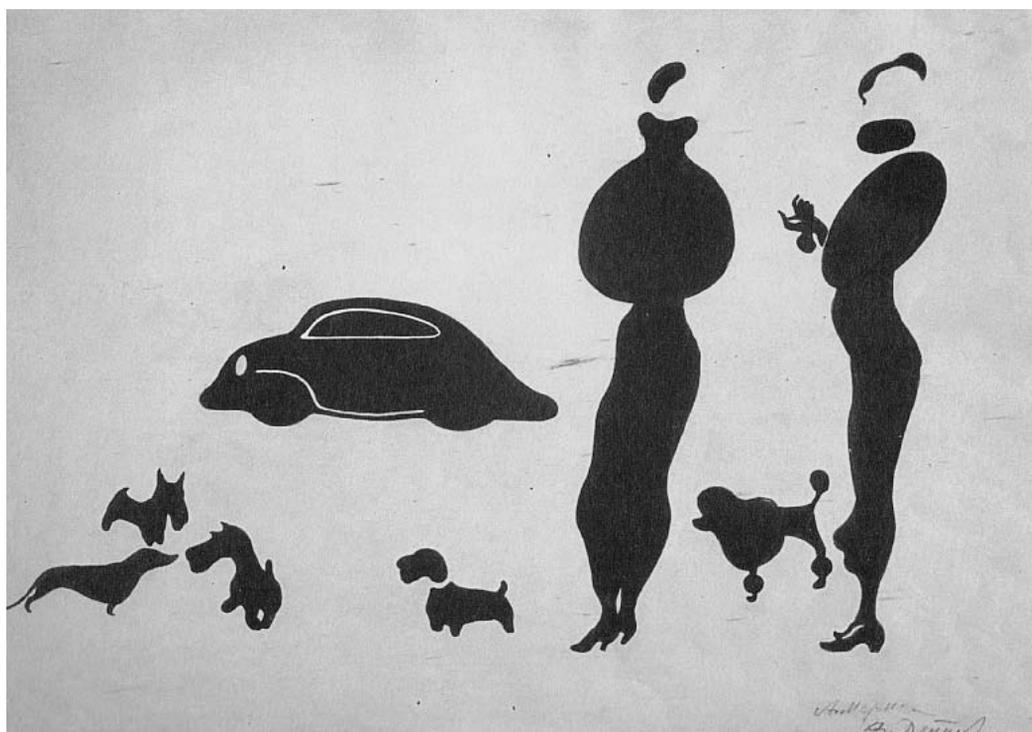
These colourful claims about his interactions with Americans are intriguing, but unfortunately limited: his letters home to Moscow, in which, apparently, he wrote in detail about the places he visited, the people he met, the art he saw, and his opinions about all of it, have been lost. One Soviet-era researcher, Irina Nenarokomova, was shown the letters briefly by Serafima Lycheva, their addressee; all we have is her account of them. After Lycheva’s death in 1987, the letters disappeared. Deineka wrote a few accounts of his trip abroad, one of which was published at the time, but they have a more official

character than the immediacy of his letters home, and they do not include daily details. We are therefore left to piece together his encounter with America from this scattered textual evidence, and from his pictures themselves. The remainder of this essay will examine a set of his more finished American works, beyond the sketches, whose density can convey his contradictory contact with American modernity, and with its artistic modernism.

### DEINEKA'S MODERNISM IN AMERICA

If modernism is the pictorial form that answers to modernity, we would expect Deineka's pictures to register the profound contrast between modern life in America and the distinctly more primitive conditions of Soviet life in the 1930s. Deineka's sketches constitute a kind of diary of his encounter with America, documenting his perception of American modernity; but in their form they do not differ much from his previous or subsequent style of drawing – they are largely mimetic, shorthand images meant to capture what he sees. His visual form is more clearly affected in the more elaborate works; we can see him embracing, resisting and selectively incorporating the visual forms of modern American art and mass culture.

A series of highly stylised silhouette drawings in India ink with white, for example, represent a dramatic injection of contemporary American modernist and commercial imagery into Deineka's visual form (ill. 9.14).<sup>30</sup> In New York, with his interest in African-American culture, Deineka would likely have seen the black and white, silhouette-based gouache illustrations for magazines and books done by Harlem Renaissance artists such as Aaron Douglas; in Douglas's illustration *Charleston*, for example, the woman's sleek cap of hair and the exaggerated curved and pointed line of her arms and shoulders might have offered a model for Deineka's silhouetted women (ill. 9.15). Douglas's work is exemplary of the combinatory or hybrid logic of cross-cultural modernism, in the way that it combines the 'primitive' form and imagery of African masks with elements of modernist geometric abstraction, endowing the typical jazz age scene with a complex set of meanings around blackness, whiteness, magic and modernity.<sup>31</sup> Deineka performs his own combinatory logic in his silhouette works, drawing on modernist artistic forms but also, in the extreme stylisation of the streamlined curves of the car, dogs and women, and the attention to the fashionable outlines formed by the shapes of hats and suits, on the contemporary visual language



**9.14.** Aleksandr Deineka, *American Drawing: Women and Dogs* (1934-35), India ink and gouache on paper. St. Petersburg, State Russian Museum, Department of Drawings.

of fashion illustrations in *Vogue* or *Vanity Fair*.<sup>32</sup> Mining the imagery of mass culture is itself a time-honoured avant-garde technique, although it is open to question whether Deineka, in these silhouette images, is critically mining or simply copying or enacting fashion imagery. But whether or not we judge his experiments to be successful, this kind of departure from naturalism, and conscious dabbling in the imagery of modernism and fashion, would not have been well received at home in the Soviet Union; he did not exhibit these works in his one-man exhibition in Moscow in 1935. Although they are both clearly labelled 'America' in Deineka's hand near his signature on the lower right, the foreign subject matter would not adequately have justified the stylistic 'distortions', as they likely would have been described by contemporary Soviet critics.

The two ladies with their purebred dogs are, from the Soviet perspective, such obvious images of capitalist class excess that one would expect them to be parodied, as rich women so often had been in Deineka's earlier graphic work. In a drawing published in 1924 in



**9.15.** Aaron Douglas, *Charleston* (1929), gouache on paper. Illustration for the book *Black Magic* by Paul Morand, 1929.

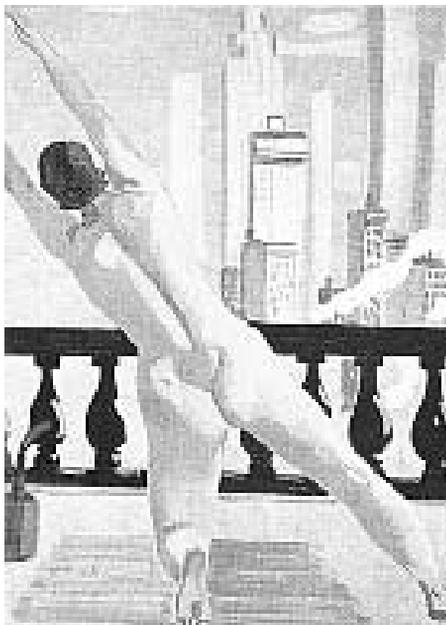
the magazine *Bezbozhnik u stanka* (Atheist at the Factory Workbench), for example, where Deineka published many images, the rich mistress is nasty and spoiled, and also lumpy and unattractive (ill. 9.16). Yet Deineka's focus in the American drawing is not on the inevitability of class exploitation, as seen in the hunched form of the kneeling servant in the earlier image, but on the effect of the sinuous, black silhouette shapes of women and dogs and car; the women are granted a slenderness and elegance of form, and an alluring, erect sexuality that is, for once, free of censure. Deineka's concern is the elongated stretch of automobile and daschund, the bubble shape of short jackets, the graceful thrust of slim buttocks, the flare of a narrow skirt, and, most playfully, the amoeba-like forms standing at attention above the women's heads, only barely legible as stylised feathers perched on unrepresented hats. These experiments are significant in their revelation of Deineka's openness to embracing new pictorial forms beyond those realist forms – such as the works of the John Reed Club artists – that had the formal approval of the Soviet art establishment. We see him imagining, however briefly, and however modestly in small works on paper, a complete flight from the constraints of Soviet art – productive as those constraints were for him.

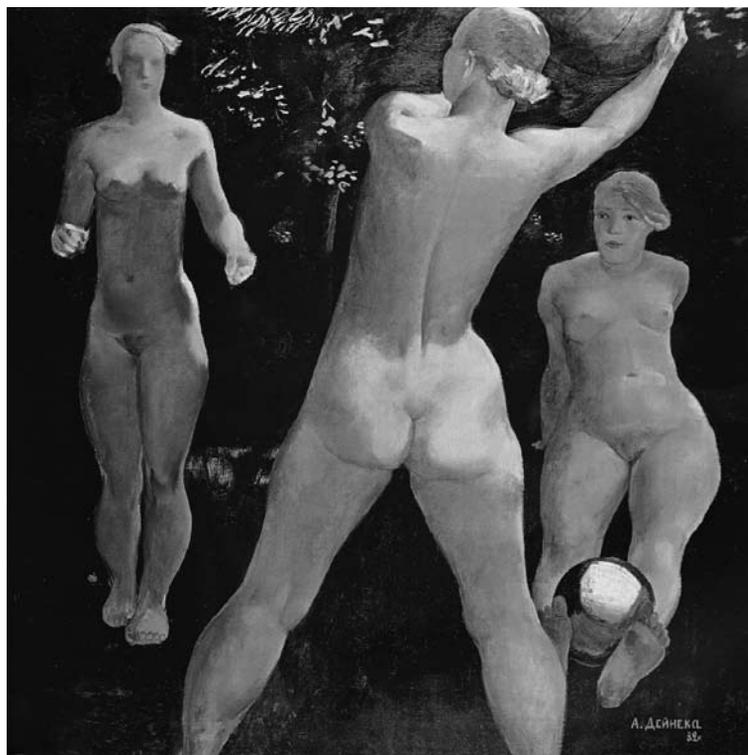
A very different American work, this time a large-scale watercolour, can be interpreted as the reverse of this openness: *American Woman*, also called *Gymnastics on the Roof (America)*, seems to be an image of outright resistance to the sexualised commodity blandishments of American modernity, as well as an assertion of his own well-honed pictorial language in the face of new influences (ill. 9.17). He places a female figure representing the Soviet fantasy of physical culture (*fizkul'tura*) into the setting of a grand New York apartment balcony.<sup>33</sup> The floating vertical brushstrokes that delineate the buildings produce a pastel dream of skyscrapers, a vision in the morning light, emphasised by the two white puffs of steam emerging from below; they appear as the dreamworld of modernity imagined from the Soviet East, despite their actual presence before Deineka in New York. But the newness of this cityscape is confronted by the familiar figure of the broad-backed, athletic young person, seen from behind, who appeared frequently in Deineka's Soviet images; almost exactly the same tightly cropped figure, with her leaning stance, outstretched arms, taut back and clenched buttocks, appeared in

**9.16.** Aleksandr Deineka, Illustration for *Atheist at the Factory Workbench* (1924). St. Petersburg, State Russian Museum, Department of Drawings.



**9.17.** Aleksandr Deineka, *American Woman*, also called *Gymnastics on the Roof (America)* (1934-35), watercolour. St. Petersburg, State Russian Museum, Department of Drawings.



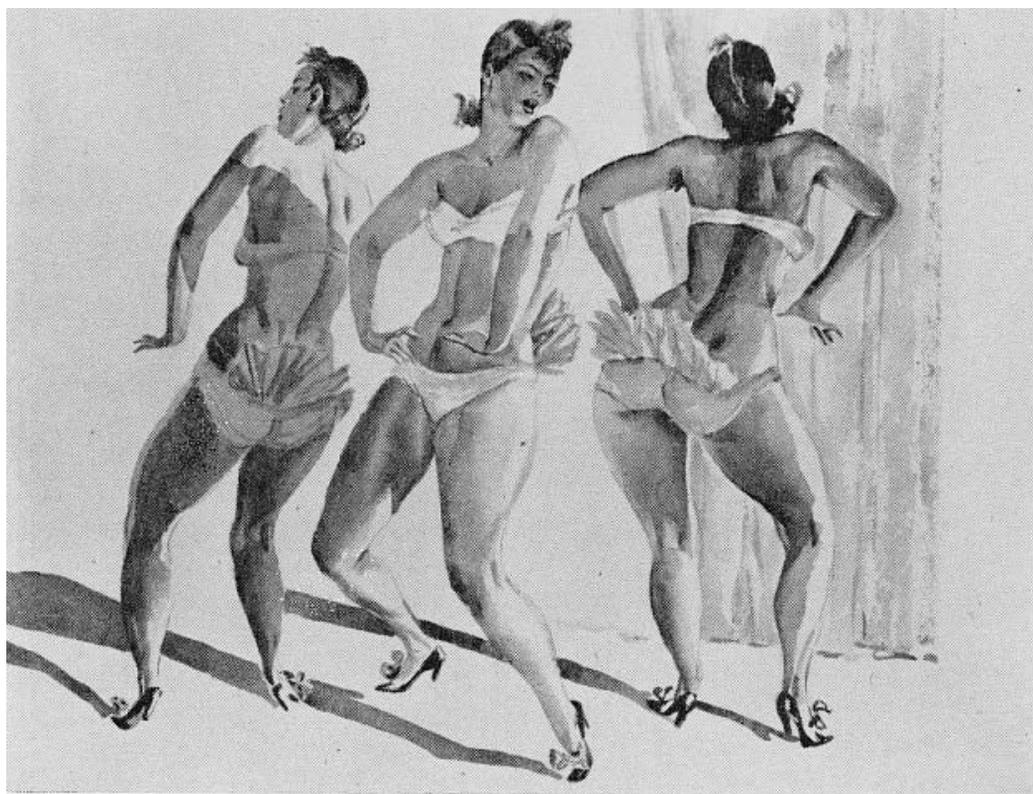


**9.18.** Aleksandr Deineka, *The Ball Game* (1932), oil on canvas. Moscow, State Tret'iakov Gallery.

Deineka's painting *The Ball Game* (1932; ill. 9.18). Yet in the American drawing, the figure of the Soviet athlete is removed from the ball game with her two comrades and instead faces, alone, this dreamscape of modernity. Her aloneness gives the drawing its peculiar erotic quality. While *The Ball Game* certainly has its own erotic charge, it is one that is woven into the fabric of sportive bodies in nature; the modern, urban setting of *An American Woman*, however, rules out any naturalising of her nakedness and instead makes it strangely disturbing. The woman's public, urban display of her naked body partakes, however distantly, of the commercialised public display of the bodies of dancers and strippers – American urban entertainments that Deineka observed in a number of his US sketches such as *Burlesque Show* with the avid attention to every detail of thrust and costume that we would expect from an artist visiting from the offi-

cially chaste public culture of the Soviet Union (ill. 9.19). If we were to search for a Deineka image that bridges the gap between these two trios of women in *The Ball Game* and the *Burlesque Show* – that imagines an eroticised body that can somehow adequately confront modernity, rather than being sucked into its capitalist maw and becoming yet another sexual commodity – I think we might get *An American Woman*.

Deineka's model for the female figures in *The Ball Game* had been an actual Soviet athlete, the long-distance swimming champion Liusia Vtorova; by a series of transferences, it is as if Deineka summons an echo of Vtorova's capable, broad-backed body to confront this spectacle of modern skyscrapers.<sup>34</sup> Solid and balanced, architectural like the skyscrapers themselves yet at a distinct angle from



**9.19.** Aleksandr Deineka, *American Drawing: Burlesque Show* (1934-35), pencil on paper. Kursk, A.A. Deineka Picture Gallery of Kursk, Graphics Collection.

them, warding us off with those clenched buttocks, her sexuality is palpable but not immediately available to us, as is the case with so many of the Soviet bodies that populate Deineka's works: turned away from us, or with masked, unreadable faces, they can be understood as his deliberate refusal to pretend, as Socialist Realism demanded, that the Soviet dream of collectivity is already knowable and therefore representable.<sup>35</sup> Deineka grants this same inaccessibility or unknowability to his fantasised 'American woman' on the balcony, in contrast to the immediacy and sexual availability of the trio of dance hall performers; the result of her subjection to capitalist modernity is not a foregone conclusion. She functions as a projection of Deineka's Soviet works, and of Deineka himself, into the landscape of Western modernity – as the ideal Soviet subject, who would be able to participate in the modern life of New York without allowing herself to be subjected to its alienating capitalist logic.

The density of meaning that I am proposing for the *American Woman* watercolour was certainly lost on the author of a front-page article on Deineka that appeared in the *Washington Post* on the occasion of the exhibition of his American and Soviet works on paper at the Soviet embassy on 5 March. Referring to Deineka as 'professor' because he taught at an art school in Moscow, the sceptical journalist opens the article by saying 'Prof. Aleksandr Deineka held court yesterday at the Russian Embassy amid swimmers, highways, formidably legged-ladies, pears and skyscrapers, all painted as he sees them,' and at the end of the short piece returns again to mention Deineka's pictures of 'ladies with very stout limbs.'<sup>36</sup> The author's urbane contempt for stout-legged women suggests an overall disdain for the awkward, unglamorous and earnest Soviet Union. The author singles out the *American Woman* watercolour for discussion, only to dismiss it as 'a female figure dancing on a New York rooftop (the professor said this one is symbolic).' The throwaway quote drips with sarcasm towards the self-important Soviet professor, but it offers a small, rare piece of evidence, from Deineka's own mouth, of his intention in his American works: the image is not just 'symbolic' in some arty sense, but a symbol of his attempt to confront American modernity – both the technological dreamworld and the sexualised commodification of life under capitalism – through the mobilisation, or even quotation, of his own reliable pictorial forms.

### CAPITALISM, MODERNISM AND *BOREDOM*

Perhaps the American-based work that represents the most stunning departure from his previous style and subject matter, because, unlike the silhouette drawings, it appears in a large-scale, highly finished oil painting, is the canvas *Boredom* (1935; ill. 9.20). The subject matter of a fashionable, obviously bourgeois woman seated in an elegantly appointed and spacious private interior filled with art is, not surprisingly, unique in the work of this Soviet artist, and it calls forth from him a painterly language that is far more detailed and modulated, as well as more muted and refined, than his customary bold shapes and unmodulated colours – a visual language reminiscent of the French modernist tradition that Deineka had derided amongst certain American artists. The picture enacts an intense engagement with capitalist subject matter and Western painterly modernism that not only transforms his pictorial language for the space of this picture, but also crystallises and reinforces aspects of his existing practice in ways that can be traced in Soviet works on his return home. We can even see it as an instance of transformative



9.20. Aleksandr Deineka, *Boredom* (1935), oil on canvas. Private collection.

transcultural contact between divergent modernisms, responding to divergent modernities.

We should begin, though certainly not end, by listening to Deineka's own description of the painting's origins. He singled it out for comment in a retrospective article on his career that he would write in 1963; it was one of only four pictures from a career spanning 40 years that he chose to remember:

Here is the heroine of my painting *Boredom*, whom I saw in Philadelphia, in a rich house, completely modern, with the most leftist paintings on the walls. Most likely she is to this day still alive and still bored, because beyond her well groomed, cosmetically made-up face, you sense in her a deep emptiness and meaninglessness which offers no personal, human joy. No matter the obviously secure life, no matter the generally accepted signs of outer beauty, how ugly is this life, how ugly this human face!<sup>37</sup>

This language is unambiguous: it points us, from a securely later, Soviet Cold War perspective, to the pitfalls of bourgeois individual alienation, and it echoes the approving political interpretation of the critics who praised the painting when it was exhibited in his 1935 solo exhibition in Moscow. But we don't have to trust this later narrative; we should trust the picture itself, in its sympathetic inquisitiveness and calm, polished order, and the fact that by even including it in his retrospective assessment of 1963 – a relatively anomalous picture that was not in a museum collection and thus out of the public eye – Deineka recognised it as a particular kind of achievement.

Although Deineka was best known for his outdoor, thematic, often multi-figural compositions, he did also produce a few single-figure, interior pictures over the years, such as his *Girl by the Window* (1931), *Sleeping Child* (1932), and most recently, his *Portrait of a Young Woman with a Book* (1934), portraying Lycheva in their Moscow apartment. But these were all less ambitious efforts that might even be described as private, however out of place that term might be to describe Soviet artworks at this time: they were not made for official commissions (other than *Girl by the Window*, which was used for a book illustration), nor with any immediate plan of public exhibition. Deineka painted *Boredom*, on the other hand, some time during the summer or early autumn of 1935 after his return from abroad, when he was busily producing paintings on the basis of his foreign sketches for the solo exhibition that would open in December in Moscow. Even for an artist of Deineka's stature, a major solo ex-

hibition was an unusual honour that he obviously intended to make the most of; just as this honour was bestowed on him by the Soviet art system to justify and capitalise on the decision to send him abroad, so Deineka recognised that the exhibition should include major works based on his trip. *Boredom*, then, was undertaken with high stakes, and the decision to turn a single-figure interior into a major painting was deliberate.

We know he planned to paint a formal portrait of the woman right from the start, because on one of the drawings he made of the 'rich house' in Philadelphia, a pencil sketch of an art-filled alcove in the living room, he scribbled the Cyrillic phrase 'living room, Speiser home, base for portrait.'<sup>38</sup> Altogether he made a number of preparatory sketches, in the best academic tradition of building up to a major Salon painting, or, in the Soviet context, to the kind of large-scale, thematic *kartina* or 'picture' in oil that would become increasingly favoured within Socialist Realism: there is also a detailed coloured pencil and watercolour sketch of the dining room of the house with a view into the living room (ill. 9.21), a precise drawing showing a wider view of the living room with the piano seen in the painting, and two rough sketches of another section of the living room, showing rudimentary outlines of female figures.<sup>39</sup>

Why would Deineka put all this effort into producing such an anomalous picture, so at odds with contemporary Soviet painting? One obvious answer might be that he did it because he could get away with it, officially. His trip abroad gave him appropriate justification for making a graceful, non-censorious picture of a contemporary capitalist interior, with the negative title *Boredom* providing extra insurance; the alien subject matter justified the pictorial experimentation with models of French modernism. But this interpretation rests too heavily on the assumption that the Soviet art system was rigid and xenophobic. There was in fact no single, pre-approved form of realism within Socialist Realism, and varieties of French and European modernism cropped up in the works of various artists working within the system.<sup>40</sup> It would be more accurate to say that Deineka did it because he could get away with it without compromising his own famous 'brand' of painting: the Western subject matter justified his departure from his familiar bright, bold style into a more muted, polished one, which facilitated a psychological exploration of his sitter that was essentially unknown in his previous works - an exploration of the alienated bourgeois subjectivity that



**9.21.** Aleksandr Deineka, *American Drawing: Dining Room of the Speiser House, Philadelphia* (1935), coloured pencil and watercolour on paper. St. Petersburg, State Russian Museum, Department of Drawings.

languishes within the bourgeois interior, described for us by countless theorists of capitalist modernity from Thorstein Veblen to Walter Benjamin.

The interior's hushed, ordered stillness calls to mind the paintings of Felix Vallotton at the turn of the 19th century, depicting the bourgeois interior and its mute, desiring occupants with a kind of berserk precision – and even the late paintings of Pierre Bonnard from the 1930s, with their focus on a kind of poetry of the interior as a memory of experience (like Deineka, he painted in the studio, not from nature), rendered with a formal intensity of interlocking forms that animated the inanimate objects of everyday bourgeois experience. Deineka had in fact specifically admired Bonnard's work when he was in Paris: on his return to Moscow he would write that he was 'impressed by the simplicity and painterly honesty of the old master.'<sup>41</sup> The painting revels in its detailed and precise depiction of the kinds of bourgeois objects from such paintings that were normally unavailable to Deineka's brush: the grand piano with its ornately carved legs; the elaborately framed modernist paintings; the elegant

architectural details of the sunken living room and the curved railing; the surprisingly clean lines of the rounded, overstuffed chair; the fall of fashionably striped drapes; the soft mauve carpeting that dampens all noise. It organises them all into a stylish, almost geometrically divided pictorial order: the bookcase, railing and grand piano frame the woman with a series of focusing horizontals; the railing runs behind her precisely at the level of her eyes; and she is mirrored in the foreground by the deliberately bland and reduced features of what appears to be her portrait in the modernist sculpture. The unfamiliar technique of placing a figure into such a precisely articulated, deep interior space, and organised within such subtle compositional rhythms and correspondences, offered him a way to explore his interest in the solitary, unknowable figure – an interest already apparent in his Soviet work – on different, productively alien terms.

The solitary figure represented in *Boredom* was particularly unknowable to Deineka because she differed so radically from the usual wholesome Soviet women who populated his paintings: she is the first glamorous, sexualised woman to appear in his work.<sup>42</sup> If the composition and content of the setting are modernist in the geometric style of a vaguely defined European modernism, the figure of the tall, slender woman herself, in her beautifully fitted gown with its plunging neckline and her strappy shoes, derives more from the fashion or Hollywood imagery that Deineka would have encountered in America. Film stills of actresses such as Jean Harlow provide a template for the figure's overall glamorous look, though the sexual self-confidence of a Harlow is significantly absent from the woman's desolate body language, as she hugs herself with her long, slim arms. We can imagine Deineka looking critically at Hollywood imagery, as well as at critical images of fashionable women in contemporary American art, such as Benton's mural *City Activities with Dance Hall* (see ill. 9.5). It is as if Deineka has plucked a woman from one of the dancing couples in Benton's composition out of her context, in order to focus on the spiritual emptiness that the frenzied activity of commercialised leisure tries but fails to cover over – an emptiness that Benton's mural of desperately writhing figures in bars, dance-halls and on movie screens itself invoked. But the emptiness that is Deineka's focus in *Boredom* is not Benton's generalised frenzied desperation, nor the easily dismissible, vapid emptiness of the idle rich – an emptiness of which, as we have seen, Deineka would later

accuse this woman. Where Benton seems to view his almost caricature figures with a kind of indulgence, if not empathy, Deineka seems genuinely puzzled by (but also solicitous towards) what would have been for him an exotic feminine creature. The painting suggests that her desolation arises not from her own shortcomings, but from precisely that oppressive, rich interior which holds her locked in its embrace; or to put it more metaphorically, her desolation arises from the collision of the bourgeois ideal of femininity with the actual lived experience of the female subject of capitalist modernity.

This interpretation of Deineka's empathy for the woman in the painting, in spite of the hyperbole of his later cruel words, is reinforced by considering the identity of his sitter and her particular situation in the 'rich house' in Philadelphia.<sup>43</sup> It was the home of Maurice J. Speiser, a lawyer and one-time Assistant District Attorney in Philadelphia, who would later go on to become the literary agent for Ernest Hemingway. Maurice and his wife Martha were serious collectors of both American and European modernist art, including works by Picasso, Matisse and Kandinsky; a portion of their collection had been exhibited at the Pennsylvania Museum in 1934.<sup>44</sup> With his connections to the Philadelphia art and museum world, Maurice was invited to a men's-only luncheon of museum functionaries and local artists and collectors held in honour of Deineka and Beskin at the Rittenhouse Club on 2 January 1935.<sup>45</sup> It is unclear whether or not Maurice was able to attend that lunch, but a comparison of interior photographs of the Speiser home with Deineka's sketches, as well as *Boredom* itself, leaves no doubt that Deineka eventually met him and visited the house sometime in January 1935 (ill. 9.22). His sketch of the dining room (see ill. 9.21) shows the opening onto the living room with the huge, modern windows and long, geometrically patterned drapes that we see in the photograph. The photograph also demonstrates that the composition of *Boredom* follows the actual layout of the house, with the female figure seated in the white chair in front of the grand piano; Deineka's only major change was to deepen the available foreground space (there would actually be a wall where the viewer of the painting is located), and to place the geometric curtains into this space as if they formed a wall intruding from the left. He has also transposed the sculpted head on its black, cubic pedestal from the base of the staircase, at the upper right of the photograph, into this invented foreground space.



**9.22.** Photograph of Speiser living room (c. 1936). Photo taken as one of a series to illustrate an article on the house in *Architectural Forum*, 1936 (this particular shot was not used). Private collection.

The fact that Martha Speiser was reportedly a Russian speaker, and regularly hosted a number of Russian speakers at her home, would have been a serious draw for Deineka,<sup>46</sup> as would the architecture of the house itself: the Speiser home was a traditional, very large 19th-century Philadelphia townhouse that had been renovated, in 1932, by the American modernist architect George Howe. The radical modernisation of the home would have appealed to Deineka, who was never a fan of traditional architecture: the façade had been modernised through the removal of all ornate architectural details; the size of the windows throughout the house had been nearly doubled; the interior rooms had been opened up to create more spacious ones; and the walls were left untreated and white, the better to showcase the art collection. Howe had also added overtly 'Bauhaus' style details, such as the dramatic stairwell that cuts diagonally through the house, framed by circular openings in the ceiling, and the curved metal balustrade of the upper level of the living room.<sup>47</sup> Deineka

would have been particularly interested in seeing Howe's work on the house, because he had been captivated by Howe's asymmetrical Philadelphia Saving Fund Society (PSFS) building, a thirty-three story, fully air-conditioned skyscraper that was the first in the International style to be built in the United States, in 1932.<sup>48</sup>

But if it makes sense that Deineka was attracted to the Speiser home, what drew him to this particular, melancholy young female figure? She is almost certainly based on one of the Speiser daughters-in-law: Elizabeth De Young Speiser, known as Lib, who had married Maurice and Martha's eldest son Herbert (Bert) Speiser, also a lawyer like his father, in 1927 (ill. 9.23). In the family photograph that I reproduce here, the image of Lib does not do full justice to her beauty, but the angle of the view is good for demonstrating how the shape of her face, the colour and style of her hair, and her tall figure with the broad shoulders and lanky arms all point to her role as the model for the 'heroine' of Deineka's *Boredom*. According to her niece, Lib was a person who might very well have sat in such a pose, and with such an expression of unhappiness and boredom, because she was in fact both unhappy and bored in the Speiser home. Her marriage to Bert had represented a union of two prominent Jewish families, the Speisers of Philadelphia and the De Youngs of Baltimore, but Lib soon became discontented in the marriage and resentful of having to be part of the Speiser clan. Martha Speiser never liked her, making the frequent social events at the Speiser home, including the obligatory Sunday brunches – long events with many invited guests – an unpleasant burden. By 1935, when Deineka met her – very likely at one of these brunches – she knew that she was on her way out of the marriage; she and Bert would divorce the following year.

Despite his linguistic limitations, Deineka could not have failed to sense the tension between Lib and the family, and her misery and feeling of entrapment. Combined with her attractive bearing, this made her the perfect subject for a major painting that would record his encounter with the family and the house, and, by extension, with capitalist wealth: she would embody on multiple levels the emptiness and alienation that Deineka, as a critical socialist, wanted to project onto the interior through his use of unfamiliar techniques.<sup>49</sup> The modernist-inspired pictorial structure is, then, quite deliberate when it works to lock her into place within the elegant interior. The depiction of her face, pose and body, which departs from the usual



**9.23.** Photograph of Speiser family posing on the garden steps of the Speiser house, on the occasion of Maurice and Martha Speiser's 35<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary, 12 June 1935: standing at left, Maurice J. Speiser; sitting, with cigarette, Lib (Elizabeth De Young) Speiser; seated next to her, Jeanne Speiser; standing at back, Lib's husband Herbert Speiser; seated in front, Jeanne's husband Raymond Speiser. Private collection.

simpler poses and clear-eyed, blank expressions of Deineka's figures, conveys an uncharacteristic psychological depth that complicates the obvious socialist critique of this woman and her class. Deineka conveys his empathy for her in the contradictory signals of her body. Her impeccably rank posture suggests a defiant will, and gestures us in the direction of interpreting her state as one of boredom. Her desirability is emphasised by the clinging fabric that reveals the curves of her belly and thighs, and the low-cut bodice that exposes the top of her breasts, intimating a kind of urbane sexuality that, again, was new within the world of Deineka's wholesomely attractive Soviet women. Yet her slightly bowed head and averted gaze, combined with the crossed arms hugged close to the body, betray her state as unsure, mistrustful, self-protective, even desolate. Her listlessly splayed left foot evokes nothing so much as a rag doll that has given up the fight.

The sculpted head in the foreground that echoes the seated figure's facial features and hairstyle is the final piece of the puzzle of this representation of Lib. There was in fact no sculpted head of Lib in the house. As we have seen, Deineka borrowed the sculpted head on a black cubic base that stood at the base of the stairs and inserted it into the imaginary foreground space of the composition (see ill. 9.22). Although the original sculpture is hard to see in the photograph, it is actually much smaller than it appears in the painting, and it is an antique, classical head of a woman that looks nothing like the schematic portrait sculpture that Deineka painted into the picture.<sup>50</sup> This invented modernist sculpture serves multiple functions: it provides yet another example of advanced art embellishing and defining the interior space; it disturbs the centredness of the composition, providing another focal point at the far left edge of the canvas; and it is a device that allows Deineka to insert a more 'Deineka-like' version of Lib - with smoothed and reduced features, facing directly forward, staring impassively - into the picture, setting up a diagonal relay between blankness and psychological depth. In *Boredom*, the figure based on Lib Speiser functions as Deineka's surprisingly empathetic summary figure - summed up in a borrowed, Western pictorial language - for the tragic subject of capitalist modernity, who forever tries and fails to cover over the loss of meaning brought on by commodity society through the accumulation of possessions.

### CODA: BACK IN THE USSR<sup>50</sup>

While Deineka would not paint such an urbanely modernist picture again, the experience of painting *Boredom* – and his American experiences more generally – would leave productive traces on his practice when he returned to the USSR in May 1935. During the same period that he painted *Boredom* and other foreign-themed canvases on the basis of his sketches from abroad, he also produced other major works based on Soviet themes, all in preparation for his solo show opening at the end of the year. His massive canvas *Collective Farm Girl on a Bicycle*, one of his most famous paintings, forms an unlikely pair with *Boredom* (ill. 9.24). Painted around the same time, on the basis of sketches made elsewhere, both are single-figure compositions featuring lone women. Building on the lessons of *Boredom*, in its hushed aloneness, its tautly ordered composition, and its hieratic depiction of the central figure, *Collective Farm Girl* interrogates the individual Soviet subject and the alienating experience of modernity – even Soviet modernity.

Deineka made sketches for this picture in the summer of 1935 while he was on a *komandirovka*, or paid trip, to factories and collective farms in the Donbass region. Such *komandirovki* were undertaken for the express purpose of creating works that would document Soviet achievements, and were one of the standard ways in which artists were paid under the new Soviet art system. His choice to depict not groups of collective farm workers labouring or celebrating together, but rather a single woman alone, located off kilter on the left edge of the canvas, was highly unorthodox for this subject matter. The Soviet Union was supposed to represent the opposite of alienating modern life: it proposed a socialist modernity of collective effort and unalienated sociability, as represented in several major paintings from around this period with the title of ‘collective farm festival’.<sup>52</sup> So while Deineka produced *Collective Farm Girl* under the specific conditions of the Soviet art system, and clearly endeavoured, through scale and subject matter, to produce a work that would qualify as a Socialist Realist *kartina* with its attendant prestige, he chose the uncharacteristic format of the single-figure composition that he had also used in *Boredom*. He returns to his previous bold hues, broad areas of unmodulated colour, and wide, poster-like, outdoor scenes; but the geometric carving up of space, with the vertiginously bisecting road, orderly strips of sky, wood and field, and off-centre focus on the left edge of the canvas, all bear similarities to *Boredom*.



**9.24.** Aleksandr Deineka, *Collective Farm Girl on a Bicycle* (1935), oil on canvas. St. Petersburg, State Russian Museum.

If the women of *Collective Farm Girl* and *Boredom* form a pair, then it would seem to be a programmatic one. On the one hand, we have a sturdy, thick-limbed (we think of the Washington journalist's contempt for Deineka's 'ladies with very stout limbs'), sun tanned, and generic Soviet farm worker, modestly dressed, shown exercising outside in a wide, sunny, verdant landscape organised by collective labour.<sup>53</sup> The ideological content of the painting consists of the red dress, the painting's title identifying the woman as a *kolkhoznitsa*, and the bicycle as a symbol of the new, modern consumer rewards awaiting collective farmers who distinguished themselves as 'shock workers'. On the other hand, we have a quite specific, pale, slender Western woman, in a slinky dress, surrounded by material wealth, doing nothing at all. Yet the *kolkhoznitsa* does not pedal ahead into the bright future quite so industriously as it might seem: she sits tentatively on her bicycle, as if she is still figuring out how to seize this modern contraption and ride it out of the picture. The tentativeness of her body language allies her with the figure in *Boredom*, in spite of her strong body and the ideologically solid ground she occupies. In some ways she is even more tentative: where the figure in *Boredom* is securely locked into her pictorial space, following the conventions of a Bonnard, the collective farm girl teeters on the front edge of the canvas, resembling a cardboard cut-out figure pasted on top

of the landscape. This kind of spatially destabilised composition draws on the conventions of Deineka's previous works, such as *The Goalkeeper* from the 'Art of Soviet Russia' exhibition. Her face is partially turned away and in shadow, giving it the characteristic blankness and unreadability of Deineka's figures; in this, she calls to mind the sculpted head of *Boredom* more than its central figure. This contradictory back-and-forth between the subjects and pictorial strategies of the two pictures suggests that the relation between them – and, to extrapolate, between Soviet and American modernity – is less programmatic than it might seem.

Deineka's encounter with American modernism brought out something different in his practice, as we have seen – some of which he would repudiate in his later retrospective account. But it also reinforced and complicated a central aspect of his pictorial practice: painting Soviet figures alone, or in non-communicating groups, who are still figuring out what it means to become a Soviet subject. This was a process that involved a conscious and wholesale 'reforging' of the human being into someone both modern and socialist, and which was a topic of constant public discussion and private anxiety in the 1930s.<sup>54</sup> Deineka struggled with this alienating process as much as anyone, despite his impeccable class background and success.<sup>55</sup> When he encountered the capitalist alienation of the West, and the modernist pictorial forms that had emerged to express it, he recognised that these were not wholly irrelevant to his work at home. In this sense he truly 'met' the West, in a cultural encounter with an alternative modernity that affected his perception of the experience of the fledgling Soviet modernity then under construction. Against the Cold War narratives of Socialist Realism that still dominate today, his American works do not offer simple condemnations of capitalism, just as his Soviet works offer more than just sunny canvases of mindless utopianism or the sinister propaganda of totalitarianism. We can be pleasantly surprised by this – and perhaps begin to learn all over again what the enthusiastic American audiences for the 'Art of Soviet Russia' exhibition had already learned back in 1935.

## NOTES

- 1 I would like to thank Aarhus University, Denmark, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and Florida State University for the opportunity to present lectures on this topic, and for the especially incisive responses that I received from audiences there. A shorter and significantly different version of this essay appeared as 'Sotsrealizm i amerikanskii modernizm. Deineka v SShA', trans. Viktor Slavkin, *Pinakothekhe* (Moscow), vol. 22-23, no. 1-2, 2006, pp. 288-95, reprinted in *Deineka: Grafika* (Interros; Moscow, 2009), pp. 455-64.
- 2 I take my working understanding of modernism as the form of representation that prophesied and responded to modernity from T.J. Clark's introduction to *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism* (Yale University Press; New Haven and London, 1999), pp. 1-13. His emphasis on the way that modernism and socialism lived and died together is particularly relevant to a study of Soviet Socialist Realism as a form of modernism (although he would disagree with this possibility); Clark's proposal that '[modernism] sensed socialism was its shadow [...] it too was engaged in a desperate, and probably futile, struggle to imagine modernity otherwise' (p. 9) speaks to the nature of Deineka's pictorial imagination, especially as he confronted America. In speaking of Deineka's work as a 'variant of modernism', I refer to the thesis, developed in recent theories of global art history, of the existence of 'multiple modernities' and thus of multiple - though not necessarily congruent - modernisms. See for example the essays in Kobena Mercer (ed.), *Cosmopolitan Modernisms* (MIT Press; Cambridge (Mass.), 2005).
- 3 State Archive of the Russian Federation (GARF), *fond 5283 VOKS, opis' 11* (Exhibitions department), *delo 324* (Protokol zasedaniia komisii po otberu ekspozitov dlia izo-vystavki v filadel'fii), p. 122, letter of 7 November 1933 from Fiske Kimball, Director of the Pennsylvania Museum of Art, to Boris Skvirskii, Counsellor of the Soviet Embassy in Washington, DC and representative of VOKS.
- 4 (GARF), *f. 5283, op. 11, d. 324*, pp. 79-81, letter of 29 January 1934 from the American-Russian Institute to VOKS.
- 5 One of the main organizers, art critic, collector and Russophile Christian Brinton, wrote to Fiske Kimball, after he had seen the works sent over from Moscow for the exhibition, wondering what to do about the 'horrible' paintings. He called it a 'funny and unaccountably weird and wan ensemble' of Soviet art. This letter is held in the 'Art of Soviet Russia' folder in the Registrar's Records at the Philadelphia Museum of Art. The US organizers eventually decided on radically pruning the selection that was sent; seven full cases of paintings were not included in the exhibition, and were kept in storage for the duration of the tour.
- 6 The definitions of Socialist Realism that had been put forward at the Writers' Congress in 1934 called only vaguely for a realistic art that would 'depict reality in its revolutionary development'. See Andrei Zhdanov, 'Speech to the Congress of Soviet Writers', in Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (eds.), *Art in Theory 1900-1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas* (Blackwell; Oxford, UK and Cambridge (Mass.), 1992), p. 411.
- 7 On these debates, see Christina Kiaer, 'Was Socialist Realism Forced Labor? The Case of Aleksandr Deineka', *Oxford Art Journal*, vol. 28, no. 3, 2005, pp. 321-45.
- 8 Ekaterina Degot has argued that Socialist Realism should not be approached with the familiar tools of art history, including analyses of stylistic development and theories of modernism vs. realism, because as a system it fundamentally departed from older models of art, becoming instead a base for mass reproduction and distribution, along the lines of mass cultural forms in the West. See her 'The Collectivization of Modernism', in Boris Groys and Max Hollein (eds.), *Dream Factory Communism: The Visual Culture of the Stalin Era* (exh. cat.), Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt a.M., 2003, pp. 85-105. While I take her point, at this moment in Deineka's career, in the earliest days of the development of the Soviet art system, the traditional structures of the institution of art were still relevant to his self-perception and production.
- 9 Abram Efros, 'Vystavka Aleksandra Deineka', in *Mastera raznykh epokh* (Sovetskii khudozhnik; Moscow, 1979), p. 278. He meant that Deineka was the most modern of the artists who were then actively working, in the major art forms, within the Soviet art system, thereby not including the former avant-garde artists - such as Vladimir Tatlin, about whom Efros had written positively ten years before, but who was by then marginalised.
- 10 GARF, *f. 5283, op. 11, d. 324*, p. 35, ca. May 1934, unsigned and undated report to VOKS.
- 11 GARF, *f. 5283, op. 11, d. 324*, p. 35.
- 12 Edward Alden Jewell, 'Soviet Art in an Impressive Show', *New York Times*, 23 Dec 1934, p. X9.
- 13 Philadelphia Inquirer, 16 December 1934 [text modified to correct grammar].
- 14 Baltimore Sun, 7 March 1935.
- 15 'State Art', *Fortune*, vol. 11, no. 3, March 1935, pp. 62-67.
- 16 For the itinerary of the exhibition and further information about it, see my contribution to the years 1934-35 of the 'Khronika', in *Aleksandr Deineka - Zhivopis* (Interros; Moscow, 2010).
- 17 Russian State Archive of Literature and Art (RGALI), *fond 2932* (Tsentral'nyi dom rabotnikov iskusstv SSSR), *opis' 1, delo 144* (Stenogramma doklada khudozhnika A.A. Deineka, 'Iskusstvo Ameriki, Frantsii i Italii - Vпечатleniia o zagranichnoi poezdke', Klub masterov iskusstva), 27 May 1935, p. 8. Deineka arrived in New York on 22 December 1934, and after spending almost three months in the United States, left on 13 March 1935 and travelled to Paris for a few weeks, followed by a shorter trip to Rome, before returning to Moscow.

- 18 RGALI, f. 2932 op' 1, d. 144, p. 6. Deineka was particularly taken with Benton's mural programme *America Today*, painted in 1930 for the New School for Social Research in New York, which I discuss below.
- 19 Stephen Alexander, 'Mural Painting in America', *New Masses*, vol. 14, no. 9, 26 February 1935, p. 28, cited in Andrew Hemingway, *Artists on the Left: American Artists and the Communist Movement, 1926-1956* (Yale University Press; New Haven and London, 2002), p. 30.
- 20 See Hemingway's interpretation of Alexander's views on Jones and Benton, pp. 37-38; and Stephen Alexander, 'Joe Jones', *New Masses*, vol. 15, no. 9, 28 May 1935.
- 21 Aleksandr Deineka, 'Putevye zametki ob iskusstve Ameriki i Italii' [1935], manuscript published in Vladimir Petrovich Sysoev (ed.), *Aleksandr Deineka: Zhizn', iskusstvo, vremia*, vol. 2: *Literaturno-khudozhestvennoe nasledstvo* (Izobrazitel'noe iskusstvo; Moscow, 1989), p. 117.
- 22 RGALI, f. 2932, op. 1, d. 144, p. 6.
- 23 RGALI, f. 2932, op. 1, d. 144, p. 6.
- 24 This phrase appears within his description of 'Negroes' in a letter home to Moscow, as cited in Irina Nenarokomova, *Liubliu bol'shie plany... khudozhnik Aleksandr Deineka* (Sovetskii khudozhnik; Moscow, 1987), p. 99. It is unfortunate that his letters home have been lost (see below), because the only textual account we have to explain his attitude towards African-Americans is the short account by Nenarokomova, who was briefly shown the letters; otherwise, we only have his sketches of African-Americans, making it difficult to analyse what seems to have been an intense encounter for him.
- 25 Letters cited and paraphrased in Nenarokomova, *Liubliu bol'shie plany...*, pp. 97 and 99.
- 26 I take the concept of the dreamworld of modernity from Susan Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West* (MIT Press; Cambridge (Mass.), 2000).
- 27 Paraphrased in Nenarokomova, *Liubliu bol'shie plany...*, p. 99. This claim is somewhat mysterious, because neither the checklist for the Art Alliance exhibition, nor the fairly detailed exhibition reviews in the press, mention any images of African Americans or of rich American women - and journalists were especially eager to discuss his images of the US. It is possible that he may have added some recent works to the exhibition after it opened, thus missing the reviews. On the Art Alliance exhibition, see Ms. Coll. 53, Folder 1579, Annenberg Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Pennsylvania.
- 28 O.H. Bonte, 'Water-colors by Deyneka Seen at the Art Alliance', *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 17 February 1935, p. 14.
- 29 Cited in Nenarokomova, *Liubliu bol'shie plany...*, p. 100. Unfortunately, I have not yet been able to find the zoo photograph in any Philadelphia publication or archive.
- 30 Three of these silhouette images are in the drawings collection of the State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg; they are illustrated in *Deineka: Grafika*, pp. 408-409.
- 31 On Douglas and the concept of the 'contact zone' in mid-century Afro Modernism, see Kobena Mercer, 'Cosmopolitan Contact Zones', in Tanya Barson and Peter Gorschlüter (eds.), *Afro Modern: Journeys in the Black Atlantic* (Tate Publications; Liverpool, 2010).
- 32 His esteemed teacher at VKhUTEMAS in the early 1920s, the graphic artist Vladimir Favor'skii, had certainly demonstrated the power of silhouetted black and white forms, but the sinuous lines of Deineka's American silhouette drawings seem to me to draw their inspiration from entirely different sources; they are significantly different in form from any of his black and white or two-colour journal illustrations or poster designs.
- 33 Correspondence held in a private archive suggests that the balcony depicted in this watercolour may be a specific one, belonging to the New York apartment of Rena Rosenthal, who owned a modern design gallery located in the Waldorf Astoria hotel.
- 34 On the figure of Liusia Vtorova, see Christina Kiaer, "The Swimming Vtorova Sisters: The Representation and Experience of Soviet Sport in the 1930s," in Sandra Budy, Nikolaus Katzer, Alexandra Köhring and Manfred Zeller, eds., *Modern Sport in Soviet Culture and Society* (Campus-Verlag; Frankfurt a.M., forthcoming 2010).
- 35 For an elaboration of this argument about the unknowability of Deineka's Soviet protagonists, see Christina Kiaer, 'Was Socialist Realism Forced Labor?'
- 36 'U.S. Highways Catch Soviet Artist's Fancy', *Washington Post*, 6 March 1935, p. 1.
- 37 A.A. Deineka, "Moi raznye sovremenniki," *Ogonek* no. 45 (1963), reprinted in Sysoev (ed.), *Aleksandr Deineka: Zhizn', iskusstvo, vremia*, vol. 2, p. 98.
- 38 This drawing is no. 2007g in the Graphics Collection of the A.A. Deineka Picture Gallery of Kursk. The American surname transliterated into Cyrillic and scribbled on the drawing was difficult to decipher: it looked like Slaidер or Sneider (Слайдер, Снейдер), and it was only by coming across the name through further research in Philadelphia that I was able to arrive at the name Speiser (Спейзер, as Deineka wrote it incorrectly, with a «з» [«z»] instead of an «s»).
- 39 On the rise of the *kartina* in Soviet painting, see Susan E. Reid, "All Stalin's Women: Gender and Power in Soviet Art of the 1930s.," *Slavic Review* 57, no. 1 (1998): 133-73. The wide-view drawing of the Speiser living room is in a private collection and has only been reproduced in postage-stamp size in Vladimir Petrovich Sysoev, *Alexandre Deineka: peintures, arts graphiques, arts monumentaux, articles littéraires* (Éditions d'art Aurora; Leningrad, 1982), p. 290. The two rough sketches had until recently been unavailable for viewing in the Graphics Collection of the A.A. Deineka Picture Gallery of

- Kursk, and were just published for the first time in A.A. Deineka: *Zhivopis', Grafika, Skulptura* (State Tret'iakov Gallery and Interros; Moscow, 2010), p. 57.
- 40 See Alison Hilton, "Holiday on the Kolkhoz: Socialist Realism's Dialogue with Impressionism," in Rosalind P. Blakesley and Susan E. Reid, eds., *Russian Art and the West: A Century of Dialogue in Painting, Architecture, and the Decorative Arts* (Northern Illinois University Press; DeKalb, IL, 2007), pp. 195-216.
- 41 Aleksandr Deineka, 'Parizhskie vpechatleniia', *Sovetskoe iskusstvo*, 11 June 1935, reprinted in Sysoev (ed.), *Aleksandr Deineka: Zhizn', iskusstvo, vremia*, vol. 2, p. 123.
- 42 Some of his very earliest drawings from art school show sexualised, semi-nude women dancing in the context of a party or cabaret, but these are overtly critical images of capitalist - or NEP (New Economic Policy, 1921-c. 1928) era - excess. A few years after his return to Russia, he would paint some portraits, and even a large *kartina* (*At the Women's Meeting* of 1937), of women wearing relatively fashionable clothes, though none with the kind of sexuality implied in *Boredom*.
- 43 In terms of art historical methodology, the fact that I have located the model for the picture - that I have a "proper name" to attach to the pictorial enterprise - does not necessarily unlock its meaning or significance, though I will argue that it does help to make my case against Deineka's later repudiation of the picture's content. For a classic critique of an "art history of the proper name," see Rosalind Krauss, "In the Name of Picasso," in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (MIT Press; Cambridge (Mass.), 1985), pp. 23-40.
- 44 See Henry Clifford, 'The Speiser Collection: January 13-February 14', *Bulletin of the Pennsylvania Museum*, vol. 29, no. 160, February 1934, pp. 43-45.
- 45 Correspondence about and with invitees is held in the 'Art of Soviet Russia' folder, Registrar's Records, Philadelphia Museum.
- 46 According to Martha Speiser's granddaughter, Ellen Speiser Katz, her grandmother spoke Russian, and had grown up in a Jewish immigrant family that presumably came from a location within the Russian empire; she believes that the Speisers may have emigrated from Kiev in the 1890s. Interview with the author, 13 August 2009.
- 47 See 'House for Maurice J. Speiser, Philadelphia, Pa.: George Howe, architect', *Architectural Forum*, vol. 64, 1936, pp. 122-25; and Barbara Barnes, 'The Bauhaus Lives on in Philadelphia Homes', *The Evening Bulletin* (Philadelphia), 12 January 1968.
- 48 He wrote about the building admiringly on his return to Moscow, taking it, along with Rockefeller City in New York, as his main example of American architecture. See Deineka, 'Putevy zametki', p. 115-16.
- 49 In spite of his ideologically critical view of their wealth, it seems likely that he enjoyed his visits to the Speiser home. An indication of his engagement with the family is an attractive portrait in oil of Martha Speiser, the mistress of the house, which he completed while in Philadelphia, and which remains in the family's collection. This simple portrait, with its empty background, relatively blank facial expression, and stark colour scheme of black, white and red, is instantly recognisable as a classic Deineka - and so underscores the unusual stature of *Boredom* within his body of work.
- 50 The sculpture is still in the collection of Maurice and Martha's granddaughter; although the exact origins of the sculpture are unclear, the family believes that it is an Etruscan head.
- 51 Invoking the Beatles' song here risks a pathetic attempt at (outdated) pop hipness, but the song captures an important aspect of Deineka's work in its relentless, if ironic, invocation of the variety of wholesome Soviet 'girls'.
- 52 Key examples of such paintings are Arkadii Plastov, *Collective Farm Festival*, 1937, and Sergei Gerasimov's painting of the same title and date. See Hilton, 'Holiday on the Kolkhoz'. It goes without saying that all these positive representations of collective farms, including Deineka's, glossed over the tremendous suffering caused by the collectivisation process.
- 53 Although this *kolkhoznitsa* may be modelled on a specific woman that he encountered on his *komandirovka* or elsewhere, I have turned up no evidence for this; nothing in the depiction of her face or body suggests anything beyond a fully generic ideal of Soviet womanhood.
- 54 On the widespread anxiety over mastering Soviet ideology and becoming an appropriate Soviet subject in the Soviet Union of the 1930s, see Christina Kiaer and Eric Naiman (eds.), *Everyday Life in Early Soviet Russia: Taking the Revolution Inside* (Indiana University Press; Bloomington, 2005), especially the authors' introduction; and Jochen Hellbeck, *Revolution on My Mind: Writing a Diary Under Stalin* (Harvard University Press; Cambridge (Mass.), 2006).
- 55 When Deineka joined the Association of Proletarian Artists (RAPKh) in late 1931, for example, in spite of having been actively courted by the group, members immediately attacked him for his modernist tendencies and inappropriate subject matter. Throughout the 1930s, in spite of relatively steady success and commissions, he was routinely attacked for his 'formalism' and 'schematism'.

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**10**      **LEGACY, HERITAGE OR HISTORY?**  
**A Study of Artistic Agency in the Art Scene of the GDR,**  
**1949-1989 and beyond**

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JØRN GULDBERG

Now we know that the Impressionists painted what they saw, the Expressionists what they felt, and we – dear colleagues – we are in fact expected to paint what we are told.

Bernhard Kretzschmar, 1959.<sup>1</sup>

## **INTRODUCTION**

The art of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) is now history, and as such it is documented to an almost extraordinary degree. In chronological terms the history of GDR art was brought to an end in November 1989, and in terms of legacy and heritage, only a few seem prepared, in the current political climate, to claim the right to possess it, to acknowledge or to commemorate it.

A general survey of the artistic culture of the GDR from 1949 to 1989 inevitably will have to conclude that the structures, institutions and organisations of the art scene as well as professional trajectories of individual artists were conditioned by the overall totalitarian framing of its production, distribution and consumption. A detailed description of the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion, acknowledgment and discouragement, promotion and degradation etc. will reveal a pattern which is superficially rather similar to that of art scenes elsewhere. The experiences of East German artists with regard to phenomena such as cliquism, nepotism and the (real or imagined) prompting to follow current trends were presumably no less embarrassing than those of their Western colleagues. What is unique to the art scene of the GDR is that the chains of command and control reached the highest level of state administration, while regulation and adjustment in Western art scenes are left to the art world with its typical combination of public and private, semi-public and commercial structures. A closer study of how artists in the GDR were recruited, trained, organised etc. – and of the roles they played in the official policies of exhibitions, museum acquisition policy, selections for representative shows at home and abroad, participation in decoration programmes in relation to public buildings etc. – will reveal that all the ‘classic’ criteria of totalitarianism apply well to the art scene of the GDR.

It is rather easy to establish that the influential definitions of what characterises the totalitarian regimes of the 20th century given by the American political scientist Carl Friedrich in 1956 hold for the GDR in general and for the artistic culture in particular.<sup>2</sup> For instance,

Marxism (in the variety authorised by the Soviet Union) functioned as an official ideology, including a utopian anthropology concerning socialist man and an artistic ideology, namely Socialist Realism. The SED (*Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands*) held a *de facto* monopoly of power, and party influence was extended to all levels of social life; via the state apparatus the party exerted severe control over the media, and its display of force assumed the character of intimidation by means of physical, psychological and symbolic violence.

However absolute and unrestricted the power of 'the system' was, the totalitarian framing and penetration of the art world, for instance, had its weaknesses, and this was exhibited towards the end of the regime. The dissident and émigré art critic and historian Günter Feist points to the fact that the exertion of power was based on a combination of (on the one hand) a quasi-religious ideology which, in the official political rhetoric, gave way to fictitious and distorted pictures of social reality that no one could recognise, and (on the other) a political culture based on various forms of violence. This combination produced fiction and fear, and thus, in reality, the socialist project of the SED was not designed to secure genuine support from the people of the GDR. The late 1980s saw a twofold weakening: that of the ideology and that of the channels of control. This relaxation or irresolution caused the collapse of the system, and, as Feist notes, in the end it unveiled a real yet astonishing discrepancy between 'omnipotence and impotence'.<sup>3</sup>

The place and function of art within (and as an integrated part of) 'the system' have been documented in several publications in the 1990s.<sup>4</sup> As shown below, general surveys as well as closer analysis of developments and processes of the art of the GDR most commonly take 'the system' as a point of departure. Headlines and slogans such as 'Arrival at Every Day Life' (1960s) and 'Width and Variety' (1970s), which are meant to summarise the general tendencies of decades, are taken from official declarations and party statements. This applies to both GDR literature and Western accounts.<sup>5</sup>

The relevance of this system approach is evident, but the main part of the present article will take a different point of departure. One alternative to an approach that focuses on how official art policy were institutionalised and made instrumental in different sectors of the art world – educational programmes of art schools, admittance to exhibition facilities, the genres of art criticism, the rhetoric of theo-

retical and other scholarly discourses etc. – could be to focus on how individuals acted in explicit or implicit response to the work conditions imposed. This approach does not necessarily have to be biographical in any ordinary sense. Instead, the focus will be on two artists in their capacity as agents of the art world of the GDR. The two represent different generations, two different backgrounds and professional attitudes, and two very different trajectories and careers as artists. The artists are Bernard Kretzschmar (1889-1972) and Wolfgang Mattheuer (1927-2004).

While Kretzschmar during his whole career (with one or two important exceptions) seems to have occupied positions just beside the chain of events along which history is made, Mattheuer was in the centre of that history as one of the most highly profiled GDR artists. He also contributed substantially to the formation of a relative favourable reputation for GDR art in the West in the 1970s. For instance, Mattheuer was one of the five artists who made up the official representation of the GDR at the *documenta 6*, in Kassel, 1977. Both artists were democrats and socialists by political conviction. Whether Kretzschmar was actually a member of a political party is not mentioned explicitly in the literature, but there are some indications that he was in the 1920s. Mattheuer was a member of the SED until 1987, when he resigned his membership. More than a decade prior to his political resignation, he withdrew from his professorship at the college of art in Leipzig in the austere intellectual and political climate that culminated with the expatriation of the singer and songwriter Wolf Biermann in 1976. While Kretzschmar seems to have been rather indifferent to the ideological elements of official art policy in the GDR, Mattheuer was in a permanent dialogue with the official ideas, ideals and utopias of the socialist project, including those concerned with the creation and dissemination of a genuine socialist artistic culture.

As a consequence of their different artistic attitudes and strategies, their respective status in the literature of art history differs. One principal difference is due to the fact that (with a few exceptions) Kretzschmar's oeuvre has nothing explicitly GDR-esque to it, while it is difficult to appreciate Mattheuer and characterise his production as a painter, graphic artist and sculptor without situating his works in their specific historical context. A preliminary, but also simplifying, conclusion is that the older artist is uncompromised, and hence desires a high esteem on purely artistic grounds, while the

career of the younger is so tied up with the art scene of the GDR that his work, even if he took a critical stand (precisely because of this attitude, perhaps) is only of documentary interest since the historical situation that gave a kind of legitimacy to his original and personal form of artistic expression is now an anachronism.

Before presenting the two artists, it seems relevant to pause and ask more principally how this difference of artistic 'destiny' may affect their position in an historiographical retrospective in terms of history, (in)heritage, legacy, treasure etc. More generally, it seems appropriate to ask how the art of the GDR as such and as a whole may be subjected adequately to historiographical, critical and evaluative inquiry.

#### THE ART OF THE GDR AND ITS HISTORY AND LEGACY

If we elaborate a little upon the English geographer David Lowenthal's delicate distinctions between history, heritage and legacy, we may conclude that the art of the GDR definitely is *history*.<sup>6</sup> It can be documented rather easily by using a huge number of primary written sources and with reference to the store rooms and (in few cases) the galleries of museums in the Eastern part of the now united Germany. Here the works of former GDR artists are kept as relics and evidence of an artistic culture of the past, and as such this art is a 'foreign country' where things worked differently and from which we are now inevitably separated.<sup>7</sup>

*Heritage* is, according to Lowenthal, anything from the past which serves a present-day purpose other than that of being 'objective' historical evidence. This means that the present status of heritage is not based on inherent qualities of a given past phenomenon, but functions as a sign of age, continuity and endurance only because it fits into a contemporary strategy of some kind, especially as a resource in the identity policies of societies, social groups and individuals. Hence heritage is not a reliable source of history (the past), but, if symbolically inverted, the construction of heritage is a privileged source of information in relation to the study of current social, political and cultural dynamics and processes, and primarily with regard to present ideas of aspects of the past.

The notion of *legacy* is not explicitly defined in the writings of Lowenthal. However, it seems fair and adequate to assume that what Lowenthal refers to by the term is a dimension of heritage. While heritage proper has a status in contemporary culture, which is exclu-

sively conditioned by the needs and wants of the present, the *legacy* of past thoughts, actions and forms refers to the real quality of those elements of the past. Thus legacy, as a category, simply indicates that some historical phenomena are still valid more or less in their original, even authentic forms of manifestation; while heritage is staged history – it is eventually invented, constructed, produced.

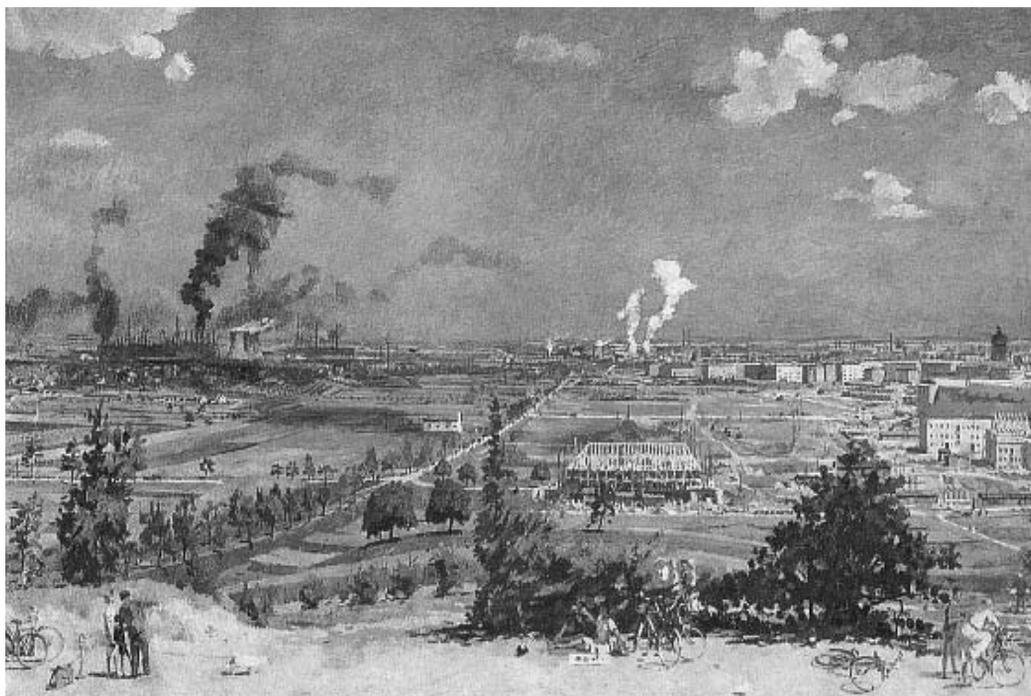
Lowenthal's categorical distinctions have been challenged, but also confirmed and radicalised considerably. Especially in relation to tourism, the 'heritage industry' has, in line with Lowenthal, and with or without direct reference to him, been blamed for producing 'staged authenticity', 'bogus history' and the like.<sup>8</sup> The current (rather intense) debate on memory, narration, heritage and history is, however, only of secondary interest to this presentation. The purpose of introducing the categories here is primarily to open up for a discussion of the present status of the art of the GDR, both with the general public and with the scholar, who is, in the present context, the historian.

A number of questions emerge when the art of the GRD is considered as a question of inheritance: Who would claim the right to take care of it as heritage? Who wants to be its executor? What is the purpose of going to see it or studying it at all? What can be experienced, learnt or recognised from it? Does anyone actually miss it? What is its legacy? What kind of heritage does it represent? What is its contribution to world art? How has it enriched painterly culture in general – has it made no difference or even impoverished that culture? Is it possible, in an objective manner, to characterise it plainly as *history*, as something that is past and gone forever? Is it adequate to liken the art of the GDR metaphorically to 'a foreign country' where people thought and behaved in strange ways that we (the outsiders) cannot *appreciate* properly and can only hope to be able to *explain* by means of semiotic interpretation? Must the overall conclusion to be drawn from an inquiry into the art of the GDR be a negative one – for instance, that this art documents the disastrous outcome of totalitarian control and oppression? Is it possible that a conclusion might require a more relativistic judgment, pointing to the fact that, irrespective of control and suppression, characteristic and impressive art forms have developed after all? Does a conclusion have to reflect the possibility that regulations, strictures and the massive piloting of art production in the GDR might have turned out to be a productive force, in a Foucaultian sense, so that artists may have benefited from the specific conditions of creative work? Is it the case that the

creative reaction to ideological constraints and the delicate handling of open-ended theoretical formulas such as those contained in the official aesthetic programme of Socialist Realism actually encouraged an unforeseen artistic sophistication and inventiveness?

Such questions are, of course, of relevance in relation to art of any time and place and to any creative agent of any given art scene. But they are particularly precarious in relation to the art of the GDR, since most West German criticism of the art of the East (and very little has in fact been written by non-Germans) has, not surprisingly, tended to produce not only a hostile picture of the artistic culture of their socialist neighbours, but also an imprecise, even false identification of the roles and attitudes of the art producers and consumers. The artists are seen either as victims or as opportunists, and their audiences are stigmatised as being either ignorant or misinformed, people who were only anxious to please 'the system'. But the audiences for the art of the GDR were vast, and however the facts are interpreted and compared to similar facts concerning the volume and level of activity of art audiences elsewhere, we cannot simply ignore the fact that no art exhibitions in any part of the world attracted so many visitors as did the official show (*Die Kunstausstellung*) staged in Dresden every fourth year. It is hard to believe that the thousands who lined up in front of *Gemäldegalerie* or *Albertinum* each morning were looking forward to being let in to see trash or pitiful artistic products in the galleries.<sup>9</sup>

In fact, there were a number of artists who saw themselves as being victimised by politically motivated and rationalised ties and restrictions, just as there were numerous artists who benefited from their capacity to manoeuvre successfully in the political and ideological minefield of the art scene. But the majority of artists do not fit into this simplified picture. In relation to 'the system' there were fellow travellers as well as dissidents. More interestingly, there were artists who in general were more or less indifferent to the ideological elements of official art policy and tried to screen their artistic work from 'external' influences. And yet, on rare occasions some of these artists eventually contributed substantially to the development of GDR art. On the other hand, there were artists who were members of the SED - convinced socialists believing that their mission was to bring about new forms of artistic expression. Such artists were often highly sensitive to minor shifts in both the political signals and the life conditions of GDR citizens.



**10.1.** Bernhard Kretzschmar, *View of Eisenhüttenstadt* (1955/58), oil on canvas. Frankfurt/Oder, Museum Junge Kunst.

These two attitudes or strategies between the positions of victim and opportunist respectively represent (at least to the present author) the most interesting and informative approach with a view to gaining an idea of how the structure and dynamics of the art scene in the GDR worked, and in particular how opportunities and restrictions were experienced by artists.

### THE HEIMAT OF SOCIALISM: BERNARD KRETZSCHMAR

With the exception of a few official portraits of artists, intellectuals and political leaders of the GDR, the generally apolitical Dresden painter Kretzschmar made only one contribution to the proliferation of a specific East German imagery – although it was a highly influential contribution. With his panorama, entitled *View of Eisenhüttenstadt* (1955/58) (ill. 10.1), he started a new trend in landscape painting: a mode of representing the contemporary industrial landscape with its emerging urban structures, heavy plants, power stations, blocks of flats etc.<sup>10</sup>

This painting became famous almost overnight, and in the first official art history of the new state, published by Ulrich Kuhirt in 1959, it was praised as ‘one of the best landscape paintings of the GDR’.<sup>11</sup> According to Kuhirt and other critics and historians, the painter had succeeded in his attempt to represent the new socialist *Heimat* as a comforting unity of the spheres and activities of production and recreation, work and leisure, participation and observation.

The industrial area is seen from above and at a considerable distance from an observation post on a hilltop outside Eisenhüttenstadt, on which Kretzschmar has placed four couples or small groups of observers who are, along with us, the spectators of his painting, engaged in social sightseeing of the contemporary urban scenery, while a lonely painter with his easel is standing to the right preoccupied with his registration of what he is observing. The smog-producing chimneys that dominate the city skyline and the busy construction sites of the townscape are shrouded in a sunny, sombre atmosphere. Art historian Helga Möbius has characterised the rich, dazzling colour tints as an effect that enhances ‘the decorative beauty’ of the place.<sup>12</sup> The accentuation of an inviting topographical and social ambience prompted the controversial (and slightly dissident) freelance art historian and journal editor Lothar Lang, in a much disputed survey of the visual arts of the GDR, to note that with this ‘new’ type of landscape image Kretzschmar had ‘opened the way for such paintings in which the poetry of the landscape of work is given expression’.<sup>13</sup> Against such favourable East German partisan views as those quoted here by Kuhirt and Lang, Karin Thomas, the West German art historian and author of numerous handbooks and surveys, stated laconically in 1985 with reference to Kretzschmar’s painting that,

[i]n the course of this attempt to put through a proletarian art revolution the genre of landscape painting effectively paid service to economical production propaganda, in that only industrial landscapes, mining sceneries and *kolchoze* fields with ploughing tractors were depicted.<sup>14</sup>

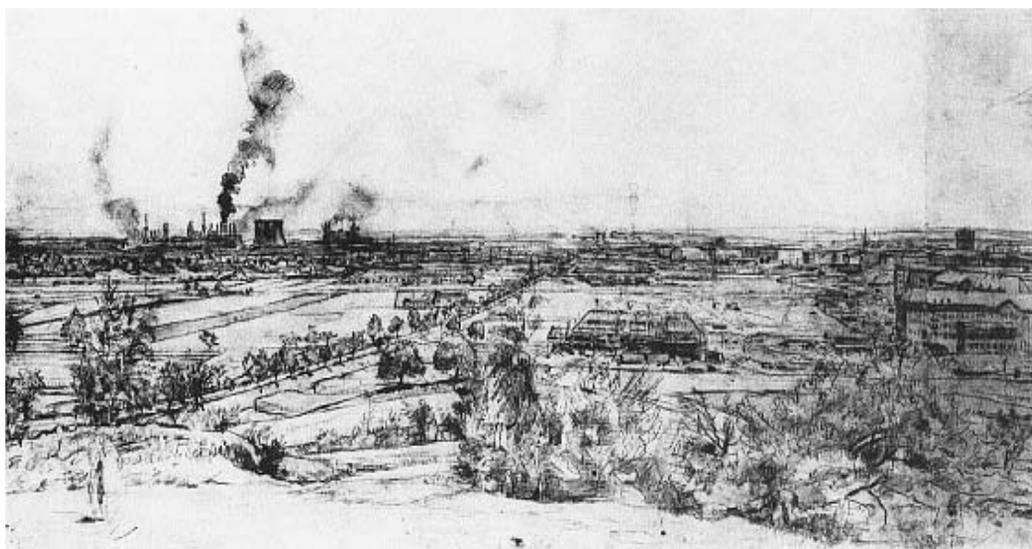
Whatever the truth of the matter, Kretzschmar’s painting is rather conventional and based directly upon the familiar sub-genre of city prospects within the popular topographical tradition grounded by the monumental publications by Hartman Schedel (1493), Sebastian Müller (1544), and especially the various editions of *Civitates Orbis Terrarum* (first volume in 1563) by Georg Braun and Frans Hogen-

berg. The combination of a city skyline on the horizon, the emphasis on characteristic buildings as identity marks, and the use of various kinds of folklore in the depiction of human agents in the foreground are all well-known devices adopted from this topographical tradition. Nevertheless, there are two important innovative traits in Kretzschmar's painting to be noticed. One is the replacement of palaces and castles, church towers and town halls by power stations, factories and high-rise blocks; and the second is the emphasis placed on an expanding and dynamic city structure in contradistinction to traditional representations of townscapes as solid, static and closed physical and geographical units. Kretzschmar emphasises the artefactual quality of the urban structure, and its design and planned character are revealed by the regular pattern of fields that dominates the middle ground, the zone between the observation post and the city centre, where new building constructions will rise in due time. The sightseers on the hilltop (and we ourselves) are not only observing the actual townscape, but are also able to anticipate its expansion and future structure.

The emphasis in Kretzschmar's painting, then, is on landscape transformation, industrialisation and productivity, and therefore, in this specific historical and political context, on *progress*. After all, the painting is 'political' in the sense that it, according to Kuhirt's judgement, evokes a feeling of friendliness and optimism which corresponds to what is interpreted as a committed attitude to life among the sightseers on the hilltop. Moreover, in the art literature of the GDR, the Eisenhüttenstadt painting is in general singled out as the starting point of a new wave of landscape painting that focuses on the picturesque quality of building, construction and foundation activities, thus showing the traces of a successful, revolutionary conversion from capitalist to socialist economy.

In retrospect, Kretzschmar and this particular painting played an important part in the East German art history. The authoritative *Lexikon der Kunst* states laconically that owing to his commitment to realism the artist was perceptive of typical features of what is here called 'socialist reality', including such features that characterise the socialist landscape.<sup>15</sup>

The process by which the view of Eisenhüttenstadt was produced has not been documented. Very little has actually been written on Kretzschmar, and neither of the two existing life-and-work publications devoted to the artist discusses this painting in any detail.<sup>16</sup>



**10.2.** Bernhard Kretzschmar, *Eisenhüttenstadt* (1955), watercolour *Eisenhüttenstadt*. Städtisches Museum Eisenhüttenstadt.

So it is not possible to establish the various stages in the sequence of its production, which lasted about four years. For instance, it is difficult to answer the question whether the painting exists in two (or more) versions: an early one, 'the original' from 1955, a reworked final version from 1958, and possibly a number of intermediate stages as well. What seems to be the case is that only one canvas of that particular size is registered in his oeuvre. A number of small studies on paper of specific sites in Eisenhüttenstadt from 1955 exist, for instance the watercolour (ill. 10.2), but apparently none from subsequent years. The final version, then, is probably a studio piece.

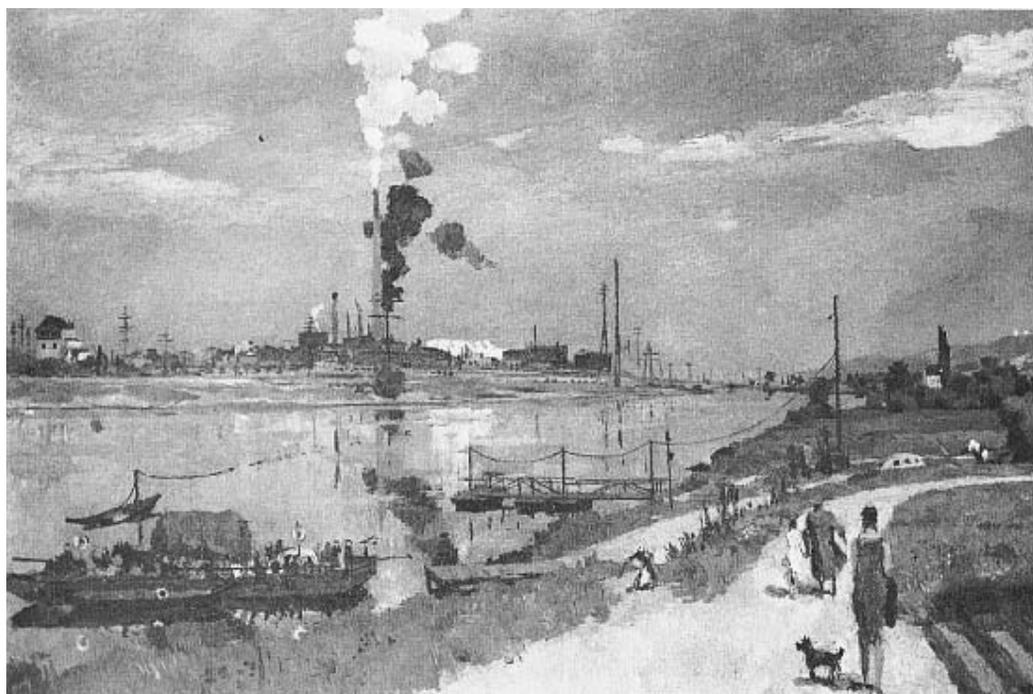
We cannot be sure, but we may assume that Kretzschmar wanted to express in his painting both what he actually had the opportunity to *see* in Eisenhüttenstadt in the mid-50s, and his emotional response to the visual impression – what he *felt*. This assumption is substantiated by one of the very few written statements that Kretzschmar published. In 1956 he wrote a kind of 'auto-testimony' (*Selbstzeugnis*) to the principal art journal *Bildende Kunst*, in which he described his intentions as follows:

I have made drawings and paintings in Eisenhüttenstadt until I knew the appearance of each tree, each house, each field, each chimney and had this panorama inside of me. For, every square centimetre had to be filled with the experience that moved me to capture the impression.<sup>17</sup>

This statement provides evidence that Kretzschmar's sensitivity manifested itself in a combination of a descriptive, topographical approach and an openness to the emotional tensions triggered off by this particular environment. But in addition to this, we may assume that he was 'told' to do something as well, as he stated in the quote that introduces the present study. For instance, he may have been told to make alterations of the sketch or the original painting in order to counter certain criticism or conform to his client's requirements. Moreover, since most of his artistic production in the mid-50s was concentrated on routine work with portraiture and conventional landscapes, there are reasonable grounds to suppose that it may very well have been his own recent experiences with the production of the Eisenhüttenstadt painting he was referring to in his conference statement on the differences between the creative impulses of Impressionist, Expressionist and the would-be or, rather, should-be 'Socialist Realist' painters the following year.

However marginal Kretzschmar's production in general is to be judged in relation to the characteristics of mainstream GDR art of four decades, he is undoubtedly representative of the vast number of older artists who were acclimatised to the conditions in which they found themselves in divided Germany after the end of World War II. Residing in Dresden ever since he began his studies, first at the school of *Kunstgewerbe* and then from 1911 to 1920 at the Academy of Arts, he never left the town, and after the war, he was appointed professor of painting to the academy. In 1959 he received the *Nationalpreis*, one of the more desirable official honours. Unlike many others, he did not leave the Northeast Soviet sector of post-war Germany (the so-called SBZ) to settle down in one of the three West sectors that were administered by the Allies. Kretzschmar continued to find 'neutral' subject matter for his many landscape studies in the vicinity of Dresden. The painting entitled *The Elbe River near Gauerwitz* (ill. 10.3) is a typical example.

During the years of the Weimar Republic, Kretzschmar did not join the revolutionary group of artists that had a stronghold in Dresden in the late 1920s in particular. He had no connection to the communist *Assoziation Revolutionärer Bildender Künstler Deutschlands* (ARBKD, The Association of Revolutionary Artists of Germany), which was founded in 1928 as a German counterpart to the Soviet Russian organisation with an almost identical name, AKhRR (The Association of Revolutionary Artist of Russia), an organisation that



**10.3.** Bernhard Kretzschmar, *The Elbe River near Gauernitz* (1964/67), oil on canvas. Whereabouts unknown.

was radicalised that year and turned into what the leaders proclaimed was a militant, proletarian direction. By 1933, when the ARBKD was declared illegal, it had, according to contemporary estimates, about 800 members organised in one local and several regional units all over Germany, and 'sister' groupings of graphic designers, filmmakers and architects were affiliated to the association. Of the 800 members, the names of approximately 350 are known today, and Kretzschmar's is not one of them. ARBKD was only one among a number of groupings with a strong communist, left socialist or social democratic commitment, and the styles or pictorial idioms favoured by these artists were multiple. They covered a vast field - from the epic naturalism of ARBKD (e.g. Otto Nagel, Käthe Kollwitz, Otto Griebel), via the poster-like didacticism of John Heartfield, Heinrich Vogeler and others, to the verism of *Neue Sachlichkeit* artists like Otto Dix, Georg Grosz and Georg Scholtz and the ideogrammatic purism of the Cologne group *Die Progressiven* (Franz Seiwert, Heinrich Hoerle and others).<sup>18</sup>

Kretzschmar did not take part in any political or artistic activism, neither in the inter-war period nor after the communist take-over after the war. In 1927 he became a member of the group of Dresden secessionists which was founded in 1919 as *Dresdner Sezession: Gruppe 1919*. This group favoured a colourful, lyric Postimpressionism in low-voiced opposition both to the austere, critical expressionism of the painters who later became the verists of the *Neue Sachlichkeit*, and to the harsh realism of the communist-minded artists, that is, the later *Assos* (as the members of ARBKD were called after its foundation). *Gruppe 1919* officially ceased to exist in 1923 as a consequence of a split within the group between an apolitical sub-group and a radical, socialist fraction. The literature on the *Gruppe 1919* differs to a considerable degree with regard to the names of the more marginal adherents, and, for instance, it is not at all clear whether Kretzschmar actually took part in the activities of the group.<sup>19</sup> By 1927 the Dresden secessionism was but an informal and temporary exhibition community that organised a show in a private gallery as a protest against the exhibition policies of the academy and the attempt made that year by the old institution to revive the tradition of academic salons. Hence the label, *secession*, is used by a few historians in a general sense in order to characterise the anti-academic gesture of this *salon des refusés*. The secessionism of 1927 was without any ideological pretensions. It was first of all an action of trade unionism with the practical scope of creating temporary exhibition facilities and promoting sales of artworks.

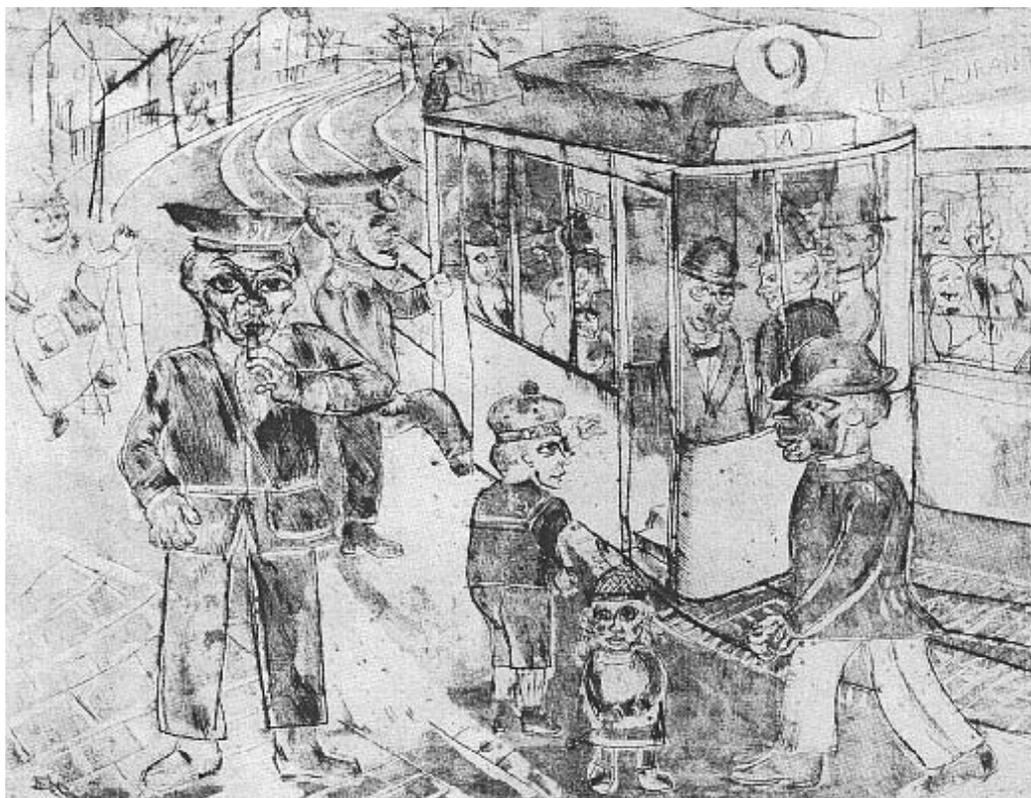
The same could be said about the next event in the history of Dresden secessionism in which Kretzschmar actually played a major part. In 1933 he became a leading figure in the formation and first manifestation of the so-called *Dresdner Sezession 1932*, which functioned as an umbrella organisation in relation to three exhibitions, the last of which took place in 1934 and had a swastika on the cover of the catalogue - not as a tribute to the new regime, but because all the printed matter of this semi-public nature had to exhibit the new national symbol. For the second exhibition Kretzschmar wrote a preface to the catalogue, and here he stated the following on the objectives of the secession as an exhibition community: 'The principle of the *Sezession* is to judge any question with which it is confronted from a purely artistic point of view, that is to say, open minded and beyond particulars'.<sup>20</sup> This liberal exhibition policy is well illustrated by the fact that one of the three local organisations that par-

anticipated in the 1932 show was in fact the one formed by artists who were also members of the Nazi party. Another section of the exhibition included Otto Dix, whom the Nazis had removed only recently from his position as a professor of painting at the Academy of Arts.

Kretzschmar really seems to have had a lifelong dedication to an illusion of artistic freedom and neutrality of cultural production. As the case with the *Dresdner Sezession 1932* indicates, this idealism made it possible for him to act pragmatically and heroically at an organisational level in order to improve the opportunities of artists to get in contact with their audiences at difficult times. The reasons for the difficulties of the period (the crisis in world economy, the disastrous inflation within German economy, the nationalistic counter revolution of the Nazis, the spite of his fellow artists etc.) were beyond his concern.

After the end of World War II he did not join local groups such as *Der Ruf* and *Das Ufer*. While the former (organised in 1945) included representatives of modern trends of the 1920s (i.e. Expressionists and Constructivists), the latter was formed in 1947 in order to mobilise the old guard of socially engaged and politically conscious artists of non- or anti-modernist persuasion in order to support an anti-fascist, democratic and socialist development in the 'new' Germany.

Kretzschmar was as apolitical in the first years after the end of World War II as he had been in the 1920s, during the Nazi regime and again after the foundation of the GDR in 1949. This does not imply that he had no ideas as regards artistic life in the new state; but his interests were directed towards practical matters in relation to the working conditions of artists and the role of art in general education. Fritz Löffler, one of his biographers, throws light on Kretzschmar's curious 'strategy of privacy' as a debater. He was a frequent letter writer, but not in the columns of letters to the editor in the public or professional press. Instead, he addressed personal letters containing suggestions, recommendations and complaints directly to members of the government, administrators of the art scene and leading officials of artistic organisations.<sup>21</sup> In such private letters and in social gatherings in small circles, Kretzschmar occasionally characterised himself as a safeguard of art - a *Bollwerk gegen den Mißbrauch der Kunst* - and Löffler comments on this self-esteem by stating that Kretzschmar's l'art pour l'art attitude had been expressed ever since the painter appeared as a mature artist before the public in the early 1920s.



10.4. Bernhard Kretschmar, *Tramway Stop* (1921), etching.

Kretschmar's professional profile as a skilled portraitist, and the fact that he was a rather conservative performer in artistic terms, always guarded him from overt persecution and repression, even during the Hitler regime. It should be noted, of course, that in connection with the 1937 *Säuberung* campaign against so-called degenerate art since 1910, more than 40 of Kretschmar's works in museums and public collections were confiscated. Most of these works were in various graphic media and from his Dix/Grosz-influenced, expressionistic years around 1920. The etching *Tramway stop* from 1921 (ill. 10.4) is typical of his works on paper from that period. All in all, in 1937 the officials of the *Reichskammer der bildenden Künste* removed about 17,000 art works from museum collections all over Germany, and a selection of this virtual museum of sequestered modern art provided the stock for the notorious scandal exhibition of *Entartete Kunst* in Munich later that year. Kretschmar's works

were not included in this infamous show – maybe because his imagery was judged to be only superficially modern, or perhaps their degeneration was not found to be explicit enough to serve the exemplary pedagogical function of this show of artistic, political and mental deviation and decay.<sup>22</sup>

Of course, it is not the case that being persecuted, repressed or scandalised is a mark of quality in itself, and inclusion or exclusion in relation to what are retrospectively interpreted as key events or paradigmatic episodes does not automatically qualify an artist to be held in high esteem. The point is that Kretzschmar was a *painter*, from first to last, and we may assume that the same may be said about the majority of GDR painters of his generation. They were generally out of focus and operated in the margins of the art scene, but they might, as Kretzschmar did occasionally, grumble about not being left alone with their art as well as expressing their concern about the pressures placed on the principal neutrality and autonomy of art by ideologists and people with power. This is what the quotation at the beginning of this essay exemplifies. Furthermore, they were generally inarticulate as regards theoretical and critical issues. They were tolerated, and most likely they were unnoticed in debates on right or wrong directions of the artistic development. As a consequence, they became more or less invisible in contemporary critical and future historiographical discourses; and subsequently painters like Kretzschmar have been judged as having played no role in the history of art. For instance, the extensive and generous documentation of the art of the GDR (exceeding 900 pages), that was compiled and published only a few years after *Die Wende* by the productive Berlin art historian and documentarist Eckhart Gillen only mentions Kretzschmar when strings of names are reeled off.<sup>23</sup> And one of the most all-round popular accounts of the role of the fine arts in Nazi culture contains no references at all to the painter.<sup>24</sup>

Even in relation to one of the paradigmatic and, at the same time, most controversial episodes in the early history of GRD art, the so-called *Wandbildaktion*, which was initiated in 1949, most literature ignores Kretzschmar's contribution. This is because it was unproblematic as a wall decoration, and hence did not, unlike other murals and the campaign in general, cause public discussion and criticism. In fact nothing indicates that his contribution was realised; it remained a proposal in the form of a draft on paper.<sup>25</sup> In Kretzschmar's case, the only historical justification for taking notice of him in this

context – and more generally in the context of the art of the GDR – seems to be the rather isolated incident of *A View of Eisenhüttenstadt*.

However, the complete narrative of this painter includes a chapter which has been written only recently. Kretzschmar has been rediscovered, so to speak, and celebrated with reference to his merits as a painter. For instance, he has been associated with what is claimed to have been a permanent current in German art. This current has been labelled ‘expressive objectivity’, indicating a painterly strategy that stresses the expressive properties of physical features and focuses on the ability of things to articulate ideas and tell stories.<sup>26</sup> This ‘tradition’ is quite obviously a construction, since it includes artists that never worked or exhibited together – in fact, artists of different generations are gathered under this rather broad designation. The label ‘expressive objectivity’ accounts for a historiographical interpretation of disparate historical facts, and thus it represents a move or procedure by means of which historians, critics and curators find ways of arousing interest in old matters by presenting new approaches. As such, the construction of a tradition of ‘expressive objectivity’ is not at all surprising, since it is in perfect harmony with the present, post-modern preoccupation with narration, storytelling and the metaphysics of things that dominate academic as well as commercial discourses.

Certainly, there is some irony in the fact that while Kretzschmar basically remains unnoticed in historical accounts that in one way or another focus on principal agents, actions, institutions and events in their actual historical context in different periods, he has now been rehabilitated and situated within an unhistorical construct based on a rather futile claim of rediscovery of a mode of artistic performance that allegedly has no history. The narrative of Kretzschmar’s life and work, then, may be regarded as a belated contribution to the old mythology of posthumous recognition as the destiny of the true artist, who escapes the templates of the standard narrative of concrete, individual artist agents acting within specific cultural contexts, not least the narrative of a social history of art.<sup>27</sup>

A preliminary conclusion as regards the role and position of Kretzschmar in the art history of the GDR is that he was generally tolerated, in some places even acknowledged. Indeed, according to another GDR art historian, Wolfgang Hütt, who along with Ulrich Kuhirt was one of the most dogmatic historians in relation to the pa-

rameters of official art historiography, Kretzschmar was the perfect example of an 'excellent painterly culture'.<sup>28</sup> Even though on one occasion he made a substantial contribution (the renewal of landscape painting), and also took part in the so-called 'mural campaign', he is absent from the standard narrative of GDR art (as he is in relation to the art history of the 1920s and 1930s). There are two reasons for this. One is that the matrix of the standard narrative of the art history of the GDR – and of the USSR, Nazi Germany, fascist Italy and various so-called Peoples Republics in Europe and China – involves the different phases of the history of the state and party leadership. For obvious reasons, this is relevant because one of the concerns of the historian is to examine the relationship between art and official politics. In the case of the GDR this implies that the periodisation of shifting artistic orientation of a whole painterly culture is synchronised in advance with the phases of official state politics and thus sequentialised as an echo of the shifting ideological tenets of the SED.

As a consequence of this one-sided historiographical approach, artists like Kretzschmar, who primarily regarded himself as a *painter* and only secondarily as a participating subject of the GDR with civic rights, duties and responsibilities, are ignored. However, there is no reason to doubt that Kretzschmar, for whom serving art in its own right was of vital importance, was entitled to perceive the official art policy of the GDR as an attack and a wrongful way to discipline art. The outcome of the *Gleichschaltung* of art was, in Kretzschmar's view, not art at all but standard artefacts. To him art was an individual engagement and a personal, even intimate, effort, and therefore any idea of ideologising or collectivising artistic production would harm art as such.

Consequently, in the above-mentioned statement or self-declaration Kretzschmar undoubtedly reveals his own ideology – which was in fact an artistic ideology of the emancipating and liberating powers of art:

When the necessity of art and its objective is recognised as it is now reduced in a technical sense – and people thereby have learnt to look deeper – I think it's evident that some of the yearning of the past has been achieved and that a better world is on its way.<sup>29</sup>

Whether this idea of art and its social role, which is not only rather typical of its time, but in fact genuinely *modernist* in its core, appears rather naive to us today or can be seen as a key example of what

Pierre Bourdieu calls *illusio* in the context of his theory of the field of cultural production, we are not allowed to doubt that Kretzschmar actually believed in it. And even if he was tolerated as an artist, we have no reason at all to suppose that the existential problems and personal dilemmas he found himself confronted with as he was subjected to pressure, control and censorship are more superficial than the traumas experienced by artists in the frontline of spite and official disapproval in public. Thus Kretzschmar's apparently secluded career is by no means less relevant to our understanding of how the *Gleichschaltung* of the GDR art scene worked historically (and was experienced) than the professional and civic lives of artists who repeatedly found themselves in open and often dramatic confrontation with political and professional authorities. Kretzschmar's life and work, then, is as informative a source for an account of the implications of totalitarianism as the careers of high profiled and well integrated artists like Bernhard Heisig, Wolfgang Mattheuer, Werner Tübke, Fritz Cremer and others, who more than once were forced to produce self-criticism before the public and declare loyalty to State, Party and People.

There is at least one obvious reason why Kretzschmar was tolerated or (and this is virtually the same thing) met with indifference: the absence from his works of undisguised or covert symbolism. In his works, there are few clues and hints that need interpretation. Some of his portraits may indicate a cheerful atmosphere and a sympathetic relationship between artist and sitter, but in general his imagery does not constitute a serious semiotic challenge. One curious exception is the rather untypical painting from 1954, *Self-Portrait with Masks* (ill. 10.5). This self-portrait is from a period when Kretzschmar was trying to come to terms with the new role artists were expected to play in the official art policy. To mention only a few examples of the new situation: the third *Kunstaussstellung* in 1953 was the first version of this major institution in the official artistic life of the new state which was censored by the *State Commission of Artistic Affairs* established in 1951. The same year saw the second wave of 'the struggle against formalism', which was touched off by an article on 20 January in the newspaper *Die Tägliche Rundschau* written by the pseudonym N. Orlow. The title of the article was: 'Feinde der deutschen Kunst' (the enemy was non-figurative abstract art in general). The next year, at a party conference, 'Socialist Realism' was fixed as the official art ideology. This marked the beginning



**10.5.** Bernhard Kretzschmar, *Self-Portrait with Masks* (1954), oil on canvas. Whereabouts unknown.

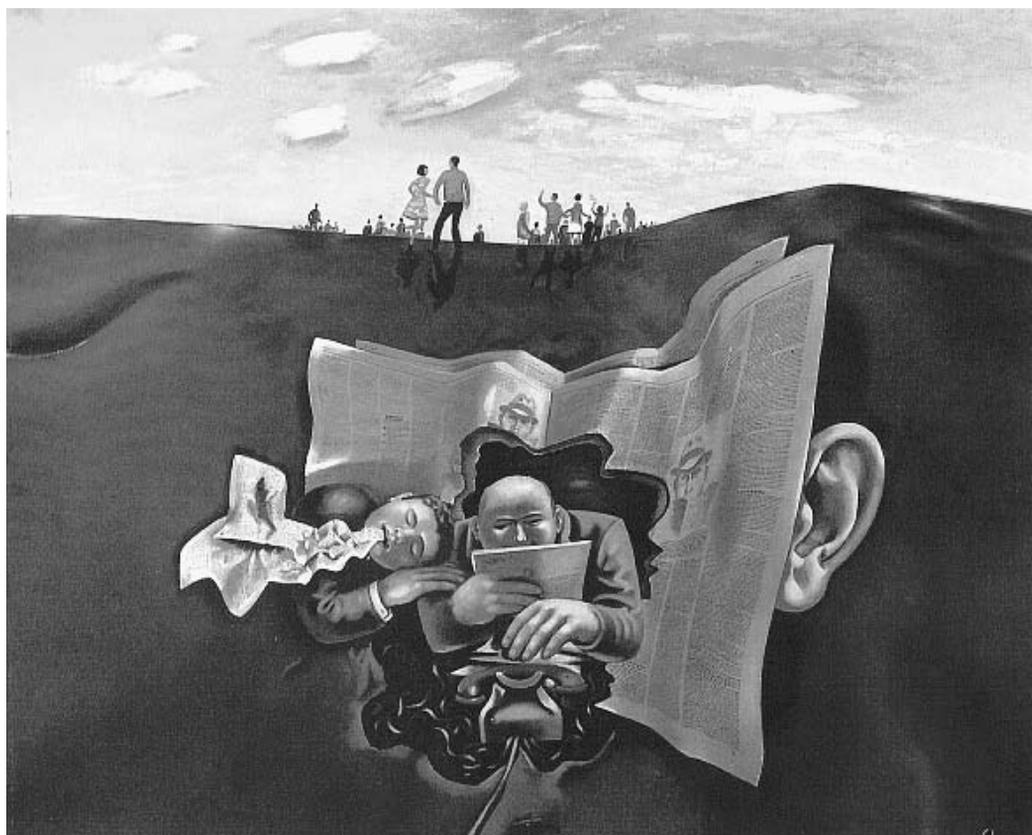
of a period of harsh surveillance and censorship, and of the introduction of a number of administrative measures that effectively reduced the range of artistic performance.<sup>39</sup> It seems reasonable to assume that Kretzschmar felt that his integrity was threatened and wanted to express in this self-representation his uncertainty as regards his identity as an artist by playing on the theme of carnival and masquerade.

## UNSETTLING THE SYSTEM: WOLFGANG MATTHEUER

The opposite applies to Wolfgang Mattheuer, not least because of his many explicit references to classical mythology and legendary figures. Many of his best-known and popular works are characterised by their capacity to arouse in the beholder a feeling of something annoying and unsettling. His pictures are enigmatic and contain riddles and subtle hints in their apparently plain, almost naive representations of everyday situations and events. It feels right that the West German critic Peter Dittmar once characterised Mattheuer as 'a kind of trivial Magritte, who compensates for lack of expressive power by freedom of interpretation'.<sup>31</sup>

Mattheuer's pictorial records of, and comments on, the conditions of life in the GDR and socialist civilisation bear the mark of ambivalence. This means, however, that attempts to understand their message often gave (and still give) rise to a dilemma, not least in critics who were loyal to 'the system' – and especially since Mattheuer basically made common cause with the socialist project. Any direct critical problematising of the indirect assertions that Mattheuer's works illustrate involved a great risk of doing nothing but confirming the terms of his unveiling of the clash of ideology and reality and the contradictions between what was officially declared about the 'developed socialism' of the GDR, and what was actually experienced by its citizens. Excessively direct or explicit criticism would run the risk of revealing not Mattheuer's intentions, but the critic's blindness or politically biased misrecognition of what was actually going on around him or her.

How, for instance, should we express critique of the handling of the theme of evasion in Mattheuer's famous painting *Horizon* (1971) (ills. 10.6 and 10.7) without making things 'worse', so to speak, that is, without exactly making explicit and attesting what the painter is only alluding to in the multi-layered legend of this painting? A matter-of-fact enumeration of observable iconographical elements will generate a series of questions: for instance (to mention only a few), what does it mean that the parti-coloured crowds of people of different ages ('the people') on the horizon are turning their backs on the strange configuration of supervision, intelligence and communication in the foreground? In the particular universe of action which is defined in spatial terms by the painting, the human figures are about to leave not only the sphere of surveillance and control, but



**10.6.** Wolfgang Mattheuer, *Horizon* (1971), oil on canvas. Staatliche Museen zu Berlin. Nationalgalerie.

also the social space that the observer (the painter) is a part of and is able to grasp. So what does the fact that the destination of migration of the crowd is detached from the known and effectively obscured indicate? Perhaps it is Mattheuer's intention to state that the people's cheerful gathering and collective efforts are oriented towards the unknown; that in order to pursue the goals of human action people have to transgress the horizon, the border between 'now' and 'then', 'here' and 'there', 'common space' and 'utopia' etc. If this does not conform to the painter's intentions, what sense does it make that the foreground is dark and colourless, only with the grey and brownish hues of the sterile ground, while sunshine and bright colours dominate the distance? The colour pattern of some of the clouds may indicate sunset and thereby the direction of movement of the people (namely towards the West). Is that a coincidence? Hardly, even if it



10.7. Wolfgang Mattheuer, *Horizon* (1968), linocut.

would explain in objective terms the darkness of the foreground. However, Mattheuer's statement is not on topography, but on social and political space, and this space is quite clearly divided, not only into dark and bright zones, but also into a static 'system-zone' of observation and reproduction to which the painter also belongs, as opposed to a zone of energetic movement and action.

The configuration of elements in the foreground contains an abundance of hints at media control, surveillance, recording, reporting, filing of observations, and dissemination of information. The telephone set of the grey bureaucrat is connected to several lines. He is in close contact with his hinterland, and his younger apprentice or spokesman sends out or excretes (even while asleep) official, censored messages in *Papierdeutsch*, as Lang calls this particular language – the stereotypes and gibberish phraseology of officialism.<sup>32</sup>

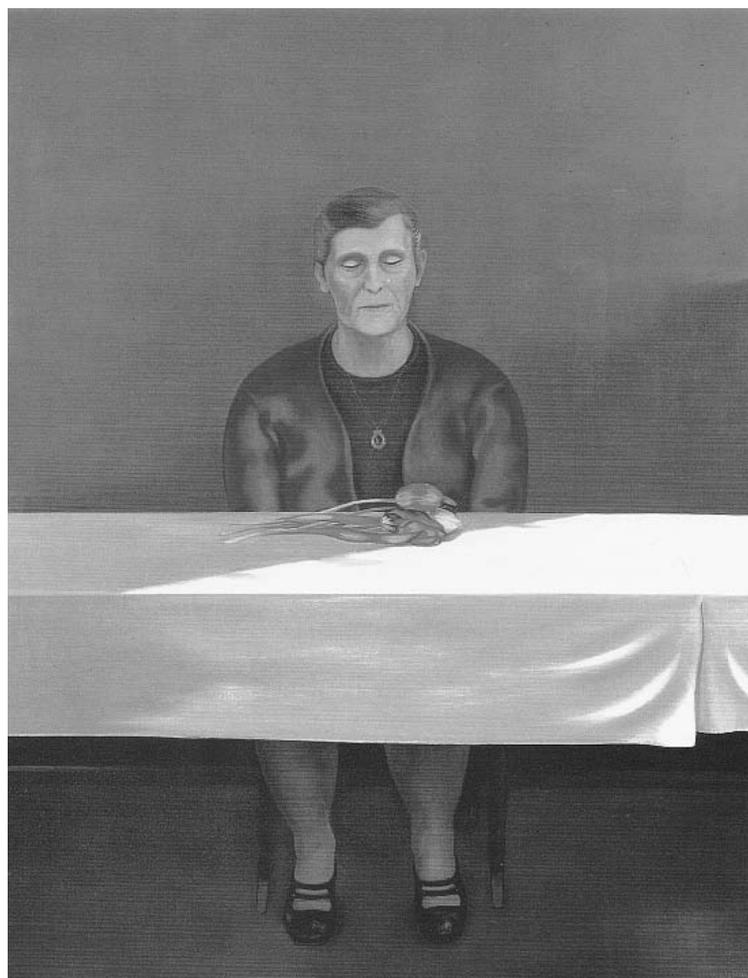


**10.8.** Wolfgang Mattheuer, *A Tree Is Being Pollarded* (1974), oil on canvas. Leipzig, Museum der bildenden Künste.

Mattheuer's strategy was to keep his pictorial legends at a rather abstract level, leaving it to the beholder and critic to specify the message and establish concrete references. The reductive and standardising mode of representation of landscape, humans and objects, in combination with the markedly simplicity of the composition, leaves plenty of opportunities for specification. It is up to the observer to interpret it as a criticism of the 'real existing socialism', and Mattheuer would claim that this perception reveals more about the interpreter's world of experience and ways of thinking than about the painting and its creator.

Mattheuer was a specialist in allegorical representations of social space – the space of individual and collective action. Like Kretzschmar in the fifties, he was one of the initiators of a sub-genre of landscape painting particular to the art scene of the GDR that emerged around 1970 – the so-called ‘landscape of conflict’. As the label indicates, this type of landscape painting focused on tensions and problems in the contemporary environment (in a broad sense); the possibilities and constraints of movement; the costs and benefits of industrialisation, urbanisation and the transformation of the physical, social and psychological *Umwelt*. A concern with the threat to the natural environment caused by heavy industrialisation is evident in his production from the first work that caught public attention owing to its ecological issues – a painting with the title *A Tree is Being Pollarded* (1974), to which we will return below (ill. 10.8). Just before the collapse of the GDR, Mattheuer stated on one occasion that the only remarkable thing to notice about his home town Leipzig was the massive pollution and destruction of nature and landscape, and, as he wrote, a description of the landscape of Leipzig ‘can only be an elegy’.<sup>33</sup> Mattheuer seems in particular to have been aware that a forced quantification of production capacity tends to cause a certain ‘homotopia’ – a standardisation of places regarding not only physical and geographical structures, but mentality and patterns of thought and behaviour as well.<sup>34</sup>

In Mattheuer’s view, the tendency of standardisation was also observable in the automatism of routines, rituals and ceremonies in relation to events in the political and semi-political zones of social life. Such events could be the celebration of ‘model workers’, ‘shock workers’ or ‘heroes of work’ – a system imported from the Soviet Union. A fine and characteristic example of how Mattheuer approached such themes is revealed in his famous painting *The Distinguished* from 1973/74 (ill. 10.9). Mattheuer has not chosen to depict a situation with ‘comradely’ handshaking, applauding colleagues, and smiling representatives of employers, trade unions or party. The distinguished woman is not simply lonely; she is *isolated* as she is sitting there behind the table, the extension of which is indeterminable for the beholder. She is mute and looks down, with no gestures or facial expressions revealing her state of mind. There is no communication, the only sign of mediation and social interaction is the congratulatory bunch of flowers on the table. Both the flowers



**10.9.** Wolfgang Mattheuer, *The Distinguished* (1973/74), oil on plywood. The property of the former county council of Leipzig; now in Staatliche Museen zu Berlin Nationalgalerie.

and the woman are taken out of their 'natural' context and introduced into this alienating arrangement.

The painting, then, functions as both an exclamation and a question mark in relation to the content and purpose of this particular type of social event. It invites the beholder to reflect on 'how developed the character of socialist relations between people really is, apart from Women's Day and May 1st', as the professor of art history at Humboldt University Peter H. Feist said in a comment whose

conclusion runs as follows: 'Mattheuer's laconic painting introduces a moralising, critical dimension into the representation of workers'.<sup>35</sup>

Mattheuer belongs to the so-called *Leipziger Schule* – a name that refers to the major role the artists of the town played. The Leipzig School was one of three centres of the artistic culture of the GDR from the late 1960s (the two other centres were Berlin and Dresden).<sup>36</sup> He did not belong to the strong and influential 'group' of expressionists around the painter Bernhard Heisig, who formed the nucleus of the Leipzig School, but his attachment as a popular teacher to the school's art college secured him a solid position within the artistic community of the town. Like the Expressionists, Mattheuer was under attack for several years from critics who were loyal to the party. To many critics Expressionism continued to be a bourgeois art form which represented capitalism in its imperialist stage; and a debate in 1983/1984 triggered off by the official show called the *IX Art Exhibition* documented that many critics and commentators never reconciled themselves with Expressionism of any sort.<sup>37</sup> However, the opposition Mattheuer met was more directly caused by the above-mentioned ambiguity of his painterly mode of enunciation. However, as already indicated, addressing this issue directly caused some difficulties, and instead some critics focused on his painterly performance and style and claimed it to be too intellectual and speculative, even too strained.<sup>38</sup>

Mattheuer's artistic trajectory has, quite reasonably, been characterised as that of 'a painter who is drawing', that is, a painter who basically works as a black and white artist or illustrator, even as he paints.<sup>39</sup> He was in fact self-taught as a painter, but trained as a printmaker, graphic designer and illustrator. Before his enrolment in the *Wehrmacht* in 1944 he was apprenticed to a lithographer for a period of three years. After the war, he studied graphic techniques for one year at the *Kunstgewerbeschule* in Leipzig until he was admitted to the local college of art and design, *Hochschule für Grafik und Buchkunst* (HGB), where he studied from 1947 to 1951. From 1953 onwards he taught at HGB: his appointment as a professor came in 1965, and from 1968 until his resignation in 1974 he was head of the department of painting and graphic arts. He was awarded a number of official prizes, and in 1978 he was elected to membership of the *Akademie der Künste der DDR*. Retrospective shows of his production were mounted at the principal museums of the GDR, and, as indi-

cated above, Mattheuer was often invited to represent the GDR officially in international exhibitions, for instance *Documenta 6* (1977) and the Venice Biennale (1984).

In other words, Mattheuer was well integrated into the art scene of the GDR; but his position was contested. In particular, the influential dogmatists of the official art ideology insisted that his personal style was a menace to Socialist Realism at a very fundamental level because his representation of so-called 'socialist reality' manifested doubt about the historical truth and legitimacy of communism. Other critics, also influential, saw in his problem-oriented production an innovative elaboration of Socialist Realism that encouraged the beholder to reflect on topical questions. One of Mattheuer's supporters in this context was Peter H. Feist, who is quoted above. In 1974 he coined the concept of 'dialogic pictures' with explicit reference to Mattheuer (specifically the above-mentioned *A Tree is Being Pollarded* as an exemplary case, ill. 10.8). In *Bildende Kunst* Feist published an essay under the headline 'The Artwork as Interlocutor'. Here he rejects a number of stock arguments against Mattheuer's pictures, such as objections to his false proportions and inconsistency as regards spatial relations; but he also admits that Mattheuer's works cause disputes concerning the correct interpretation of their multiple meanings. However, Feist states:

This I do not consider a symptom of an absence of distinctness of expression, but, contrary to that, as an indication of a power of spiritual incentive. Pictures over which one is inclined to quarrel are productive. [And with reference to the above-mentioned lithograph of the tree, the branches of which are being cut down by a man, Feist continues] If such a picture encourages reflections about the relationship between the city and a life closer to nature, about environmental protection, concern for the future, coldness and warmth, educational matters – or about the phrase that 'trees do not grow into the sky' – then it is only of secondary interest to state whether or not the painter had one of these associations in mind. Consequently the picture is not a non-sensual and intellectual rebus. Without complex symbolism, Mattheuer provides us [...] with visual enjoyment and thereby he gives us an impetus to be spiritually productive ourselves.<sup>40</sup>

Feist's comments do not situate the dialogical character of Mattheuer's pictures within the specific historical context of the GDR. His suggestions of possible interpretations are general, and so he

seems to comply with the painter on this issue. Mattheuer more than once complained of commentators who deciphered his imagery in terms that he found too narrow. In this connection he was referring both to commentators from the GDR and critics from the West. In an interview in 1987 (less than a year before he left the SED) he contested the idea that his pictorial parables and narratives were exclusively concerned with GDR reality:

Is it really correct that I only reflect my GDR present? [and that] further associations and provocations are not of my intention but ascribed to my pictures from the outside? I would like to think of myself that I, first of all, reflect my own age, not only the age of the country and the form of the society I live in, but my age in general. [...] On the background of my personal knowledge and experience, I point deliberately at complex relationships and correspondences between the known past and a hoped for future.<sup>41</sup>

This statement may indicate that Mattheuer's primary concern was modernity in general, and more specifically how the dialectic of interpretations of the past and anticipations of future conditions influence the understanding of contemporary agents as regards their roles in the process of modernisation. However, considering the fact that the interview was given at the time he gave up his engagement in the socialist project of the GDR, Mattheuer's comments may well indicate that he wanted to disassociate himself from 'the system' and the official *Staatskultur* of the GDR.

His resignation became public in the late 1980s, but a decade before a feeling of scepticism, disillusion and disappointment was beginning to grow in his mind. In June 1975 he confided to his diary:

When we no longer are told to supply pictures of harmony, then pictures of protest and conflict also become invalid. The intriguing friction between harmony and protest, between Yes and No, encourages a realist art and intensifies a search for the truth.<sup>42</sup>

The point here is that Mattheuer emphasises the impossibility of *realist* representations of the life conditions of the age. To him this was a consequence of a situation in which the appreciation of both history and future goals had become questionable. When artists are no longer 'told' (the term Kretzschmar also used) to produce picture postcards showing socialist idylls, and when history is nothing but an officially sanctioned political construct, and when invocations of future happiness become increasingly hollow and untrustworthy, the



**10.10.** Wolfgang Mattheuer, *The Escape of Sisyphus* (1972), oil on plywood. Dresden, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Galerie Neue Meister.

experience of conflict, disharmony etc. can no longer be expressed explicitly in a convincing artistic form and communicated to an addressee, because who would be the ideal or actual receiver of these messages? Mattheuer would probably answer that hypothetical question by saying that 'the age' is the proper receiver.

It is, however, not that simple, nor that complex, for it remains quite inadequate *not* to see Mattheuer's imagery as a reflection of the specific conditions of intellectual life and artistic production in the GDR. But at the same time, he treats his subject matter in a way that requires a more inclusive framework of interpretation.

The fact is that from the early 1970s in particular three mythological figures came into focus in Mattheuer's production: Sisyphus, Icarus and Prometheus. And with them, the whole hermeneutic tradition associated with the issues of being that the three figures



**10.11.** Wolfgang Mattheuer, *Sisyphus Carves in the Stone* (1974), oil on plywood. Dresden, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Galerie Neue Meister.

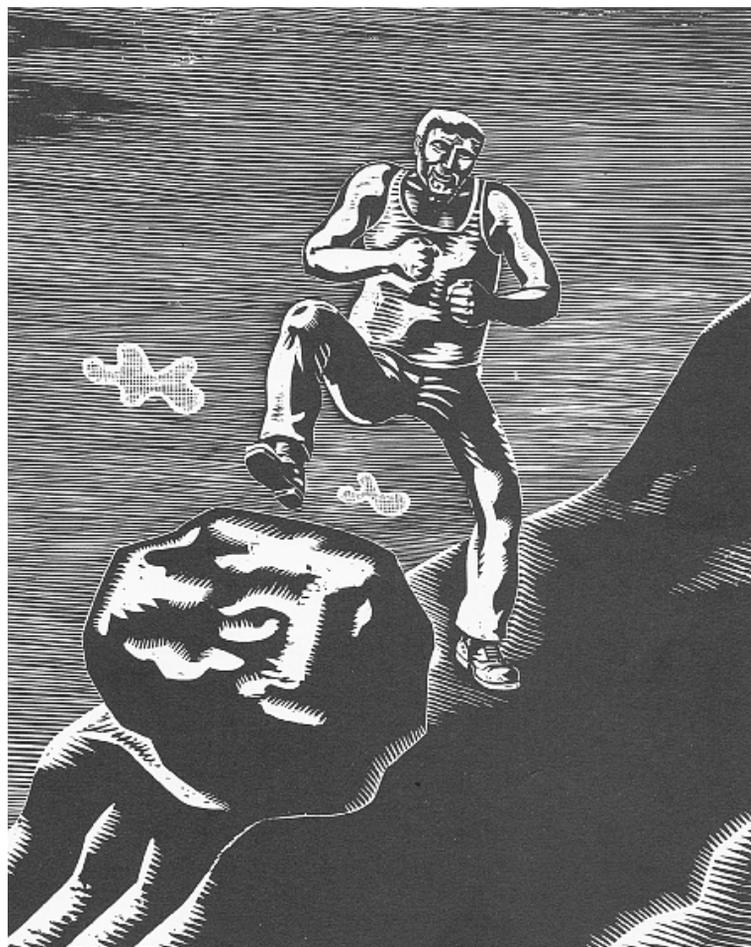
epitomise: the absurdity of human business; the fruitless attempt to escape by means of creativity and inventiveness; and the gift of enlightenment, art and civilisation to humans as a gesture of revolt against the powerful. Prometheus, then, brought to humans the capacity of anticipation (pro-metheus = the forward-looking). With this selection of subject matter, Mattheuer placed himself on safe ground within the classical tradition of European culture. His works may evoke traditional interpretations, but their iconography has an explicit GDR-esque emphasis. The mythological figures have become contemporaries, and they are situated in the environment of the 'real socialism' of the GDR.

To begin with, the treatment of the myth of Sisyphus, for instance, indicates that Mattheuer wanted to challenge the existentialist reading of the myth as presented by Albert Camus. In paintings, linocuts

and woodcuts he depicted a contemporary Sisyphus incarnation that was not prepared to accept the destiny the myth prescribed.. One of the most popular Sisyphus representations from this period is in fact the painting from 1972 entitled *The Escape of Sisyphus* (ill. 10.10), in which Sisyphus simply turns his back on the absurd business of stone rolling and flies away. This particular representation of Sisyphus is now seen and interpreted as one part of a kind of triptych, which in addition consists of *Sisyphus Carves in the Stone* from 1974 (ill. 10.11), and *The Arrogant Sisyphus and His Peers* from 1976 (ill. 10.12). As in many cases with Mattheuer's paintings, various



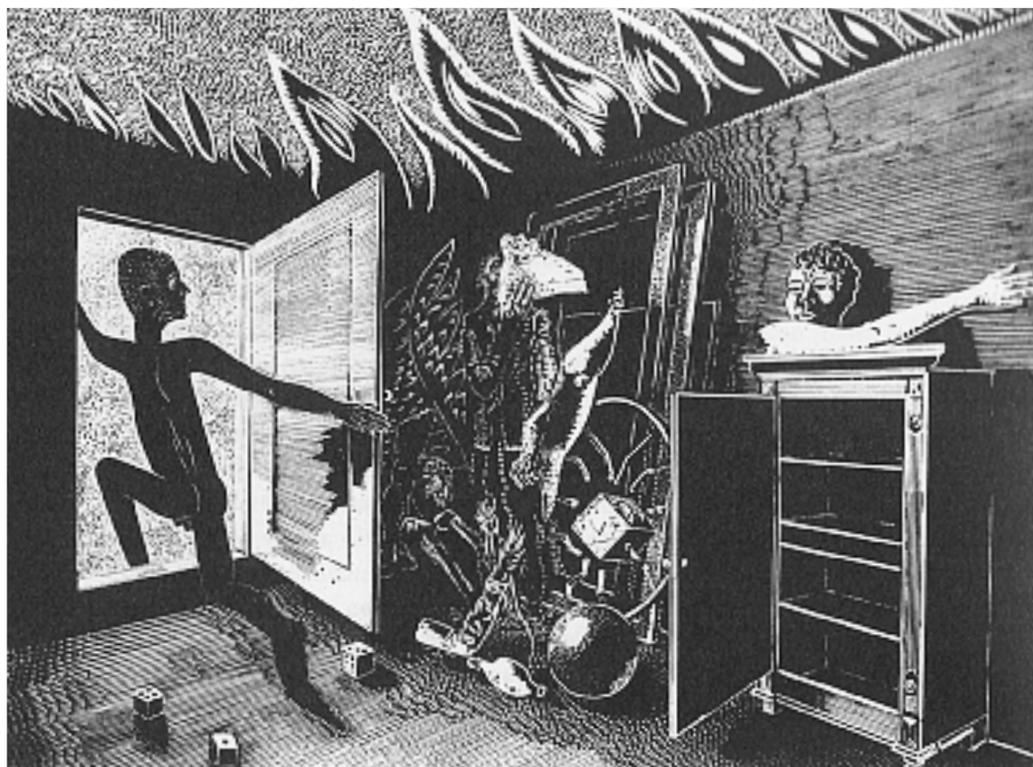
**10.12.** Wolfgang Mattheuer, *The Arrogant Sisyphus and His Peers* (1976), oil on plywood. Dresden, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Galerie Neue Meister.



**10.13.** Wolfgang Mattheuer, *The Arrogant Sisyphus* (1973), woodcut.

aspects of the myth of Sisyphus are the subject matter of series of prints and watercolours, with the woodcut of *The arrogant Sisyphus* (ill. 10.13) predating the painting.

When *The escape of Sisyphus* was exhibited in the German Federal Republic (Hamburg) in 1974, the West-German art historian Peter Sager noted in a review that the subject matter of these early examples of Mattheuer's representation of 'everyday myths' was 'Sisyphus in socialism'.<sup>43</sup> The term 'everyday myths' was coined by the art critic Werner Spies, who published a review in the leading newspaper *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (with special emphasis on Mattheuer) of the Venice Biennale of 1984. In his review Spies substan-

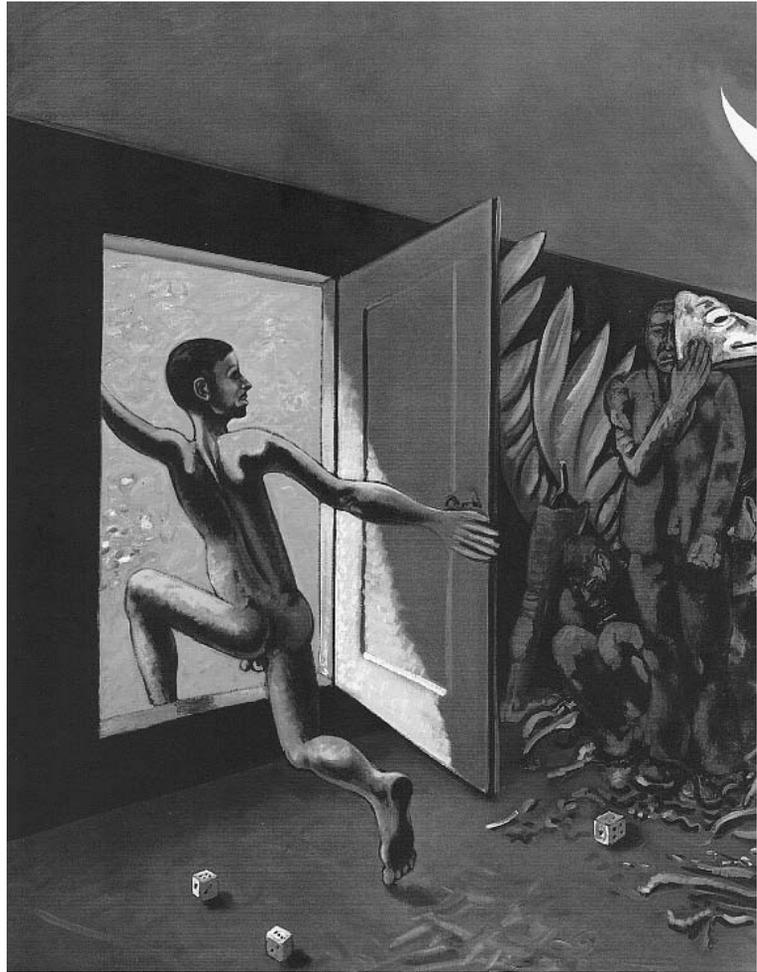


**10.14.** Wolfgang Mattheuer, *Prometheus Leaves the Theatre* (1981), linocut.

tiates the remarks given above on the dialectic relationship of history and utopia, knowledge of the past and confidence in prospects of a coming age. Spies here puts forward the plausible explanation of the tendency to mythologise in the arts of the day: mythology has taken the place of historical interpretation and therefore, at the same time, made it impossible to believe in changes for the better promoted by conscious human action.<sup>44</sup> What is left in this situation is the tragedy of being surrendered to destiny, without the guidance of the past in the form of its legacy or heritage, and without spiritual or political 'lighthouses' to guide your actions. Resignation or escape become adequate solutions.

One example of his Prometheus pictures, and of how the mythological themes were treated later, is a linocut from 1981, *Prometheus Leaves the Theatre* (ill. 10.14) and the oil painting *Leave Your Boxes* from 1985 (ill. 10.15). Prometheus, the prototype of the artist, leaves the burning scene (of life, of art, of society?) with its requisites.<sup>45</sup>

While Mattheuer's implicit criticism of the society of 'real existing socialism' in his early works also expressed his solidarity with 'the system' he was a part of (socialism was his project, too), his application of mythological patterns of interpretation became more and more generalising during the 1980s as he developed a solid scepticism and distrust in the political processes. He no longer felt obliged to think of GDR reality as something that could be influenced by intellectual and artistic effort. In the end 'the system' petrified, and moreover it turned out that this 'system', in spite of its vast body of control and numerous instruments of surveillance, was even in-



**10.15.** Wolfgang Mattheuer, *Leave Your Boxes* (1985), oil on canvas. Hannover, Sprengel-Museum.

capable of responding to dissent. This is why the celebration of Mattheuer's 60th birthday in 1988, irrespective of the fact that he almost simultaneously resigned his membership of the SED, was monumental with huge exhibitions in Berlin and Dresden and the publication of, among other things, the extensive biography by Heinz Schönemann, from which the diary entry quoted above is taken. This marking of Mattheuer's anniversary documents that a number of officials and officers of the art institutions simply ignored the political authorities and did not behave in accordance with unwritten codes of political correctness. A decade earlier such actions of rehabilitation would have been unthinkable.

It may be that in the 1980s Mattheuer wanted to extend his pictorial statements in order to address the problems of 'his age' as such and modernity in general. Nevertheless, this move unmistakably bears the stamp of escapism. It is not difficult to understand Mattheuer's reasons for turning his back on official state culture, but it is also quite clear that he must have felt his resignation distressing and frustrating. As an anti-capitalist, a connoisseur of Marx's writings and a critical socialist, until the mid-1970s Mattheuer was an active supporter of the socialist revolution, and basically he found the firm political leadership of the SED to be historically legitimate and necessary. During the intense debates of 1994 on the legacy and heritage of GDR culture and art, on the dictatorship of the party over cultural life versus artistic autonomy and freedom etc., Mattheuer advanced an interesting, personal point of view. He argues against the common opinion that all art production in the GDR was so-called *Auftragskunst* - commissioned art - the content and form of which was dictated by 'the system'. Another frequent reason for working as an artist within 'the system' was a kind of 'self-commission', as when artists gave themselves 'commissions', namely an assignment to produce art that could contribute actively in the shaping of a new artistic culture.<sup>46</sup> This means, among other things, that the specific context of the GDR art world provided artists like Mattheuer with an intellectual and political framework that made it possible, *and* necessary, to develop new forms of artistic expression.

## CONCLUSION

While Kretzschmar is now being installed as part of artistic heritage and may gain a position within the history of modern art, it is difficult to predict whether the time will come when the political

energy of Mattheuer's imagery will once again appeal to (old and new) art audiences and critics. Mattheuer's work and attitude are in many respects an early incarnation of the figure of *the artist as ethnographer*, which was launched by the American art theorist and critic Hal Foster in the mid-90s to identify a shift of artistic strategy – from symbolic action to real intervention into the cultural circuit and, more generally, into social processes.<sup>47</sup>

It may sound like a paradox when considering Mattheuer's pre-occupation with myth and heavy symbolism, but the point is that his pictures functioned as pictorial reports or narratives of everyday experiences. And they were meant to be read, discussed, contested or affirmed by the audience. It is true that they were presented as an artistic gesture, but they were not intended to leave reality untouched by its beholders as far as the perception of ethical and social standards was concerned. The works were themselves manifestations of activism, and they urged their public not to contemplate them exclusively as art works, but to respond to them rather as mediators of action. This is also to say that the 'purely' artistic quality of Mattheuer's works in a way becomes secondary to their ability to mobilise. While his works on paper reflect his craft and skills as a graphic artist, the quality of his paintings as paintings has frequently been questioned. However difficult it is to define in *general* terms what 'artistic quality' is, many have found it difficult to ignore the fact that many of his paintings reveal not only his self-education, but also a certain reserve concerning his will to utilise the expressive powers of painterly techniques and devices. The quality of Mattheuer's painted oeuvre, then, exceeds what is commonly defined as aesthetic issues, as is the case with much contemporary interventionist art. It is still quite a challenge to define the exact objective or visual qualities, that is to say the *particular* qualities, that turn Marcel Duchamp's famous *Urinal* into a piece of art; and the same difficulty arises if we are asked to explain what *particular* skills and photo-technical competences are involved in transforming the numerous snapshots of Cindy Sherman in various disguises into an imagery of artistic interest. The list of embarrassing questions of this kind is endless, and the conclusion would presumably be that the real meaning of Duchamp's so-called Ready Mades and Sherman's self-portraits is of a sociological nature (as regards the institution of art and the position of (for instance) minorities within mainstream cultures, respectively). The point is that art critics and historians

continue to return to agents like Duchamp and Sherman, not because of the quality of their art, but because of their interventions and provocations; while Mattheuer has so far been ignored due to his status as an artist of the former GDR.

This leaves us with a final question, which was also asked at the beginning of this essay. Now this question may be put more directly: do the trajectories of the two artists who have been focused on here allow us to conclude that Kretzschmar is *heritage* (and may even represent an artistic legacy), while Mattheuer is *history*? This would imply that Kretzschmar's work has an artistic message which is of relevance today. His paintings are becoming *monuments*. Unlike Kretzschmar's art, Mattheuer's art is an anachronism, and his works are only of interest as *documents*. Furthermore, this would mean that in Kretzschmar's case the different contexts are ignored, since 'expressive objectivity', the label attached to him recently, is an *a priori* category almost like the categories of 'linear' versus 'painterly' (Wölfflin) or 'haptic' versus 'optic' (Riegl). Mattheuer's 'dialogic pictures', on the other hand, seem to be so determined by time and place that the context tends to be seen as even more productive than the artist, which means that the context is inescapable.

The difference, then, is quite simply that the works of Kretzschmar may be perceived directly, while Mattheuer's works need explanation and can only be approached indirectly. In Kretzschmar's case, we do not even need to be aware of the titles of individual works; while the titles of Mattheuer's works function as a key in our interpretation. Kretzschmar is uncompromised, just as he is innocent regarding the disasters of the 20th century. In contradistinction to this, Mattheuer is both compromised and 'guilty'. In his address to the SED in connection with his resignation in 1988, he wrote:

What is to be done? I feel that, on the whole, I have a share in responsibility, and I have no intention of denying my share in responsibility or of delegating it 'upwards' or to downgrade myself to a fellow traveller. I can't shout with joy, and I can't say 'Yes' when sorrow and resignation, want and decay, corruption and cynicism, when a thoughtless, exploiting industrialism in such a greedy way leaves its fatal mark on life and when any change now or in the future is systematically precluded.<sup>48</sup>

Mattheuer's self-portrait of 1986, *Out there; in there; and I* (ill. 10.16), is a rare example of how he perceives himself situated at work in the studio. The artist is present in the mirror, which also reflects synec-



**10.16.** Wolfgang Mattheuer, *Out there; in there; and I* (1986), oil on canvas. Staatliche Museen zu Berlin. Nationalgalerie.

dochically his production: both the series of small works on paper and a large oil version from his Prometheus series can be seen. Through the open window to the left we glimpse the so-called University Church of Leipzig, which became a symbol of the GDR city's resurrection in 1989. A chimney is reflected in the window pane, adding (also by means of a synecdoche) to the idea of the artist's physical placement in the city environment of Leipzig. He is placed between past and present, and the mirror, which may be

grasped as a reference to the so-called 'mirror doctrine' of Socialist Realism, represents his artistic universe with the popular, didactic and highly communicative print works on the one hand and a painting containing a monumental and mythical interpretation of human sentiment and behaviour on the other hand. The mirror replaces a stretched canvas, or the rectangular shape on the easel is in fact a completed painting. In any case, the mirror/painting puts Mattheuer in a relationship with the mythological figure of Prometheus; but while the small prints may refer to education, enlightenment and symbolical fire or light, the painting refers to annihilation, the destructive power of real, physical fire in so far as the lighting fire is not controlled and commanded properly.

As so often with Mattheuer, as an existential statement this painting is characterised by an ambivalence which is intensified by his use of mythological motives and figures. The above-mentioned triptych shows various ways of reacting to the meaningless activity of man: the individual escape, the collective self-confidence or overweening pride of Sisyphus and his peers, and the astute artistic initiative to shape and reshape, and thereby transform, the burden to be carried by humans.

The day in 2004 when Mattheuer passed away, a student organisation in Leipzig published a poster and established a website with a memorial. The eye-catcher is a reproduction of the central piece of the Sisyphus triptych, *Sisyphus Carves in the Stone* (ill. 10.11). The text states that Mattheuer never lost his capacity to hold and carve the stone – as a socially engaged and humanistic artist, one may presume. It is not the sceptical or defeatist Mattheuer of 1986 but the still confident artist of the early 1970s that is featured in the poster. At that time, carving out a fist in stone was both an embellishment of the stone (the human effort) and an uncovering of the 'content' of the stone (the meaning of that human effort). The fist belongs to the conventional iconography of determined, revolutionary action – an iconography that today apparently seems to be part of the past.

## NOTES

- 1 Kretzschmar's notorious and often quoted statement was advanced during an academic conference on Socialist Realism. Quoted from the journal *Bildende Kunst*, 1976-77, p. 364.
- 2 Cf. Carl J. Friedrich and Zbigniew K. Brzezinski, *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy* (Harvard University Press; Boston, 1956).
- 3 See Günter Feist, 'Allmacht und Ohnmacht. Historische Aspekte der Führungsrolle der SED', in Günter Feist, Eckhard Gillen and Beatrice Vierneissel (eds.), *Kunstdokumentation SBZ/DDR 1945-1990* (DuMont; Köln, 1996), pp. 42-61.
- 4 See, first of all, the generous edition by Feist, Gillen and Vierneissel mentioned in the previous note; see also Monika Flacke (ed.), *Auftrag: Kunst 1949-1990. Bildende Künstler in der DDR zwischen Ästhetik und Politik* (exh. cat.), Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin, 1995; Günter Feist (with Eckhart Gillen), *Kunstkombinat DDR: Daten und Zitate zur Kunst und Kunstpolitik der DDR 1945-1990* (Dirk Nishen; Berlin, 1990); Werner Schmidt (ed.), *Ausgebürgert: Künstler aus der DDR und aus dem Sowjetischen Sektor Berlins 1949-1989* (Argon; Berlin, 1990); and Eckhart Gillen (ed.), *Deutschlandsbilder: Kunst aus einem geteilten Land* (exh. cat.), Martin-Gropius-Bau, Berlin, 1997.
- 5 For instance, in his survey Lothar Lang uses the headlines as titles of chapters: 'Die Sechziger Jahre: Ankunft im Alltag' and 'Die Siebziger Jahre: Weite und Vielfalt'. Lothar Lang, *Malerei und Graphik in der DDR* (Edition Leipzig; Leipzig, 1980), pp. 62 and 99.
- 6 See, especially, the many schematic and systematic distinctions in David Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (Cambridge University Press; Cambridge, 1998 [1996]), pp. 105ff.
- 7 *The Past is a Foreign Country* is the title of an earlier work by Lowenthal, published in 1985 by Cambridge University Press.
- 8 See, as an example of present positions, Chris Rojek and John Urry (eds.), *Touring Cultures. Transformations of Travel and Theory* (Routledge; London, 1997), especially the editors' introduction (pp. 1-23), and as an example of an alternative to Lowenthal, the article by Sharon Macdonald, 'A People's Story: Heritage, Identity and Authenticity' (pp. 155-75).
- 9 Bernd Lindner has studied intensively the GDR art public of the last two decades. An overview of his empirical research is given in his 'Kunstrezeption in der DDR', in Feist et al., *Kunstdokumentation*, pp. 62-93.
- 10 One piece of curious information should be mentioned here, since it points at one aspect of the perverse memory politics in (and of) the GDR, which is, at the same time, a politics of oblivion. The original title of Kretzschmar's painting was *A View of Stalinstadt*. The locality which was later named Eisenhüttenstadt was originally the residential area established in 1950 in connection with the opening of the smelting works *Eisenhüttenkombinat Ost* near the river Oder and the Polish border. Soon after, the new township achieved independence, and in 1953 it was planned to celebrate this independence by baptising it Karl-Marx-Stadt to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the death of the great German philosopher. But then Josef Stalin passed away, and 'the first socialist city on German ground' was named Stalinstadt in order to commemorate the Soviet idol, while the city of Chemnitz was renamed after Marx the same year. In the process of de-stalinisation after 1956, and as a consequence of a revision of the local municipal structure, a number of towns and villages were united in 1961 under the name of Eisenhüttenstadt. And the art museum of Frankfurt (an der Oder) had to revise its catalogues, accession register, visitors guides, labels and other information material in order to keep up with the current state of the political and symbolic economy of nomenclature.
- 11 Ullrich Kuhirt, *Kunst in der DDR 1945-1959* (Seemann; Leipzig, 1982), 2nd edn., p. 151.
- 12 Helga Möbius, 'Überlegungen zur Ikonographie der DDR-Kunst', in *Weggefährten/Zeitgenossen: Bildende Kunst aus drei Jahrzehnten* (exh. cat.), Altes Museum, Berlin, 1979, p. 369.
- 13 Lang, *Malerei und Graphik*, p. 45.
- 14 Karin Thomas, *Zweimal deutsche Kunst nach 1945. 40 Jahre Nähe und Ferne* (DuMont; Cologne, 1985), p. 60.
- 15 *Lexikon der Kunst* (Seemann; Leipzig, 1976), vol. 2, p. 724.
- 16 Dieter Schmidt, *Bernhard Kretzschmar* (Verlag der Kunst; Dresden, 1970), pp. 8-9 (Schmidt's publication is a tiny brochure); Fritz Löffler, *Bernhard Kretzschmar* (Verlag der Kunst; Dresden, 1985), p. 66.
- 17 Bernhard Kretzschmar, 'Versuch, mich im rechten Winkel zu Spiegeln', *Bildende Kunst*, 1956, p. 135.
- 18 The most sensitive discussion of the politicised artistic life in the Weimar Republic is the unsurpassed exhibition catalogue, *Wem gehört die Welt, Kunst und Gesellschaft in der? Weimarer Republik*, Neue Gesellschaft für bildende Kunst, Berlin, 1977, which covers all the groups and trends mentioned here.
- 19 See for instance the articles by Diether Schmidt and Lothar Fischer, in *Die Dresdner Kunstszene 1913-1933* (exh. cat.), Galerie Remmert und Barth, Düsseldorf, 1987, pp. 12f. and 96f.
- 20 Quoted from Löffler, *Bernhard Kretzschmar*, p. 36.
- 21 Löffler, *Bernhard Kretzschmar*, pp. 68-69.
- 22 See Peter-Klaus Schuster, *Die 'Kunststadt' München 1937: Nationalsozialismus und 'Entartete Kunst'* (Prestel; Munich, 1987), p. 103; and further, Robert Brady, 'The National Chamber of Culture (Reichskulturkammer)', in Taylor, Brandon and Willfried van der Will (eds.), *The Nazification of Art* (The Winchester Press; Winchester, 1990), pp. 80-88.
- 23 Feist et al., *Kunstdokumentation*, e.g. pp. 253-254.

- 24 Reinhard Merker, *Die Bildenden Künste im Nationalsozialismus* (DuMont; Köln, 1983).
- 25 Peter Guth, *Wände der Verheißung – Zur Geschichte der architekturbezogene Kunst in der DDR* (Thom; Leipzig, 1995). Only one scholarly publication mentions Kretzschmar's participation in the 'mural action': Martin Schönfeld, 'Wandbildaktion', in Flacke, *Auftrag: Kunst 1949-1990*, p. 34.
- 26 See for instance the exhibition catalogue, *Verfremt – Vergessen – Wiederddeckt: Kunst expressiver Gegenständlichkeit aus der Sammlung Gerhard Schneider*, eds. Rolf Jessewitsch and Gerhard Schneider (Kunstverein Südsauerland, Olpe et al., 1999). An exhibition toured under this title in 1999-2001 in Southern Germany.
- 26<sup>27</sup> *Verfremt – Vergessen – Wiederddeckt*, pp. 18-20.
- 27
- 28 Wolfgang Hütt, 'Aufbruch und Selbstbesinnung', in *Weggeführten/Zeitgenossen*, p. 42.
- 29 Kretzschmar, 'Winkel zu Spiegeln', p. 139.
- 29
- 30 See the concise account in Rüdiger Thomas, 'Staatskultur und Kulturation', in Feist et al., *Kunstdokumentation*, pp. 16-41.
- 31 Peter Dittmar in *Die Welt*, January 25, 1979, in a review of an exhibition in Hamburg, here quoted from the informative exhibition catalogue, *Wolfgang Mattheuer: Malerei, Grafik, Zeichnung, Plastik*, Berlin Nationalgalerie, 1988, p. 49. This exhibition was a celebration of the 60th birthday of the painter.
- 32 Lang, *Malerei und Graphik*, p. 126.
- 33 Wolfgang Mattheuer, 'Leipziger Landschaft', in Eckhart Gillen and Rainer Haarmann (eds.), *Kunst in der DDR* (Kiepenheuer & Witsch; Berlin, 1990), p. 403.
- 34 The term 'homotopia' was introduced by the British sociologist John Bale in order to characterise a particular 'sense of place', characterised by mental and behavioural indifference and irresponsibility, corresponding to the monotony of post-war suburbia and high-rise building areas, see for instance John Bale, *Sport, Place and the City* (The Blackburn Press; Caldwell, NJ, 1993), pp. 64f.
- 35 Peter H. Feist, 'Gegenwärtige Entwicklungsprobleme der sozialistischen Kunst', vol. 3, *Kunsterziehung*, 1975/11, p. 4.
- 36 Concise presentations of the *Leipziger Schule* are found in Lang, *Malerei und Graphik*, pp. 103-45; and Henry Schumann, 'Leitbild Leipzig – Beiträge zur Geschichte der Malerei in Leipzig von 1945 bis Ende der achtziger Jahre', in Feist et al., *Kunstdokumentation*, pp. 480-557.
- 37 The debate was for largely provoked by an article by Ingrid Schulze, 'Verpflichtung der Gesellschaft und dem Erbe gegenüber', *Bildende Kunst*, 1983, pp. 15-19. Here Schulze tries to prove the 'principal' fascistoid character of Expressionism, and she argues that this art form never will be a part of the socialist heritage. Consequently, it cannot serve as an inspiration, either.
- 38 E.g. Ulrich Kuhirt, 'Ein "ungewöhnlicher Realismus"? Gedanken zum Werk Wolfgang Mattheuer', *Bildende Kunst*, 1975. Kuhirt's comment was aroused by an article by J. Uhlitzsch in the catalogue of the Mattheuer exhibition at *Galerie Neue Meister* in Dresden, 1974. The title of Uhlitzsch's text was 'Der ungewöhnliche Realismus der Wolfgang Mattheuers'. The Dresden exhibition is of particular interest since Mattheuer's paintings and works on paper were juxtaposed with works by Caspar David Friedrich, hence the exhibition contributed considerably to the diffusion of an idea of a spiritual kinship between the two German artists.
- 39 Cf. Rainer Haarmann, 'Wolfgang Mattheuer', in Gillen and Haarmann, *Kunst in der DDR*, p. 375.
- 40 Peter H. Feist, 'Das Kunstwerk als Gesprächspartner', *Bildende Kunst*, 1971. While Feist preferred the label 'dialog pictures', other critics and historians called this type of imagery 'conflict pictures', as did Mattheuer himself occasionally, as cited below.
- 41 Haarmann, 'Wolfgang Mattheuer', p. 375.
- 42 Quoted from Heinz Schönemann, *Wolfgang Mattheuer* (Seemann; Leipzig, 1988), p. 280.
- 43 Peter Sager, 'Bei Wolfgang Mattheuer. Sisyphos im Sozialismus', *Westermanns Monatshefte*, vol. 1, 1975. Quoted from Schönemann, *Wolfgang Mattheuer*, p. 309.
- 44 Werner Spies, 'Die Sehnsucht nach der Geschichte – Kunst und Klitterung auf der Biennale in Venedig', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 1 July 1984. Quoted from Schönemann, *Wolfgang Mattheuer*, p. 322.
- 45 See Rüdiger Thomas, 'Staatskultur und Kulturation', p. 38.
- 46 See Wolfgang Mattheuer, 'Das Thema DDR Kunst', *Freie Presse Chemnitz*, 28 January 1994. See also the article by Bärbel Mann and Jörn Schütrumpf, 'Galerie im Palast der Republik', in Flacke, *Auftrag: Kunst 1949-1990*. Mattheuer's statements are cited on p. 244.
- 47 Cf. Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real* (MIT Press; Cambridge (Mass.), 1996), especially chapter 6: 'The Artist as Ethnographer', pp. 171-203.
- 48 From Mattheuer's letter to the SED office in Leipzig, October 1988. Published in *Die Welt*, 8 January 1990. Quoted from Feist and Gillen, *Kunstkombinat DDR*, p. 188.

## INTRODUCTION

In the wake of World War I emerged a phenomenon we today consider under the term 'totalitarianism'. The political regimes of Mussolini, Hitler and Stalin were erected on the basis of the experiences of war, defeat, and political and economic crisis. The trauma of war partly caused a strong rejection of individualism, liberalism and democracy. This development was not limited to the political field but afflicted the art world too. During the Weimar Republic in the first half of the 1920s, artists had already reacted to the moments of crisis of the political and economic system. Rebellious against the expressionist movement which was now becoming popular, being collected and entering the German museums, first Dada in Berlin and then the strong movement of *Neue Sachlichkeit* meant a shift in the arts. The Dadaists were full of polemical aggression against the new and often ridiculed democracy. On the contrary, the new objectivity was more or less associated with the new state. Nevertheless, a number of protagonists became relevant figures during the first years of the Third Reich - for example Alexander Kanoldt, Franz Lenk, Franz Radziwill and Georg Schrimpf. Even the so-called left-wing protagonists of *Neue Sachlichkeit* such as Rudolf Schlichter had the desire to participate in the newly forming cultural landscape in Germany after 1933. Although one cannot speak of a general swing of *Neue Sachlichkeit* Painters to National Socialism, it is possible to find constitutive factors for *Neue Sachlichkeit* that make clear a potential anti-democratic disposition.

The following essay is an attempt to outline the theoretical and artistic expression of Max Beckmann's view of the socio-political position of the artist, as revealed in his statements, writings and painting in the later phase of the Weimar Republic and at the beginning of the Third Reich until the first year of his exile in Amsterdam.<sup>1</sup> It will seek to expand on the thesis that Beckmann, reacting against a historicist relativisation of values after the end of World War I, for a short time became part of the so-called antidemocratic 'Conservative Revolution' and came to believe that the modern artist should usurp the role of lawgiver. However, with the onset of the Third Reich he abandoned this position. From then on he elaborated on his provocative, aesthetically based claim to an artistic autonomy operating beyond the purview of political developments. As a result, his painting began to take on the onerous residual function of articulat-

ing the creative artist's resistance to totalitarianism, and thus sheds light on the problem of the relationship between modernism and totalitarianism from the periphery.

### TOWARDS AN ARISTOCRATIC BOLSHEVISM

On 12 March 1926, Beckmann wrote a letter to the well-known writer on art Wilhelm Hausenstein, in which he made clear his increasing alienation from the then fashionable phenomenon of *Neue Sachlichkeit*. Beckmann, who at that time was living and teaching in Frankfurt, depreciates Franz Roh and his book on Post-Expressionism, in which he, Beckmann, had been characterised as an undoubtedly remarkable but peripheral figure.<sup>2</sup> Concerned for his reputation, Beckmann reacted hypersensitively to this slight and accused Roh of 'conspicuously lacking a sense of quality in regard to pictures and artists alike'.<sup>3</sup> In addition, Beckmann criticised the increasing tendency of *Neue Sachlichkeit* to descend into banality, as well as its embrace of the ideological perspective of the mass movement, which was something completely alien to his own strongly felt individualism. At the same time emerges the painter's vigorously self-confident identification with the new 'Objective Realism', which he even began to describe as his 'life's work'. And indeed Beckmann featured in an exhibition under this banner organised by Gustav Friedrich Hartlaub in Mannheim, where he was represented as one of the main protagonists of the Objective Realist 'style'.<sup>4</sup>

The aversion to *Neue Sachlichkeit* mentioned above also surfaces in an unpublished note by Beckmann that may be dated to some time between 1925 and 1930:

(1.) The sport idiot is the very soul of collectivised man. (2.) The arrogance of collectivised man has resulted in his submersion in the mass and the liquidation of the individual. (3.) Man has forgotten that he himself is God; therefore he worships football and the cinema. (4.) The reaction to the incapacity of the soul has produced a collective consciousness and an apathy represented by an obsession with sport. Metaphysical restlessness is present only to a very small degree. (5.) We lack a new law: that is, the new faith, that we are ourselves the Godhead and carry the responsibility in ourselves for life and death; and that every form of nationalism is a cretinous absurdity and only distracts from the business of ensuring the immortality of mankind. (6.) It is necessary to create a new church whose task would be to administer the transcendental politics of mankind. (7.) Every minute is wasted that fails to recognise that man-

kind is itself God; that it has, or can have, responsibility for, and decisions over, life and death. (8.) Only by means of this faith can a world come into being that pushes aside the sport obsession and creates the powerbase whereby mankind's twenty or so humane individuals to compel human beings to unite.<sup>5</sup>

What underlies this outburst is the attempt to restore the dignity of the individual and to distinguish him from modern mass society. The triumph of the latter was indeed, as Detlev Peukert rightly stresses, an historic achievement of *Neue Sachlichkeit's* *Weltanschauung*.<sup>6</sup> Beckmann distances himself from this development. At the same time his verdict on the matter is relevant to the 'model solution' then under discussion for what was generally agreed to be a crisis in, and a relativisation of, values after World War I, which was reflected in *Neue Sachlichkeit's* painting.<sup>7</sup> Max Horkheimer, the Frankfurt sociologist and philosopher, diagnosed the problem as follows in one of his Frankfurt lectures of 1926:

If we look at America, we find that feelings of futility among the masses there are not so much deliberately assuaged by the leaders of society through the hypertrophy of sport, bad films and Christian Science alone, but just as much through holding out the possibility of everyone acquiring a Ford motor-car. In the old world, the triumphal procession of the diversionary tactics of the ruling powers was rendered ineffective, perhaps less through intellectual resistance than through economic difficulties. All the same, the cultural, and in particular the philosophical, situation of recent years (or even recent decades) is best summed up in the image of a man who is constantly seeking refuge from the troubles that afflict him, but is driven out of his refuge as soon as he finds it; then he seeks another refuge, but is compelled to leave this one too, when it too proves to be anything but safe.<sup>8</sup>

Horkheimer is here referring specifically to the compensation for a general loss of values by means of the consumer society, cinema, the purchase of motor-cars or sport. Beckmann refused to accept this specific solution to overcome the questionable nature, even the futility of existence. On the contrary, he engages critically with Americanism and the materialistic assumptions of the age. Beckmann's painting also offers evidence of his general attitude. In this respect, the two large-format paintings, *Stunt Fliers* and *Football Players* (*Luftakrobaten* and *Fußballspieler*)<sup>9</sup> of 1928 and 1929 may be seen as critical statements on the triumph in Europe of the American way of life and its economic system, as also on the 'hypertrophy' of sport.<sup>10</sup>

The contemporary reception of the pictures saw in *Stunt Fliers* a 'symbol of the existential struggle, [whose protagonist] is prepared to confront the abyss'.<sup>11</sup> In this way the struggle between American civilisation and European culture is placed in the context of the relativisation of values, in opposition to which Beckmann proposed an anti-materialistic artistic utopia.

Subsequently Beckmann tried to emancipate himself from the claustrophobic visions of fear and futility that he painted during the first years of the Weimar Republic. It seems he dared to make the leap from the corrupt age in which he lived to the eternal verities of myth, whose function was to interpret the present. The famous essay of 'Der Künstler im Staat' ('The Artist and the State') of 1927 was an early indication of his change in attitude, at least at the level of theory. The text was published in July 1927 in the series *Der Europäer* in the *Europäische Revue – Monatshefte zur Pflege der geistigen Einheit Europas*.<sup>12</sup> In this article Beckmann postulated an active role for the artist, who was now consciously to be involved in shaping the transcendental idea on behalf of the polity. His aim, reflected in the content of his work, should be to bring about the 'deification of man'. Beckmann now explicitly engaged with the problems of his age, as epitomised by *Neue Sachlichkeit*, and specifically with the problem of the atrophy of values; through this engagement, he sought to liberate himself from such an atrophy by means of a conscious act of the will:

Chastened and devoid of all faith, matured into its adulthood, humanity stares into the empty void, not yet aware of its strength. [...] Let us realize that we were always fighting only against ourselves. We no longer have anything to expect from without, only still from within. For we are God – [...] What we're missing is a new cultural center, a new center of faith. [...] What we are after is an elegant mastery of the metaphysical, so as to live a stalwart, clear, disciplined romanticism of our own profoundly unreal existence.<sup>13</sup>

With this somewhat ill-defined position, lying somewhere between Nietzschean nihilism and metaphysical voluntarism, Beckmann had dared to open a narrow front of brinkmanship on the basis of a romantic aesthetic. Thereby he instinctively grasped that the solution to the problem would be rooted in metaphysics, even if classical metaphysics no longer existed. The sociologist Karl Mannheim observed in 1924 that historicism, the relativisation of values, had become the basis of intellectual thought in place of metaphysics.

He had drawn from this the necessary inference, even if it was one that was hard to implement in practice, that all standards for judging the world had themselves to be dynamic, yet should be so devised that they did not end in relativism. As far as practical living was concerned, Mannheim proclaimed: 'Only a way of thinking, only a philosophy, which can give a concrete answer to the question 'What ought we to do?' can claim to have overcome relativism.'<sup>14</sup>

It was into this vacuum postulated by Mannheim, into this open question, that Beckmann aggressively advanced. He delegated the answer to an elite group of individuals. At the point where painting, heavily staged manifestoes and the current debate on contemporary issues intersected, his independence from the unsettling tendencies of the Weimar epoch become evident. In this situation the artist, intellectually and artistically, tried to take refuge in the future. He expressed a desire to 'bring the eternally fluctuating generations of man, which we embody, to a final standstill, allowing for a free state of being.'<sup>15</sup> At this time Beckmann wanted to realise in art the transcendental idea of man as an autonomous law-giving being, the consequence of which should indeed be that life should imitate art. Underpinning his standpoint with fin-de-siècle aestheticism, he attempted to win back autonomy and sovereignty for the individual, thus overcoming the prevailing relativisation of values.

There is hardly a single *Neue Sachlichkeit* painter at this time who so self-confidently and decisively expressed his standpoint as Beckmann. The much discussed self-portraits of Georg Grosz, Georg Scholz or Otto Dix of the second half of the 1920s, which are relevant here, and are frequently compared to the *Self-Portrait in Tuxedo* (*Selbstbildnis mit Smoking*, 1927; ill. 11.1), undermine the otherwise evident self-confidence of their creators with sceptical, melancholic or self-ironising reserve. Beckmann's self-portrait, 'the epiphany of an autonomous genius' (Hans Belting)<sup>16</sup> and a perfect evocation of an alienated dandy<sup>17</sup>, remains a one-off in the German art of the first half of the 20th century on account of the artist's extraordinarily self-confident projection of himself. It is a picture that can even be viewed as intimidating, displaying its creator as a man beyond fear, or at least one who has learned to conceal his fear perfectly. The painter looks out at us from the picture with cool indifference, holding a cigarette loosely in his left hand and supporting his right hand on his hip. Motionless, he looms impressively before the viewer. This is a Beckmann that one can no longer evade or ignore, even if one



**11.1.** Max Beckmann, *Self-Portrait in Tuxedo* (1927), oil on canvas. Cambridge (Mass.), Fogg Art Museum.

wished to. Instead the observer is inexorably drawn into a sort of complicity with the artist.

Beckmann's self-portrait and the verbal statements analogous to it in the text of the recently written 'Der Künstler im Staat' were mostly received with incomprehension. A contemporary critic, writing in the *Berliner Tageblatt* of 3 May 1928 on the occasion of an exhibition, which was held in the Berlin Secession, wrote in the following terms:

An imperial mask, knitted brows, the look of one accustomed to command, every inch the great man: these are the faces that must disappear from the world, if mankind is to be restored to its rightful place.<sup>18</sup>

It was ironic that this remark was aimed at Beckmann, who really was concerned with the restoration of mankind, and indeed wanted to 'bring about the union of humanity'. Nevertheless, this characterisation of the picture, which was acquired the same year by the Berlin National Gallery, did contain a germ of truth. Karl Anton Prinz Rohan, the editor of the *Europäische Revue*, was to point this out in his post-World War II memoir entitled *Heimat Europa*, where he describes Beckmann as being like a 'titanic animal trainer', who would have 'tamed the masses' had he become a politician.<sup>19</sup>

Insofar as Beckmann favoured the option of 'becoming a politician', he undoubtedly appears as such in his *Self-Portrait in Tuxedo*. The evident affinity between the picture and the text of 'Der Künstler im Staat' has rightly been stressed. However what has for long been overlooked is that Beckmann's pictorial formulation has an astonishingly similar forebear: in 1924, in the last phase of his career, Lovis Corinth painted a picture of the sick Reichs President Friedrich Ebert, then in office (as he remained until his death in 1925) (ill. 11.2). It shows the 'first man of the German Empire', as he was dubbed, dressed in a suit with a white shirt and bow tie. Ebert stands close to the door of his residence, a three-quarter figure portrayed frontally; Beckmann has taken over both the disposition of the figure and the planimetric organisation of the Corinth picture, also employing a similar format. It is almost as if he placed himself in the position of the first man of the Weimar Republic. Shortly after its completion, Corinth's impressive and moving portrait had been shown in Frankfurt at the Kunstverein in 1926 and in the Department for Contemporary Art of the National Gallery situated in the former palace of the Crown Prince, where it had soon aroused heated debate. Ebert himself, who at the time was the subject of defamatory press reports accompanying the circulation of unauthorised pictures that showed him in bathing costume, and also had to endure the recurrent accusation of having betrayed his country, eventually asked Corinth to remove the portrait from public view.<sup>20</sup>

The form chosen by Beckmann, and no less the implications of his painting and his writings, now appear explosive. As a solution to



**11.2.** Lovis Corinth, *Portrait of Reichspräsident Friedrich Ebert* (1924), oil on canvas. Basle, Kunstmuseum.

the problem to which he had drawn attention, namely the lack of a focus for faith in society, he proposed an elite caste of priests, in whose ranks he self-confidently placed himself, even arrogating to himself the position of leader:

The priests of this new cultural center must be dressed in dark suits or in tuxedos on state occasions, unless we succeed in developing a more precise and elegant piece of manly attire. Furthermore workers should likewise appear in tuxedo or tails. By which I mean to imply that we are seeking a kind of aristocratic Bolshevism; a social equalization, the fundamental principle of which, however, is not the satisfaction of pure materialism, but rather the conscious and organized drive to become God ourselves. [...] What we want today is to believe in ourselves.<sup>21</sup>

This is Beckmann's solution for a situation in which 'nothing, no knowledge, no values, no reality can prevail, when everything degenerates into endless flux', as Horkheimer expressed it in 1926.<sup>22</sup> But Beckmann's personal statements laid down no clear political concept - his remarks are much too contradictory for that. His ideas are suffused with a diffuse socialist utopianism and right-wing or liberal aristocratic thought, as well as ideas taken from Schleiermacher, Schlegel, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche - and more importantly from contemporary thinkers like Max Scheler.<sup>23</sup> Beckmann's fragmented system of ideas thus oscillates between the poles of emancipatory democracy and aristocratic elitism. His concept of 'aristocratic Bolshevism' reflected the contemporary reception of Bolshevism in Russia, as filtered through the German right. The elitist, aristocratic character of Russian Bolshevism was recognised in rightist circles of the Weimar Republic and was the subject of much debate.<sup>24</sup> However it would be false to locate the painter, at this time, in the camp of the right-wing or revolutionary conservatives. For example, around 1927 Beckmann commemorated the brutal and unatoned murder of Karl Liebknecht in a small-format picture which shows the dead man in his coffin displayed at the Hotel Eden.

At the same time it is important to remember that Beckmann's essay *Der Künstler im Staat* appeared in the *Europäische Revue*, which is described by Armin Mohler in his handbook as the periodical of the conservative revolution, or more precisely as the leading periodical of the young conservatives. According to Mohler, with the *Europäische Revue* Rohan succeeded in creating 'a glittering social resonance for a specific form of conservatism.'<sup>25</sup> Beckmann had loose contacts to these right-wing circles in the second half of the 1920s. However, in contrast to the proponents of a conservative revolution, he decisively rejected every form of nationalism and was politically and temperamentally rather closer to the conservative liberals.

One should not forget, moreover, that one of the peculiarities of the liberal conception that was current under the Weimar Republic was the belief that the carrying out of central political objectives could equally well be achieved by a monarchical, democratic or even dictatorial state. To that extent neither antidemocratic, nor elitist, nor liberal attitudes were totally excluded. Indeed dictatorship and the rule of law were definitely reconcilable in much of the thinking of the time. During the Weimar Republic, general concepts of liberal political philosophy, as described by Norbert Schürgers, included the rejection of 'standardisation, of levelling down, of loss of individuality and of the regimentation of personal, as of social matters'. Against these evils the 'greatest possible freedom for personal development' was postulated, together with the demand for an 'intellectual aristocracy'.<sup>26</sup> This indeed reflects crucial aspects of Beckmann's political beliefs.

A central conservative motif in Beckmann's thought is the threat to the individual posed by modern society, an attitude he shared with a number of Weimar intellectuals and artists. In the spirit of the existential philosophy of Karl Jaspers and Martin Heidegger, which was fashionable at the time, the starting point for future action (including the artist's contribution) was conceived as a return to the existential self and abstinence from the quotidian babble of mass society. The *Self-Portrait in Tuxedo* and *Der Künstler im Staat* represent both of these: a return to the self in its most sovereign, self-confident incarnation, and a bold declaration whereby the world's lack of orientation was to be reversed by means of confident, voluntaristic acts of aesthetic law-making reflecting transcendent ideas of art and the state.

The central notion of *Der Künstler im Staat* was concerned with the formulation of a new transcendent idea as a necessary precondition for a new concept of the state. This in turn was based on the belief that both the state and society, as a consequence of the ineluctable bureaucratisation of the modern world, had come to be understood in purely mechanical terms. The sociologist Max Weber had spoken of a 'steely casing' and had seen in this image the results of an increasing 'demystification of the world'.<sup>27</sup> Beckmann sees it as equally the job of the artist and of the statesman to reverse this process and to respiritualise the world. A new focus of faith should be created for it, and from this orientation point alone its destiny was

to be guided. The 'law of balance', as Beckmann called it following the thoughts of Scheler, together with a rediscovered 'personal responsibility', are the metaphysical ingredients of this faith, which should eventually lead to 'stasis, to existential being'. Once this point has been reached, 'deified man' again recedes into the background and the 'play of the worlds', to which art holds the mirror, begins anew.<sup>28</sup>

Beckmann's contribution to the *Europäische Revue* represents an artistic programme that consists of a mixture of socialism, Bolshevism, liberalism and conservatism. It shows marked parallels to contemporary documents of crisis theology, crisis philosophy and political journalism.<sup>29</sup> Peppered with ornamental references from extremely diverse discourses on philosophy, politics and art, the text is evidence of the artist's participation in contemporary debate and his widely ranging intellectual interests. More generally, it displays the workings of a mind with a strong tendency to synthesis. The crucial point, however, is that Beckmann puts himself forward as a statesman and as a leader of society. His writings propagate the idea of a revival of the state by means of a lawgiving and faith-renewing elite, in effect a small group of creative artists. These were to rank equal with statesmen, or even stand above them. Ideas of this kind situate Beckmann in the 'aesthetic fundamentalism' of the time and find parallels in the work of writers such as Gottfried Benn and Rudolf Borchardt.<sup>30</sup> Artistic utopianism and charismatic leadership meet in the person and in the work of Beckmann; at the same time they demonstrate the way in which the existence of the liberal artist was imperiled in the second half of the Weimar Republic. However, all this is combined with a virtually inexplicable contradiction in Beckmann's personality; that is what emerges, for instance, in his answer to a question about his political stance posed by the *Frankfurter Zeitung* in 1928, which appeared to contradict what he had said only a year before:

I am a painter, or, according to a very disagreeable collective notion, an artist. At any rate I am a misfit. A misfit also in politics.

Such matters can only become interesting for me again when politics has passed through its *materialistic* phase and has turned to the metaphysical or transcendental, or in other words, to a new form of religious apprehension.

It would be pointless to elaborate here on that particular future dispensation, in which I already live, and whose fulfillment I am awaiting.<sup>31</sup>

## EVADING POLITICS

However, at least by 1930, Beckmann's conservative-liberal (and simultaneously solipsistically elitist) existence as an artist had been seriously compromised by contemporary events. In that year, a short but heated debate took place concerning Beckmann's participation in the 17th Biennale in Venice, at which his large-format picture *The Beach* (*Der Strand*, 1927) was shown.<sup>32</sup> Because the picture featured the fascist paper *Il Popolo di Roma*, it aroused the wrath of the authorities. The *Völkische Beobachter*, which was the party paper of the NSDAP, took the exhibition of this work as its cue to demand an end to the 'phantoms of the [Labour and Socialist] International'. Instead, there should be 'men with a typically German consciousness.'<sup>33</sup> Beckmann reacted to this attack immediately, writing to his agent Günther Franke on 23 October 1930: 'Don't forget, if and when the opportunity arises, to educate the Nazis in the fact that I am a German painter [...] Do not forget that. One day it might be important.'<sup>34</sup> And in fact Beckmann's art in this period is generally regarded as nationalistic by his most sympathetic critics.

In the same year, in the *Museum der Gegenwart*, Otto Fischer considered Beckmann's early engagement with France and the Parisian avant-garde. He stated categorically that Beckmann's work was 'in every respect German', because of the problematic way it was constructed out of, and subordinate to, the sophisticated draftsmanship that characterised it.<sup>35</sup> Likewise in 1930, a Beckmann monograph appeared as Volume 56 of the popular series *Junge Kunst*, written by Dr. Heinrich Simon, who was the editor of the *Frankfurter Zeitung* and a critic who had been intensively concerned with Beckmann's painting for several years. In 1930 Simon sees Beckmann as having worked out an idiosyncratic position between the two extremes of non-representational abstraction and political engagement, and he comes to the following thought-provoking conclusion:

This is certainly the only thing possible, namely to welcome the dissolution of the old forms. And it is certainly the only creative solution, namely to carry on the struggle by creating a new form. Beckmann's intellectual physiognomy, his knowledge of contemporary issues, of the way in which the times we live in abolish traditional boundaries, relativise the laws hitherto prevailing, and seem to call out for nobler men whose task it shall be boldly to overthrow the last citadels of inherited dogmas – this intellectual cosmos of Beckmann stands in direct relation not to what he paints, but rather, quite simply and in a craftsmanlike way, to the space in which he locates his men and his objects.

Here the direct link is made to the contemporary relativisation of values, and a possible solution for Beckmann is also sketched in: 'the creation of a new form' and the adumbration of 'noble men', who would determine the new environment. Simon continues:

From his new world of space there is a smooth progression to the newly conceived space of the world itself. It is, however, no flight into an empty vastness. In each individual piece of the world that he paints, he wants to show how a new world comes into being. He plays the wonderful game of the human spirit, which builds a world for itself from the unchanging inherited material of trees, fields, stars, flowers, seasons, human beings, hate and love; but this world is only credible as something new when that which binds it together is new: the space that it encloses, and the mind that pervades it.<sup>36</sup>

Such explications seem to have been arrived at through a close contact with the artist himself, and indeed they reflect his diction and terminology. At the same time, they give very clear verbal expression to Beckmann's artistic experiments, as may be seen from a glance at the key picture *Man and Woman/Adam and Eve (Mann und Frau/Adam und Eva, 1932; ill. 11.3)*, where the painter attempts to combine a new politically connotated classicism with contemporary abstraction.

In August or September 1932, Walter Kunze, who succeeded Walter Kaesbach as Director of the City Museum in Erfurt in 1925, established contact with Beckmann. He made an agreement with the painter to take over a Beckmann one-man exhibition from Hamburg, which was to open in Erfurt in April 1933. This never happened. Beckmann's parallel dismissal from the teaching staff in Frankfurt and the collapse of his exhibition plans marked the end of his artistic career in Germany. It is not clear whether Kunze was told to drop the exhibition, or whether the Director himself decided it would be more prudent to cancel it, which is perhaps more likely. What we do know, however, is that the collector Stephan Lackner was able to see Beckmann's works by prior appointment in the museum depot in June 1933, deciding spontaneously to buy Beckmann's masterpiece from this period, *Man and Woman/Adam and Eve*. Without a doubt this remarkable painting is crucial to Beckmann's output, and is a poignant indication of his new artistic direction.<sup>37</sup>

In his memoirs of 1967 Lackmann described the impressions made on him by Beckmann's work, no doubt having this picture particularly in mind:



**11.3.** Max Beckmann, *Man and Woman/Adam and Eve* (1932), oil on canvas. Santa Barbara, Collection Dr. and Mrs. Stephan Lackner.

We were led down to the basement. There I had one of the most powerful sensual experiences of my life. Out of the gloom, and made more dramatic by the harsh light of a single lightbulb, a new world of proud, free men seemed to storm towards us. On huge canvases classical nudes reared up. Not palely classical – there was nothing here of “noble simplicity, tranquil monumentality”; the outlines were filled with Expressionistic tension; the colours seemed to move

convulsively across the flesh; so, perhaps a new classicism? Strange atavistic fables were presented here, exuding the freshness of the first breath of history. Could these really be “Beckmanns”?<sup>38</sup>

Lackner’s remark about a new classicism is of particular interest here, for it is a classicism which Beckmann evokes through radical simplification both of the composition of the picture and particularly of the nude figures, the latter strongly reminiscent of contemporary sculpture. *Man and Woman/Adam and Eve* is emphatically a constructed sort of work, which some commentators have associated with contemporary tendencies in non-representational art. And indeed, the strict horizontal and vertical disposition of all the pictorial elements brings Piet Mondrian’s Neoplasticism to mind. *Man and Woman/Adam and Eve*, the man and the woman, stand or lie in a bare landscape in which a few plants are growing. The woman, or Eve, is in the lower third of the picture, her rounded form spread out on the hard, parched ground of the desert. The man, or Adam, has turned away from her; he stands upright, beyond the horizon line which constitutes the picture’s horizontal axis, and is gazing into the square-shaped blue distance.<sup>39</sup>

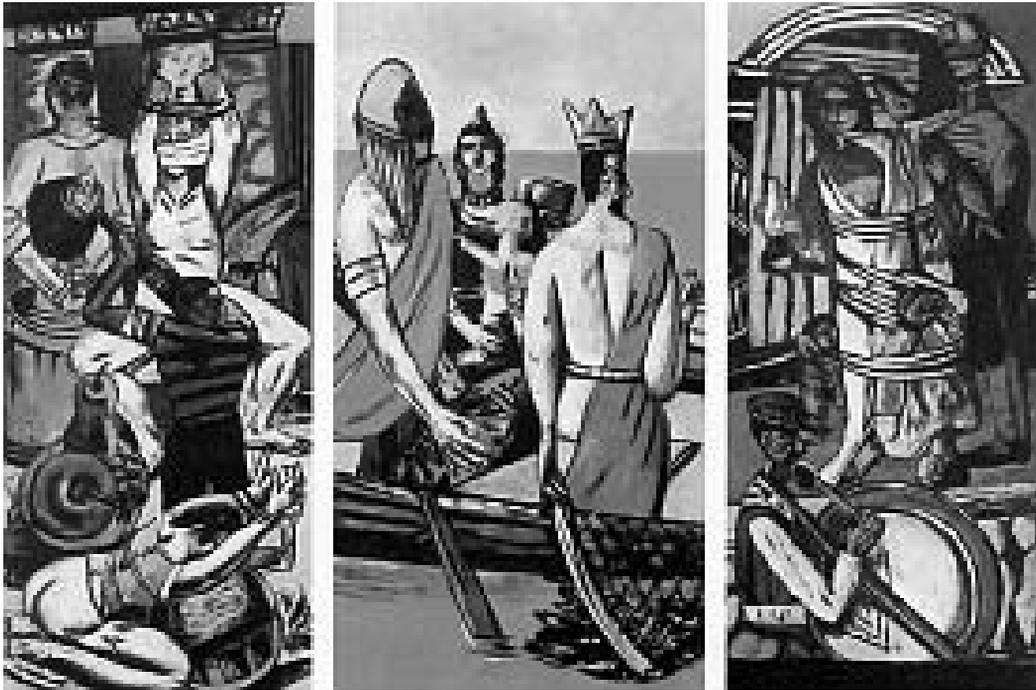
Lackner referred to the picture’s ‘noble men’ featured in classical poses of nudity, and the man does at least appear noble in his uprightness. In the impression of classicism that is created here, it is, paradoxically, a kind of archaic primitivism that plays the decisive role. Even the plants seem to come from some other world, now lost, and are emblematic of an earlier period of the human race. It is they that produce the surreal effect of the whole scene, to which many commentators have drawn attention, and which is grounded in the picture’s anachronistic context rather than in any adaptation by Beckmann of Surrealism’s aesthetic principles. Iconographic and formal elements have their roots in Picasso’s classicism of the 1920s, in the Romanesque and in Greek Antiquity, whereby, however, specific iconographical allusions are absent. What is crucial in the picture is its programmatic element. The problem of the sexes addressed here had already been dealt with by the painter in an identical format in a picture entitled *The Bath (Das Bad, 1930)*. *Man and Woman/Adam and Eve* seems to be a continuation, and at the same time a transposition of the theme of that picture into the eternally valid past. Its programme involves a new archaising and myth-evoking aesthetic, which indirectly extrapolates the problem of the relativism

of values through its denial of such relativism, and thereby genuinely seeks to solve it.

Beckmann's striving for a new form of classicism may be seen as closely related to his reaction to the 'isms' of the avant-garde and his realisation of a visual tectonics similar to that of *Neue Sachlichkeit*. Since the 18th century classicism had been characterised by phrases such as objectivity, plasticity, mass and harmony. In *Man and Woman/Adam and Eve* new gods arise, which are also the first human beings, treading the path to self-realisation. Over the next few years, these figures were repeatedly to be projected by Beckmann into the context of the present day. Unlike any of his other work, with the exception of the self-portrait of 1927, this picture overcomes the uncertainty of contingency; time is for the moment abstracted, only that it should, from this new standpoint and reacting to the pressure of contemporary events, re-emerge in the created space of other pictures as a censure of modern times. *Man and Woman/Adam and Eve* symbolises the iron rule of harmonious balance, which Beckmann wanted to convey, or dictate, to the state and to mankind in 1927. It remains unique among his works.

Under the pressure of the political developments of 1932 and 1933, Beckmann updated his shocking veristic iconography, which he had originally developed under the influence of World War I. This updating can typically be seen in the first of a total of ten triptychs, a painting with the title *Departure (Abfahrt, 1932-35; ill. 11.4)*. With his adaptation of the late medieval form of the triptych, Beckmann carved out for himself a contemporary artistic niche which was to be characterised by some of the most complex compositions of 20th-century painting. It is in these works that the artistic achievement of his work in the 1920s is summed up.<sup>40</sup>

Beckmann began the triptych in 1932 in Frankfurt am Main, just before the Nazis seized power, but after the first attacks on him by the Nazi press had already been printed.<sup>41</sup> He finished it in the decisive years of the consolidation of Nazi power in Berlin in 1935. By now, Beckmann's personal views had decisively changed. The *Departure* triptych reflects contemporary circumstances in its left-hand panel through an adaptation of the iconography of cruelty he had developed in the 1920s. One sees anonymous, timeless and bombastic architecture within which is located a brutal scene of torture. In the centre of the picture stands a powerful male figure



**11.4.** Max Beckmann, *Departure* (1932-35), triptych, oil on canvas. New York, Museum of Modern Art.

with arms upraised, who seems to be swinging a hatchet. Only on closer examination does it become clear that we are looking at a net or a quiver-like bag for trapping fish, which in the only sketch we possess still appears as a spear. The man's back is turned to a captive woman, who is bent over a large ball-like object with her bound arms stretched out in front of her; one has the impression that, with a quick turn and one powerful blow, the striped-shirted executioner will cut off her hands or her head. The two men tied to columns in the background are clearly suffering ongoing torture; the hands of one have already been lopped off, the bleeding red stumps producing a gruesome light effect that commands the viewer's attention. A sensuality that is cold, gloomy and cruel rather than alluring dominates the panel, in which one is nevertheless surprised to see luxuriant still-life pictures of fruit and flourishing, fleshy plant-life.

The other side-panel shows a couple who have been bound together; a woman with a candle, who is accompanied by a child or a dwarf, struggles through the night, dragging with her a youth with a

halter round his bleeding neck. She is also accompanied by a page-boy who has been blindfolded, and who carries under his arm a huge blue and black fish. In the foreground of this scene, which is set against a labyrinthine stairway, a drummer marches through a sort of orchestra pit in front of a balustrade, heading in the direction of the picture's right-hand frame.

With great artistic skill, Beckmann links the two side-panels by means of formal compositional techniques and colouring. In fact the side-panels act as a bracket for the middle panel of the triptych, seeming to hold it in a vice, a device which has the effect of deepening the perspective of the viewer into the background distance. Here one sees a boat on a gleaming blue seascape – the similarities with *Man and Woman/Adam and Eve* are evident. On the boat is a royal family, accompanied by a helmeted warrior, which is being taken to an unknown shore by the ferryman. Through the formal structure of the picture, this scene is connected to the fateful events of the side-panels. The pain and suffering of life and the involvement of the past create spectacular contrasting backgrounds for a perspective on putative future salvation.

At the heart of *Departure*, according to an observation by the artist, lies the concept of freedom. In 1937 Beckmann is supposed to have explained the work to a collector who was visiting his Berlin studio. This lady, Lilly von Schnitzler, was apparently interested in buying the middle panel of the triptychon. Her somewhat unreasonable request is nevertheless a clear indication of the heterogeneous structure of the triptychon, and of the autonomous concept applied to the central panel as compared with the side-panels. While the central panel is closely related to the new mythologically formulated pictures of 1932/33, the side-panels reflect the transcendent realism of the 1920s.

In February 1937, Beckmann apparently explained to Lilly von Schnitzler:

What you see to the right and left is life itself. Life is torment, all manner of bodily and spiritual pain. On the right-hand panel you see yourself, as you attempt to find your way in the darkness. You light the room and the stairway with a miserable little lamp; you drag with you something from which you cannot be parted, the corpse of your memories, the misdeeds and failures, the murder which everyone commits once in his or her life. You can never free yourself from your past. You must carry this corpse with you, while life beats the drum for it.

“And in the middle?” asked Frau von Schnitzler)

King and queen, man and woman, are brought to the further shore by a ferryman, a man whom they do not know, and who wears a mask; a mysterious figure, who brings us to a mysterious land [...] The king and queen have freed themselves by their own efforts from the torment of existence – they have prevailed. The queen carries a great treasure – freedom – [which we see] as a child resting in her lap. Freedom is the thing that matters – it is the departure, the new beginning.<sup>42</sup>

In this interpretation offered to Lilly von Schnitzler, who was a convinced Nazi, Beckmann insisted on the centrality of the idea of freedom in the work; and this insistence, in view of contemporary circumstances, necessarily takes on the colour of a political statement. Lilly von Schnitzler, a long-standing friend of Beckmann, was also a close friend of Prinz Karl Anton von Rohan, who had likewise been an adherent of the Nazis since 1933; and she was married to Georg von Schnitzler, a manager of IG-Farben. After the end of the war, Georg von Schnitzler was condemned at Nürnberg in connection with IG-Farben’s role during the occupation of Europe. The Schnitzlers continued to show their Beckmann collection, which they had built up in Frankfurt in the 1920s, in their luxurious Berlin flat until late in the Second World War.<sup>43</sup>

Just about a year after Beckmann had chosen to make freedom, politically and metaphorically conceived, the central motif of his triptych in describing it to Lilly von Schnitzler, the picture was exhibited in New York. At the beginning of 1938 Curt Valentin staged one of the first of Beckmann’s exhibitions in the USA in the Buchholz Gallery/Curt Valentin, of which he was the director. Together with Israel Ber Neumann, Valentin was primarily responsible for making Beckmann famous in New York, and indeed all over America, in the 1940s. Nevertheless, the American public could evidently at first make little of Beckmann’s hermetic compositions, so the dealer pressed Beckmann to explain the picture’s content. Valentin justified this request by saying it was typical of the American mentality that they wanted explanations for things! But Valentin himself also had a specific interest in securing an interpretation. The Director of the Museum of Modern Art, Alfred H. Barr, Jr., had already visited the gallery’s Beckmann exhibition twice. He was extremely interested in the picture, but he too required an interpretation of this obviously complex work.<sup>44</sup>

Beckmann's reaction was remarkable. Although he had willingly supplied an interpretation for Lilly von Schnitzler in Berlin, the now emigrant artist refused point blank on 11 February 1938 to give an interpretation to Valentin. 'Dear Valentin,' he wrote, 'you should either put the picture away or send it back to me. When people are unable to bring to it sufficient creative imagination of their own, it has no point to show them the things in it.' All the same, Beckmann followed this with a sort of explanation, which is of some significance:

For me, the picture is a sort of rosary or a ring of colourless figures, who sometimes, when viewed with the requisite intuition, take on a strong lustre and tell me truths which I cannot express in words and also did not know earlier. It can only speak to people who consciously or unconsciously carry within themselves roughly the same sort of metaphysical code.

Departure, yes, departure from the deceitful veneer of life in favour of the fundamental things as they are, what stands behind appearances. Basically this explanation applies to all my pictures.

I only want to stress that *Departure* is not a picture of a particular tendency and is equally valid in all ages.<sup>45</sup>

The change of emphasis that Beckmann makes here is surprising and cannot simply be explained based on his general concept of art. No longer, apparently, is the theme of the picture freedom, but instead it represents a metaphysical code. And the artist lays particular stress on the fact that the picture represents no 'tendency', that is, no political tendency such as that which is observable in the work of Dix. It seems as if Beckmann wanted to obscure, or at least play down, both the political metaphor of the picture and its contemporary relevance, and that he did so in view of the possibility of a loan to, or even a purchase by, the Museum of Modern Art. Because of the open and heterogeneous structure and somewhat vague semantics of his pictures, Beckmann was able deliberately to offer alternative interpretations to the viewers of his works, and it seems he undertook to do this depending on the particular context in which the interpretation was demanded.

Thus Beckmann confronted the director of the Museum of Modern Art, which at that time was the canon-building art institution for the free world as far as formal Modernism was concerned, with his elitist postulate of a 'metaphysical code'. Further, he implicitly suggested that the premise of the work lay in the realm of apparently unpolitical and autonomous art, and that it should be seen in this

context as a potential acquisition for the museum. Barr, for his part, saw his conception of the formal autonomy of art confirmed; on the other hand, from the way his apparent ignorance of the metaphysical content of Beckmann's painting had been handled with calculated condescension, he was obliged to recognise that he did not possess the key required to unlock the picture's meaning.

This double strategy with regard to Lilly von Schnitzler, on the one hand, and Alfred H. Barr, Jr., on the other, was only possible because *Departure*, from a structural point of view, was open to both interpretations. The work is impregnated with timeless myth, which requires a metaphysical code to be understood adequately; but it also conveys a consternating actuality. This allows the painter his interpretation based on contemporary history, as does his assertion of an autonomous artistic realm removed from the politically engaged tendency of the realism of the 1920s, to which nevertheless *Departure* remains indebted.

On 21 July 1938, Max Beckmann held a speech at the opening of the London exhibition of 20th-century German art,<sup>46</sup> in which he admitted that he had deplorably neglected the political development of the previous years in order to concentrate on painting. At the same time, he said he was convinced that the political world and the world of artistic creativity should be 'strictly separated functions of life.'<sup>47</sup> With this dichotomy, the artist took up a stance that no longer corresponded to the one he had claimed in 1927. Then it was possible to assert that the artist's realm and that of the politicians shared a common identity, whereby aesthetics featured as the guiding force for political orientation. In 1938, however, Beckmann faced a totalitarian age, to combat which he proposed the apotheosis of the self, that is, of the individual:

The greatest danger that threatens humanity is collectivism. Everywhere attempts are being made to lower mankind's happiness and way of life to the level of termites. I am against these attempts with all the strength in my being.<sup>48</sup>

After the failure of his aristocratic Bolshevism, Beckmann relapsed into an alienated solipsistic dream that excluded political action, even if his pictures still reflected the political conditions of his age. He created thereby an autonomous, hermetic realm of images, a self-reflexive modern form of painting which oscillates between aesthetic escapism and the renunciation of politics, which indeed consciously distances itself from specific political stands.

## NOTES

- 1 This essay is related to my Habilitations project on Max Beckmann at the Rheinische-Friedrich-Wilhelms University in Bonn, Germany, which I finished in the summer of 2004. See Olaf Peters, *Vom schwarzen Seiltänzer. Max Beckmann zwischen Weimarer Republik und Exil* (Dietrich Reimer; Berlin, 2005). Some parts of this essay are based on my article 'Max Beckmann, die Neue Sachlichkeit und das Problem des Werterealtivismus in der Weimarer Republik'. See *Wallraf-Richartz-Jahrbuch*, vol. 61, 2000, pp. 237-61. A different version of this paper dealing with the genesis of Beckmann's first triptych *Departure (Abfahrt, 1932-35)* was presented in 2003 in London (Tate Modern) and in Princeton, NJ (The Institute for Advanced Study). I wish to thank everyone responsible for giving me the opportunity to present the papers in Aarhus, London and Princeton – and thank you for sharing your thoughts with me. The first version of the text was translated by Nicholas T. Parsons.
- 2 See Franz Roh, *Nach-Expressionismus – Magischer Realismus: Probleme der neuesten europäischen Malerei* (Klinkhardt & Biermann; Leipzig, 1925).
- 3 Letter from Max Beckmann to Wilhelm Hausenstein of 12 March 1926. Max Beckmann, *Briefe*, eds. Klaus Gallwitz, Uwe M. Schneede and Stephan von Wiese (Piper; Munich and Zürich, 1993-96), 3 vols., vol. 2, p. 35.
- 4 See exh. cat., *Neue Sachlichkeit: Deutsche Malerei seit dem Expressionismus*, Städtische Kunsthalle Mannheim, 1925; and Karoline Hille, *Spuren der Moderne: Die Mannheimer Kunsthalle von 1918-1933* (Akademie Verlag; Berlin, 1994 [PhD diss., 1993]).
- 5 Max Beckmann, *Die Realität der Träume in den Bildern: Schriften und Gespräche 1911 bis 1950*, ed. and afterword Rudolf Pillep (Piper; Munich and Zürich, 1990), p. 45.
- 6 See Detlev J.K. Peukert, *Die Weimarer Republik: Krisenjahre der klassischen Moderne* (Suhrkamp; Frankfurt a.M., 1987).
- 7 As a contemporary reflection on this, see Alfred Neumeyer, 'Zur Raumpsychologie der Neuen Sachlichkeit', *Zeitschrift für bildende Kunst*, vol. 61, 1927/28, pp. 66-72.
- 8 Max Horkheimer, 'Nachgelassene Schriften 1914-1931', vol. 10 in idem., *Gesammelte Schriften*, eds. Alfred Schmidt and Gunzelin Schmid Noerr (Fischer; Frankfurt a.M. 1990 [1987]), p. 320.
- 9 The numbers refer to Erhard and Barbara Göpel, *Max Beckmann. Katalog der Gemälde* (Kornfeld und Cie; Bern, 1976), 2 vols..
- 10 As a contemporary document of the Weimar Antiamericanism, see Adolf Halfeld, *Amerika und der Amerikanismus: Kritische Betrachtungen eines Deutschen und Europäers* (Eugen Diederichs; Jena, 1927).
- 11 Otto Fischer, 'Die neueren Werke Max Beckmanns', *Museum der Gegenwart*, vol. 1, no. 3, 1930, pp. 89-100, here p. 96.
- 12 See Barbara Copeland Buenger, 'Max Beckmann: "Der Künstler im Staat"', in Eugen Blume and Dieter Schölz (eds.), *Überbrückt: Ästhetische Moderne und Nationalsozialismus: Kunsthistoriker und Künstler 1925-1937* (König; Köln, 1999), pp. 191-200; and concerning the context Carl H. Pegg, *Evolution of the European Idea, 1914-1932* (University of North Carolina Press; Chapel Hill and London, 1983).
- 13 Max Beckmann, *Self-portrait in Words. Collected Writings and Statements, 1903-1950*, ed. and annotated by Barbara Copeland Buenger (University of Chicago Press; Chicago and London, 1997), pp. 287-88.
- 14 Mannheim's important study 'Historismus' [1924] is here cited from Karl Mannheim, *Wissenssoziologie. Auswahl aus dem Werk*, ed. Kurt H. Wolff (Hermann Luchterhand; Berlin and Neuwied, 1964), p. 301.
- 15 Beckmann, *Realität*, p. 40.
- 16 Hans Belting, *Max Beckmann: Die Tradition als Problem in der Kunst der Moderne* (Deutscher Kunstverlag; Munich, 1984), p. 47.
- 17 See Otto Mann, *Der Dandy: Ein Kulturproblem der Moderne* (Wolfgang Rothe; Heidelberg, 1962 [1925]).
- 18 Fritz Stahl, in *Berliner Tageblatt* of 3 May 1928, cited here from Fritz Erpel, *Max Beckmann: Leben im Werk: die Selbstbildnisse* (C.H. Beck; Berlin, 1985), p. 335.
- 19 Karl Anton Rohan, *Heimat Europa: Erinnerungen und Erfahrungen* (Eugen Diederich; Düsseldorf and Köln, 1954), p. 163.
- 20 On this, see Lovis Corinth, *Selbstbiographie* (Hirzel; Leipzig, 1926), pp. 178-80.
- 21 Beckmann, *Self-Portrait*, pp. 288-89.
- 22 Horkheimer, *Gesammelte Schriften*, p. 321.
- 23 Scheler's impact on Beckmann has for long been overlooked but can hardly be overestimated. Of particular importance are Scheler's lecture, *Der Mensch im Weltalter des Ausgleichs* (1927) and the small book, *Die Stellung des Menschen im Kosmos* (1928), which were popular and much discussed even before their publication. On the late philosophy of Scheler, who was part of the wider circle around Rohan and whom he ridiculed, see Stephan Lampenscherr, 'Die Idee des Menschen in der Spätphilosophie Max Schelers', *Philosophisches Jahrbuch*, vol. 105, 1998, pp. 304-20.
- 24 See for example Ernst Jünger, *Die totale Mobilmachung* (Junker und Dünnhaupt; Berlin, 1930); and with regard to the context Louis Dupeux, *Nationalbolschewismus in Deutschland 1919-1933: Kommunistische Strategie und konservative Dynamik* (C.H. Beck; Munich, 1985).
- 25 Armin Mohler, *Die Konservative Revolution in Deutschland 1918-1933: Ein Handbuch* (Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft; Darmstadt, 1989 [1972]), 2 vols., vol. 2, p. 438.
- 26 Norbert J. Schürgers, *Politische Philosophie in der Weimarer Republik. Staatsverständnis zwischen Führerdemokratie und bürokratischem Sozialismus* (J.B. Metzler; Stuttgart, 1989),

- p. 61. See also Larry Eugen Jones, *German Liberalism and the Dissolution of the Weimar Party System, 1918-1933* (University of North Carolina Press; Chapel Hill, 1988).
- 27 On Weber, see Wolfgang J. Mommsen, *Max Weber: Gesellschaft, Politik und Geschichte* (Suhrkamp; Frankfurt a.M., 1982); and Detlev J.K. Peukert, *Max Webers Diagnose der Moderne* (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht; Göttingen, 1989).
- 28 See Beckmann, *Realität*, pp. 40 and 38.
- 29 See Norbert Bolz, *Auszug aus der entzauberten Welt: philosophischer Extremismus zwischen den Weltkriegen* (Fink; Munich, 1989).
- 30 The term is taken from Stefan Breuer, *Ästhetischer Fundamentalismus: Stefan George und der deutsche Antimodernismus* (Primus; Darmstadt, 1996).
- 31 Beckmann, *Realität*, p. 44.
- 32 On this, see Barbara Copeland Buenger, 'Das Italien Max Beckmanns und Wilhelm Worringers', in Hannes Böhringer and Beate Söntgen (eds.), *Wilhelm Worringers Kunstgeschichte* (Wilhelm Fink; Munich, 2002), pp. 141-79, esp. pp. 165-70. Concerning the historical background, see Stanley G. Payne, *A History of Fascism, 1914-1945* (The University of Wisconsin Press; Madison and London, 1995); and Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi, *Fascist Spectacle: The Aesthetics of Power in Mussolini's Italy* (University of California Press; Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1997).
- 33 D.K.K., 'Das Delirium der Häßlichkeit', *Völkischer Beobachter*, 22 October 1930.
- 34 Letter from Max Beckmann to Günther Franke of 23 October 1930. Beckmann, *Briefe*, vol. 2, p. 178.
- 35 Fischer, 'Werke Max Beckmanns', p. 98.
- 36 Heinrich Simon, *Max Beckmann* (Klinkhardt & Biermann; Berlin and Leipzig, 1930), p. 18.
- 37 On this painting, see Reinhard Spieler, 'Max Beckmann. Mann und Frau', in Gottfried Boehm, Ulrich Mosch and Katharina Schmidt (eds.), *Canto d'Amore: Klassizistische Moderne in Musik und bildender Kunst 1914-1935* (exh. cat.), Öffentliche Kunstsammlung Basle, 1996, pp. 315-20.
- 38 Stephan Lackner, *Ich erinnere mich gut an Max Beckmann* (Kupferberg; Mainz, 1967), p. 5.
- 39 The concept of the sexes depicted is based on Otto Weininger, *Geschlecht und Charakter: Eine prinzipielle Untersuchung* (Matthes & Seitz; Munich, 1980), which was first published in 1903.
- 40 See most recently on Beckmann's triptychs Peter J. Gärtner, *Der Traum von der Imagination des Raumes: zu den Raumvorstellungen auf einigen ausgewählten Triptychen Max Beckmanns* (Verlag und Datenbank für Geisteswissenschaften; Weimar, 1996); and Reinhard Spieler, *Bildwelt und Weltbild in den Triptychen* (DuMont; Köln, 1998).
- 41 On the occasion of the symposium *Beckmann reconsidered* in London at the Tate Modern in March 2003, I expressed my opinion that Beckmann started *Abfahrt* not as a triptych but developed the idea of a triptych probably not before 1933 and did so under the influence of contemporary cinema. I dealt with this problem in greater detail in a chapter of my 2005 study on Max Beckmann.
- 42 Cited in Beckmann, *Realität*, p. 46. See also Gärtner, *Traum*, pp. 73-99.
- 43 On Georg von Schnitzler, see Peter Hayes, *Industry and Ideology: IG Farben in the Nazi Era* (Cambridge University Press; New York, 1987); and Gottfried Plumpe, *Die I.G. Farbenindustrie AG. Wirtschaft, Technik und Politik 1904-1945* (Duncker & Humblot; Berlin, 1990). On Lilly von Schnitzler's Beckmann collection, see Klaus Gallwitz, 'Max Beckmann in der Sammlung Lilly von Schnitzler-Mallinckrodt', in Gerhard Kolberg, Helga Behn et al. (eds.), *Die Expressionisten vom Aufbruch bis zur Verfemung* (exh. cat.), Museum Ludwig, Köln, 1996, pp. 250-54.
- 44 On Barr, see Alice Goldfarb Marquis, *Alfred H. Barr, Jr. Missionary for the Modern* (Contemporary Books; Chicago and New York, 1989); and Sybill Gordon Kantor, *Alfred H. Barr, Jr. and the Intellectual Origins of the Museum of Modern Art* (MIT Press; Cambridge and London, 2002).
- 45 Letter from Max Beckmann to Curt Valentin of 11 February 1938. Beckmann, *Briefe*, vol. 3, p. 29.
- 46 See Cordula Frowein, 'The Exhibition of 20th-Century German Art in London 1938 - eine Antwort auf die Ausstellung 'Entartete Kunst' in München 1937', in Thomas Koebner, Joachim Radkau and Wulf Koepke (eds.), *Exilforschung: Ein internationales Jahrbuch*, vol. 2, Munich 1984, pp. 212-37. See also the contributions of Stephan Lackner and Helen Adkins, in *Stationen der Moderne: Die bedeutenden Kunstausstellungen der Moderne in Deutschland* (exh. cat.), Berlinische Galerie, Berlin, 1988.
- 47 Beckmann, *Realität*, p. 48.
- 48 Beckmann, *Self-Portrait*, p. 305.



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