Propaganda Art from the 20th to the 21st Century

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CHAPTER II: MODERN PROPAGANDA ART

As we noted at the beginning of the first chapter, the term "propaganda" in popular opinion has come to symbolize an archaic reminder of a dictatorial and "totalitarian" past. However, we have shown that the idea that modern propaganda is exclusive to dictatorial regimes is incorrect. Rather, modern propaganda has its origins in modern societies, and British democracy in particular. Of course, the fact that one regime or another employs modern propaganda does not necessarily make these regimes the same. We observed that modern propaganda is inherent to all modern societies – whether democracy or dictatorship – but that the performance of power in each of them can be different, which results in different propagandas. This stands in stark contrast with the assumption that there is an absolute opposition between "totalitarianism" and democracy, as modern propaganda is recurrent throughout the history of both.

In the previous chapter, we concluded that modern propaganda is the performance of modern structures of power. Modern propaganda relies in particular on modern technology and the means of mass communication, with the aim of constructing a reality that serves the interest of the stakeholders of power. As we observed, modern propaganda is multi-disciplinary in nature, constructing a reality – what Chomsky and Herman referred to as the manufacturing of consent – that affects all domains of life. We analyzed this process as one with a macro- and micro-performative dimension. In the case of the micro-performative dimension of propaganda, people can be implicated in the performance of power without necessarily being aware of it. Their attitudes and actions are shaped by interests that are not necessarily their own, which in the case of Adorno and Ellul we discussed as the "substructural" working of power.

In our assessment of the development of modern propaganda, we touched on a variety of its expressions. Covert propaganda, we saw, takes the form of the maintenance of systems of communication and of the control over information, such as the underground All Red Line cable network during the First World War. Overt propaganda, by contrast, takes the form of more explicit and identifiable messages that are disseminated through posters, pamphlets, publications, public manifestations, radio, and film.[1]

Especially in the case of the propaganda of 20th-century dictatorships, our understanding of propaganda tends to be strongly oriented toward the visual identification of overt propaganda. In the case of the Nazi and Stalinist dictatorships, for example, specific imagery comes

1 As we have seen in the previous chapter, each of these media can of course also be used for covert propaganda.

to mind, such as large-scale staged theatrical political events, grandiose architectural structures,heroic painting and monumental sculpture, all of which we tend to remember and identify as "propaganda." Art plays a crucial role in this process, as it is by means of art and its visual points of demarcation and identification that these regimes can express their power. At the same time, since we tend to orient ourselves on visual representation, art can also be deceiving. For example, when we think of Nazi propaganda, we might bring to mind famous propaganda films such as Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* (1935), which chronicles the 1934 Nazi Party Congress in Nuremberg and evokes a quasi-religious ritual set in Albert Speer's ancient Greece-inspired architectural site, contributing to the myth of Hitler's thousand-year Reich. One could also think of Fritz Hippler's film *The Eternal Jew* (1940), which effectively used a method of editing that equated rats and vermin with the "plague" that the Nazis considered Judaism. While we should not downplay the impact of such films when it comes to the effort in which Nazi ideology inscribed itself upon the population, it is worthwhile to note that these works are only a small fragment of Nazi film production.

In the twelve years of its existence, the Ministry of Propaganda and Enlightenment, headed by Joseph Goebbels, produced 1,097 films. Only ten percent of its production was directed at overt propaganda – such as the above examples – whereas the other ninety percent were "mainly escapist entertainment," which "manipulated social expectations and helped to create a climate that made the masses susceptible to official propaganda," and displayed the Nazi state as a "normal condition, disoriented morality and, often unobtrusively, instilled National Socialist attitudes, stereotypes and conventions."[2] When it came to the ten percent overt propaganda films, the ministry introduced a mandatory screening to Nazi Party members in order to guarantee attendance. This example teaches us that within dictatorships citizens might just as well be able to detect overt propaganda as we are able to do in retrospect. The more frightening conclusion is that, just like them, the actual propagandistic value of overt propaganda is that it allows us to think we know what propaganda is, and thus become more susceptible to internalize that which we believe is mere entertainment.

This may indicate that paradoxically, the pompous artistic expressions of the so-called totalitarian regimes distract us from the actual, more complex manifestations of modern propaganda, which touches upon the ongoing emphasis on psychological and psychoanalytical

2 Lutz Becker, "Celluloid Lies," in Dawn Ades, Tim Benton et al. (eds.), *Art and Power: Europe under the Dictators* (London: South Bank Centre, 1995), p. 277.

theory in the works of propaganda theorists. For modern propaganda is not limited to what we can see, it is also what we come to embody and perform, without us necessarily being aware of our own implication in the process. Furthermore, we saw that modern propaganda never expresses itself in a singular manner. Its multidisciplinary nature makes isolated case studies of a singular painting or singular film rather ineffective. Such analyses may in fact even strengthen our idea that we are able to understand modern propaganda by isolating one of its many expressions, and maintain the idea that we can be "outside" the performance of power. Hence, we need to look at propaganda in a multidisciplinary sense, and not simply aim to understand propaganda by exposing its effects in a given visual form. Its forms, the "art" of propaganda, always have to be understood in a contextual sense, meaning that there is a larger set of political, economic, cultural, technological, as well as psychological conditions, rooted in specific structures of power, which define its actual effect. So why, in this context, should we choose to speak about *art*? Was art not supposed to be exactly that which we *can* see and sense?

In this chapter, through an exploration of the historical definition of modern art and a series of examples of modern propaganda art, we will argue the contrary. Yes, art is partly reliant on its visibility – it is how we identify it as "art" – but its reliance on visibility is not the same as actually *making things visible*. When we look at a work of art, we do not necessarily "see" its speculative financial value, we do not "see" its function as a status symbol among wealthy elites, we do not "see" its cultural capital in relation to the social standing of an individual or group, and we don't "see" its institutional use or abuse – whether through a museum or government – in representing specific civilizational ideas in the culture wars of our time.

For example, do many people think about the artists implicated in the anti-communist witch hunt in the US when looking at a painting of Mark Rothko? Most will not. Rather, his works gained fame due to a perceived metaphysical, existential experience that results from witnessing these supposedly abstract paintings. But as we will see in this chapter, Rothko's work might as well have been shown in a museum of anti-communism: not just as modern art, but as *modern propaganda art* proper, due to its implication in the campaigns of the Congress for Cultural Freedom. Art is defined as much by what it reveals as by what it conceals, and we could say its very existence is almost paradigmatic for the realities that propagandas aim to construct. Power relies on form, on becoming manifest, recognized, sensed, admired, but at the same time – depending on the kind of power we are examining – it tends to only want to be recognized, sensed, and admired in a particu-

lar way, so as not to expose its vulnerabilities that would allow democratization, change, or overthrow of its current stakeholders. To study Modern Propaganda through Modern Propaganda Art means that we will both analyze the workings of modern propaganda and the kind of reality it aims to construct: a reality partly visible and partly concealed through art.

To speak of modern propaganda art means to critically revisit and challenge the foundational myths of modern art, its supposed autonomy and independent faculty in representing the world around us, rather than to look into propaganda art that aims to *construct* the world which we inhabit. It means that we must engage in a material analysis of the political, economic, and ideological conditions under which art is produced and artists are implicated in the performance of power in modern society. The result is that we will approach artworks as implicated in the larger interface between structures of power and the reality these structures and their stakeholders aim to construct. The work of art in modern society is not simply what it "is," but far more how it is *mediated*. As Frankfurt School philosopher Walter Benjamin argued in his essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility" (1935), that the artwork in modern society may well be defined by its *reproduction*.[3] In other words, in the modern age, art has become part of the larger domain of mass culture – the culture industry that Adorno despised. As much as art continues to try to distinguish itself from mass culture, to remain art, its means of production, mediation, and validation rely upon it, just like any other cultural commodity. What we call "art" is a product of historical processes, in which the changing nature of power structures also impact the nature of art. The modern age, which made modern propaganda possible, also made modern propaganda art possible, and in doing so it has *redefined what we can understand to be "art" as such*. The artwork, its reproduction and mediation in this context, cannot be separated from one another. A painting is *also* its reproduction as a propaganda poster; it is *also* its mediation through a television program on western "high" culture; it is *also* a symbol of legitimation of ruling powers when it hangs in the director's office, and so forth. One of the realities of this artwork is not more "true" to the artwork than the other. The painting is inherent to the interface through which it is produced, disseminated, validated, etc.

In this chapter, we will thus see how an artwork can both be considered as an image or proposition of a specific idea, while at the same

3 Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media* (Cambridge/London: Harvard University Press, 2008), pp. 19–55.

time being part of a larger political campaign with a possibly completely different objective: both are part of the larger reality of modern propaganda art. And that reality also changes the validation of what kind of media are relevant to define as art. We will see that modern propaganda art still privileges certain traditional media, such as painting, sculpture, and monumentalism, but that the value of such classical artforms and the civilizational aura that they bring forth are mediated through the interface of modern media, such as radio and film. In the final chapter on contemporary propaganda art, we will come to see that film and even videogames equally take part in the definition of art in the context of contemporary propaganda.

To gain an understanding of the *History of Modern Propaganda Art*, we will first attempt to understand the way in which "modern art" and "propaganda art" have been defined historically. We will see that these two terms have often been separated, modern art being considered as the ultimate expression of a free democratic society, whereas propaganda art would be its dictatorial counterpoint. As we by now may suspect, this differentiation itself has lent itself to propagandistic aims. Only by revisiting the origins of modern western art we will be able to point out this highly problematic opposition between "democratic" and "totalitarian" modes of artistic production, which then allows us to articulate three models of propaganda art that emerged throughout the 20th Century: *Avant-Garde Propaganda Art, Totalitarian Propaganda Art*, and *Modernist Propaganda Art*. Each of these three models will be defined by comparing a specific structure of power to specific art forms, as part of our endeavor to define propagandas in the plural.

Let us now explore the historical and political conditions that have defined our present-day conception of "modern art."

2.1 MODERN ART

In his book *MammonArt: An Essay on Economic Interpretation* (1925) writer and politician Upton Sinclair claims that the history of art as propaganda began with a fictional figure he calls "Mr Ogi," supposedly the very first caveman–artist in human art history. Sinclair describes how Mr Ogi begins to inscribe symbols into the sand of a cave, invoking in his clan of cavemen the fear about the "magic" he unleashes by making silhouettes of animals appear. In Sinclair's story, the caveman Mr Ogi is forced to prove to the leader of his clan that this "magic" is not a threat to his authority. To avoid punishment, Mr Ogi is willing to draw under the leader's command, strengthening his position in the clan by this added "magic." As such, Mr Ogi becomes the first *court painter* in history: the very first artist in the prehistory of mankind is immediately forced to dedicate his work to ruling powers to protect his position within the social context that he is implicated in.[4] From that initial historical moment, Sinclair concludes that art has always been complicit with power and has never been able to escape the interests of its ruling classes, thus coining the slogan "All art is propaganda."[5] For Sinclair, all art is part of the performance of power.

Art historian Toby Clark makes a similar assessment, when he states that "the use of art in the service of politics has a deep and enduring history." He explains that "[r]ulers of the city-states, kingdoms, and empires of the ancient world used art at a monumental scale to reiterate their power, glorify their victories, or to intimidate and defame their enemies."[6] We notice in the comment of Clark immediately that what he refers to as "monumental scale," is not limited to visual art in terms of sculpture or painting alone, but encompasses the architectural settings in which art is displayed as one of many signifiers of power. Architecture is here an example of an ancient "interface" through which art is presented, activated, and validated. Most thinkers that have engaged in the articulation of what we know today as modern art have made similar assessments; from the Swiss philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau to modernist art critic Clement Greenberg. Each of them recognize the historical dependency and servitude of art in relation to dominant structures of power; they support the idea that art historically always propagandized on behalf of a ruling power, but simultaneously argue for a possibility of art to gain a form of "freedom," or even "autonomy."

4 Upton Sinclair, *MammonArt* (San Diego: Simon Publications, 2003), pp. 1–7.
5 Ibid., p. 9.
6 Toby Clark, *Art and Propaganda in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Harry N. Abrams Inc. Publishers, 1997), p. 9.

This historical dependency of art stands in stark contrast with the popular and contemporary conception of art as a form of expression that is synonymous to freedom. The shock concerning works of art that have been used as propaganda has much to do with the societal ideals that are invested in the idea of art as something that expresses something "more" or "higher" than politics, most certainly in the context of modern democracy. But if mankind has always propagandized and art has always been part of this process, how did the general assumption of art as an expression of freedom or even autonomy come about? Somewhere in the process, art must have been "liberated" from this servitude, from its condition of being a tool of propagandization. This idea that a true art is a free art is essentially the heritage of the Enlightenment and the rise of modernity. It is in the establishment of the modern nation-state that the idea of autonomy was articulated, both for the citizenry at large and for art. This notion of autonomy, we will see, is what we associate with the concept of artistic freedom, and it is this artistic freedom with which we generally – and as we will see, mistakenly – tend to separate propaganda art from modern art.

To understand the idea of art as something that is or should be detached form political instrumentalization, we begin by discussing the work of Rousseau, who, rather than being a proponent of art, was skeptical of its subservience to ruling power. Rousseau's defense of ignorance against the Enlightenment was rooted in his belief that an "unmediated or natural perception of the world is possible."[7] In his famous text *The Social Contract, or Of the Social Contract, or Principles of Political Law* (1762), he revolted against what he considered the "particular interest" that would come as a consequence of the rationalist world view of the Enlightenment, against which he posited the importance of the "general will," which he sought in nature and the social construct of primitive man.[8] When the general will would triumph, the "sovereign" would no longer be the single ruler, but be transposed by the general will of the peoples separated from and in control of the government.[9] The outcome is what he describes as "civil society," which would establish a balance between "natural right and political right," between "man and citizen," in order to guarantee the common good.[10]

Rousseau's relation to art was sharpened through polemics with Enlightenment thinkers, most importantly in his text *Discourse on the*

7 Terence E. Marshal, "Rousseau and the Enlightenment," *Political Theory*, Vol. 6, No. 4, Special Issue: Jean-Jacques Rousseau (Nov. 1978): pp. 421–55, at p. 423.
8 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Rousseau's Social Contract Etc.* (London/Toronto: J.M. Dent & Sons; New York: E.P. Dutton & Co, 1923), p. 22.
9 Ibid., p. 16.
10 Victor Gourevitch, "Rousseau on the Arts and Sciences," *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 69, No. 20 (Nov. 9, 1972): pp. 737–75, at p. 753.

Arts and Sciences (1750). In this work, Rousseau argues that the proponents of the arts and sciences in society had become the prime symptoms of its moral corruption. Europe, which in Rousseau's view had "relapsed into barbarism" after the Dark Ages in its self-perception of being "highly enlightened," claimed that "scientific jargon, more despicable than mere ignorance, had usurped the name of knowledge, and opposed an almost invincible obstacle to its restoration."[11] The arts and sciences embodied, in Rousseau's eyes, the decay of true human nature, its innocence, virtue, and "happy ignorance"[12]:

> So long as government and law provide for the security and well-being of men in their common life, the arts, literature and the sciences, less despotic though perhaps more powerful, fling garlands of flowers over the chains which weigh them down. They stifle in men's breasts that sense of original liberty, for which they seem to have been born; cause them to love their own slavery, and so make of them what is called a civilized people.[13]

Rousseau argued that it was the arts and sciences that served the power and legitimacy of the despots, and in return for their service, they gained their protection and status. As such, the arts and sciences were nothing but a glorification of a world still in chains, a people of the Dark Ages decorated with a veil of cultivation to hide their actual enslavement.[14] Rousseau, instead, argued that one needed to look not at the philosophers and artists, who claimed the knowledge of truth, but at the "laborer," where one would find "strength and vigor of the body," for he believed that "[b]efore art had molded our behavior, and taught our passions to speak an artificial language, our morals were rude but natural."[15] Art and sciences represented a dangerous skepticism that repressed the ignorance and virtue located in the common man and suppressed its true knowledge. The artist, addicted to applause and luxury, was himself in chains, and as such not capable of contributing to the common good of society. The only true recompense, if anything, should be the "happiness of the peoples they have enlightened by their wisdom," but as "long as power alone is on one side, and knowledge and understanding is on the other, the learned will seldom make great objects their study, princes will still more rarely do great actions, and

11 Rousseau, *Rousseau's Social Contract Etc.*, p. 130.
12 Ibid., p. 136.
13 Ibid., pp. 130–31.
14 Victor Gourevitch writes in this regard: "In societies where judgments are under the sway of public opinion and private interests, people cease to trust their taste and defer, instead, to what is approved by those who are supposed to know better: the great, the rich, the artists." Gourevitch, "Rousseau on the Arts and Sciences," p. 741.
15 Rousseau, *Rousseau's Social Contract Etc.*, p. 132.

the peoples will continue to be, as they are, mean, corrupt and miserable."[16] While Rousseau does not speak explicitly of propaganda, his description of the arts serving as a veil to the benefit of ruling powers, a tool that inscribes its specific class interests upon the societal realm, comes very close to what we understand as a description of propaganda art.[17]

Rousseau's died before the French Revolution and a personality cult would develop around his legacy. While at first this cult mainly centered on his literary work, from 1789 on his concept of the general will gained more and more traction as the political counterpoint to the constitutional monarchy of king Louis XVI and as a tool to legitimize the new revolutionary government.[18] It was especially the Republican "Jacobin Club" that strove to establish a republic to implement the ideals of rational government set forward by the Enlightenment thinkers, which would paradoxically come to embrace Rousseau's ideas, most famously in the figure of French lawyer and politician Maximilien Robespierre. In 1789, the Jacobin Club disposed Louis XVI, and established a people's revolutionary government that would, in the course of history, be heavily debated both because of the foundational moment of the modern state it initiated, as well as the "Reign of Terror" it at the same time imposed.[19]

This possibility of acquiring a new, "liberating" kind of dependency is possibly best exemplified through the work of painter Jacques-Louis David. David was a member of the Jacobin Club and a dedicated supporter of Robespierre and the French Revolution. In the years preceding the overthrow of the *ancien régime,* his studio was a gathering place for political, intellectual, and social leaders of the day.[20] During the radical phase of the revolution, he had a seat in the National Convention and liaisons with the Revolutionary Tribunal. David himself

16 Ibid., p. 153.

17 Rousseau's alternative for an art that once liberated from its subservience to the despot could contribute to the common good was located in his ideal of the public theater festival: "The closest he [Rousseau] comes to a suggestion about the role the arts might play in a society with good morals is the recommendation that Geneva, instead of introducing a permanent theater, establish public festivals in which all would participate and which would provide joyous occasions on which everyone is both actor and spectator, fully himself and fully a member of the community, where all class distinctions are forgotten and all do and hold everything in common." Gourevitch, "Rousseau on the Arts and Sciences," p. 743. It is interesting to keep this proposition in mind when we discuss the emergence of mass cultural manifestations in the form of the *Proletkult* art groups – Proletarian Culture – in the years of the Russian Revolution below.

18 Gordon H. McNeil, "The Cult of Rousseau and the French Revolution," Journal of the History of Ideas, Vol. 6, No. 2 (Apr. 1945): pp. 197–212.

19 Albert Soboul, "Robespierre and the Popular Movement of 1793–4," *Past & Present*, No. 5 (May 1954): pp.54–70. Discussions on the legitimacy of the Reign of Terror continues up unto today, in which right-wing and conservative thinkers tend to associate it with the inherent violent nature of the left, whereas left-wing and revolutionary thinkers interpret it as a form of popular self-defense against the systemic violence imposed by the sovereign. See also: Sophie Wahnich, *In Defence of the Terror* (London/New York: Verso, 2015).

20 For a detailed assessment of David's role in the French Revolution, see: Warren Roberts, *Jacques Louis David: Revolutionary Artist* (Chapel Hill/London: The University of Carolina Press, 1989).

was elected as a member of the Committee of Public Safety, which identified the counterrevolutionaries that the Revolutionary Tribunal would persecute and kill during the Reign of Terror.[21] He was far from the only artist who would join the revolution. Amongst young artists and students, who were not benefiting from the highly exclusive and privileged position of a minority of artists that served the upper classes and monarchy, and who tended to marry into other rich artist families from one generation to the other, the revolution was a chance to demand equality of artistic opportunity. Art historian David L. Dowd even speaks of the involvement of artists such as David and his less known comrade Antoine-François Sergent, in terms of "propagandists":

> The revolutionary leaders, impelled by artist-politicians like David and Sergent, established a system of financial encouragement of painters of talent and inaugurated largescale public works projects to feed the artists as well as to provide effective revolutionary propaganda. Many painters were employed for the *fêtes nationales* of the Revolution, and these propaganda demonstrations helped many of them to survive. Local authorities at the departmental, district, and communal levels as well as the popular societies also commissioned innumerable works of art. Allegorical paintings of Liberty and Equality, scenes of military victories and "great days" of the Revolution, representations of heroes and martyrs of the First French Republic, classic canvases depicting republican Greece and Rome, as well as appropriate decorations for public buildings, were ordered.[22]

Now that the arts gained their part in the general will as represented by the revolutionary government, their support did not just come from private patronage, but through public subsidies; the breakdown of academic barriers increased the number of female artists in the academies during the revolution; new public cultural institutions such as the Louvre Museum, the Museum of French Monuments, and the National Jury of Arts were founded; and overall, after the revolution, the status of artists in society had changed.[23] Through the work and politics of

21 David L. Dowd, "Jacques-Louis David, Artist Member of the Committee of General Security," *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 57, No. 4 (Jul. 1952): pp. 871–92.

22 David L. Dowd, "The French Revolution and the Painters," *French Historical Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (1959): pp. 127–48, at p. 143.

23 With respect to the foundation of the new museums Idzerda notes a great dilemma of the new revolutionary government, which on one hand wanted to protect and elevate the arts in support of the common good, but on the other hand were faced with an artistic heritage that had largely been commissioned and financed by the ancien régime. As a response, in 1790, a Monuments Commission (later followed by the Temporary Arts Commission) was established comprising David and others, who were to designate works of art that were worthy of preservation by the

the artists in the revolution, a level of social equality was achieved that changed the role of the artists as servants or superior craftsmen into one recognized as fundamental to the expression of the general will.[24] Art propagated the revolution, but the artist was – embodied in the figure of David – also an inherent part of the revolution, among others through their role in developing the countless revolutionary festivals that were to propagate the new revolutionary calendar and the rites of the new "secular religion" of the Republic upon its populations.[25] This was not without risks, the death of Robespierre in 1794 under the same guillotine to which he and David had sent the enemies of their revolution became a historic paradigm of the "revolution eats its own children." This paradigm will resurface in the second section of this chapter when we will discuss the role of artists in the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia. But let us first see how the liberation of art from despotic instrumentalization was to be elaborated further.

In the years of the French Revolution, the German philosopher Immanuel Kant resided in the small Prussian town of Königsberg, currently known as Kaliningrad. He was an open supporter of the Jacobins, which was slightly paradoxical as he was simultaneously also a pacifist and convinced of the moral imperative to obey the law.[26] While inspired by the moral philosophy of Rousseau, Kant did not believe humankind could find morality in and of itself – that is to say, by embracing its "primitive" or "innocent" nature – but rather through the furthering of rational social organizations in which all would be subject to the same set of laws.The work of Kant that concerns us primarily is the *Critique of Judgement* (1790), in which he sets out to define the conditions for aesthetic judgement; not just in relation to "fine art" but to aesthetic objects in the widest sense, predominantly in nature.

In his elaboration of aesthetic sensibility, Kant argues that while the notion of taste is crucial in the process of judging a specific object, this taste cannot be one of mere enjoyment or sensation. Rather, Kant claims, "[t]aste is the ability to judge an object, or a way of presenting it, by means of a liking or disliking *devoid of all interest*," and only such object of liking can be called "beautiful."[27] Subsequently, what brings a universal judgment of aesthetics about is a "subjective purposiveness,"[28] meaning that the purpose at hand is not a functional one, but one that relates back to its own "autonomy."[29] As mentioned, the beauty of the object for Kant is not necessarily the object of art. Nonetheless, Kant's conception of a "purposeless purpose" of the aesthetic experience would become applied to art in the course of history; as an explanation and legitimization of art's autonomy and its search for the sublime.[30] Kant's own view of the essence of art would neither propagate the instrumental logic of elite interests, nor that of a revolutionary movement – its laws are of a different kind. This is crucial, as the idea that Kantian aesthetics are the equivalent of the aesthetics of art, laid the very foundation for centuries of discussion about the definition of the "freedom" of art: not just in terms of the rights to expression or the need to stand outside of political instrumentalization and its rational interest; it solidified the idea that outside the Kantian notion of autonomy and its purposeless purpose we cannot speak of something in terms of art at all.[31]

Kant himself claims that "we should not call anything art except a production through freedom, i.e., through a power of choice that bases its acts on reason."[32] Nonetheless, this notion of the *freedom of art* is not the same as an *autonomy of art*. For Kant, autonomy lies in the aesthetic experience – maybe even in the aesthetic experience of an artwork – but not necessarily *within the artwork itself*.[33] This does

state, whereas others were to be publicly destroyed. This iconoclasm was formally sanctioned by the state, and the massive mobilization that resulted from it made it nearly impossible to keep track of public monuments and sculptures that were destroyed in mass campaigns of the communes. The commissions attempted to balance the paradox between the need for destruction and preservation by initiating public destructions of art works as festivities on one hand, and moving designated works to be protected within the new museums. This brings Idzerda to observe that "[i]t seems probable that when these works were seen in the museum, torn out of their cultural context, they were regarded only as 'art'; their significance as tokens, symbols, or mana had been drained away because of their placement in an artificial situation, a strange milieu," concluding that "the public museum may be said to have originated as both an instrument of and a result of iconoclasm." Stanley J. Idzerda, "Iconoclasm during the French Revolution," The American Historical Review, Vol. 60, No. 1 (Oct. 1954): pp. 13–26, at p. 24.

24 Dowd, "The French Revolution and the Painters," p. 154.

25 Mona Ozouf, *Festivals and the French Revolution* (Cambridge/London: Harvard University Press, 1988).

26 Sidney Axinn, "Kant, Authority, and the French Revolution," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 32, No. 3 (Jul.–Sep. 1971): pp. 423–32.

27 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987), p. 53.

28 Ibid., p. 66.

29 Ibid., p. 25.

30 The sublime, different from beauty, is for Kant not what provokes contemplation, but rather that which supersedes our capacity of comparison. It is a "magnitude that is equal only to itself," but, provoking both fright and awe in the subject, it "proves that the mind has a power surpassing any standard of sense." Whereas Kant emphasizes grand and terrifying events in nature that provoke such experiences of the sublime, he at the same time perceives the experience of the sublime as a proof of the human mind's capacity to conceptualize even infinity: an incalculable experience can still be captured in the realm of the senses, of aesthetic experience, leading him to the observation that this means that the human mind within itself holds a power that is "supersensible." Ibid., pp. 105, 106.

31 Haskins points out that the paradox in the notion of purposeless purpose is that its purpose is exactly to define what the autonomy of art is in relation to that which it is not. In relation to historians and critics who followed a neo-Kantian paradigm of artistic autonomy, such as the American critic Clement Greenberg, she introduces the notion of "instrumental autonomism," which "emphasizes the work of art's distinctive capacity, as an object of value, to do something not done, or not done the same way, by other kind of objects." In other words, the need to make a distinction between art's autonomy and the realm of instrumental reason is not so much devoid of purpose, but rather defines a different purpose of art all together: "[W]hile strict autonomism presupposes that artistic value is necessarily a form of intrinsic, as opposed to instrumental value, instrumental autonomism permits works of art to be valuable, as works of art, both intrinsically and instrumentally." We will see this more specifically in the employment of autonomous art in the Cold War. Casey Haskins, "Kant and the Autonomy of Art," The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, Vol. 47, No. 1 (Winter 1981): pp.43–55, at p. 43.

32 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, p. 170.

33 As Jean-Marie Schaeffer explains, Kant considers art always compromised when it comes to engaging in a pure aesthetic judgement due to the added intentions of the artist: "Any human

not mean that fine art knows no constraints in Kant's view. There is a necessary "mechanism" that forms the body – the academic form – in which an idea manifests itself and without which the "free spirit" of art would evaporate.[34] This seemingly contradictory process of academic necessity versus the freedom of art's spirit is explained by Kant in analogy to nature: "Nature, we say, is beautiful if it also looks like art; and art can be called fine art only if we are conscious that it is art while yet it looks to us like nature."[35] Fine art must look like nature, even though we are aware that it is art. That which connects the seeming paradox between reason and nature is the figure of the genius. For the artist-genius cannot be merely contained within his training: "Nature, through genius, prescribes the rule not to science but to art, and this also only insofar as the art is to be fine art."[36] The artist's skill is thus only partly academic in nature, for essentially, it is nature that expresses is beauty through the academic discipline of the artist:

> Genius can only provide rich *material* for products of fine art; processing this material and giving it *form* requires talent that is academically trained, so that it may be used in a way that can stand the test of the power of judgment.[37]

When trying to understand the concept of modern art, it is crucial to keep in mind the key terms that Kant introduces here: for it is through the notions of aesthetic autonomy and freedom, aesthetic sensibility and the sublime, as well as the emphasis on the academy and the notion of the artist-genius, that modern art was founded. It was a practice of art that was made possible through revolutionary tendencies from the Enlightenment to the French Revolution, but that simultaneously departed from its instrumental reason and gained its relative independence.

Before we attempt to explore how Rousseau's plea for a liberation of art from its subservience to despots and Kant's translation of this agency into the notion of artistic freedom has affected the history of modern propaganda art, there is a final historical concept that

creativity, whether artisanal or belonging to the fine arts, can be referred to a determinate intention (*Absicht*). Thus if we experience the finality in a work of art, this is in conformity of our expectations, since we know that such an object corresponds to a specific end, namely the one that guided its creator." On the contrary, Schaeffer continues, "We do not posit such an intention for natural objects, and that is why, when they manifest a finality, it is a finality without representation of a specific end, giving rise to pure aesthetic experience". Jean-Marie Schaeffer, *Art of the Modern Age: Philosophy of Art from Kant to Heidegger* (Princeton/New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000), pp. 33–34, 35.

34 Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, p. 171.
35 Ibid., p. 174.
36 Ibid., p. 175.
37 Ibid., p. 178.

is important for us to mention: the originally military concept of the "avant-garde," which usage as part of the canon of modernity, according to literary critic and professor of comparative literature Matei Calinescu, equally "started in the aftermath of the French Revolution."[38]

The ideas of the French political and economic theorist Henri de Saint-Simon developed his ideas about the avant-garde in the aftermath of the French Revolution. Originally known as the "duke" of Saint-Simon, he had rejected his aristocratic status after returning from his voluntary participation in a cavalry regiment in the year 1779 of the American Revolutionary War. The rejection of hereditary privilege followed his ideals of a new society for the industrial age, inspired both by the American Revolutionary War and the French Revolution, but different from Rousseau and Kant, he emphasized the possibility of furthering the human cause by embracing and expanding the possibilities offered by the First Industrial Revolution.[39] Saint-Simon's later classification as a utopian philosopher was strengthened by his book *Système Industriel* (1825), in which he espoused his vision of the advancement of the industrial age that would be led by a new type of scientist who would help the development of society and the possibility of a global peace.[40]

Later in his life, Saint-Simon's approach to the "engineering" of society in industrial terms would shift from a "mechanistic philosophy of nature popularized in France during the Enlightenment under the influence of Newtonian thought" to a "Romantic idea of society as a kind of living organism."[41] He sought a new role of artists in society by "placing them at the head of an elite administrative trinity consisting of artists, scientists, and industrialists-artisans."[42] In a fictional dialogue between the artist and the scientist from his foundational text *L'artiste, le savant et l'industriel* (1824) – either co-written or ghostwritten by Saint-Simon's disciple and friend Olinde Rodrigues – the artist makes a plea for the unification of the three forces of art, science,

38 Matei Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1987), p. 101.
39 Saint-Simon's vision of a new league of nations would prove to be timely. See, for example: Elliot H. Polinger, "Saint Simon, The Utopian Precursor of the League of Nations," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 4, No. 4 (Oct. 1943): pp. 475–83, at p. 475.
40 Saint-Simon's ideas in this regard have retrospectively been argued to be a kind of Marxism *avant la lettre*. But whereas Saint-Simon has often been referenced as the "Father of Socialism," his own ideas were strongly influenced by liberal philosophy, in which the rationale of free exchange would naturally rid the idlers from the new industrial society for the common good of all. Nonetheless, his clear articulation of a conflict of classes and belief in industrial progress and the inevitability of a post-statist political and economic paradigm that would benefit the world at large shows clear parallels, and after the 1917 Bolshevik revolution, Lenin personally sanctioned a statue to be erected in Saint-Simon's name. For an early study on Saint-Simon and Marx, see Alice M. MacIver, "Saint Simon and His Influence on Karl Marx," *Economica*, No. 6 (October 1922): pp. 238–45.
41 Donald D. Egbert, "The Idea of the Avant-Garde in Art and Politics," *Leonardo*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (Jan. 1970): pp. 75–86, at p. 76.
42 Ibid.

and industry, which he considers crucial for human progress, for "Qui pourrait satisfaire aux besoins de l'homme, ou lui procurer les jouissances qui sont aussi des besoins pour lui, si les arts, l'industrie, les sciences, venaient tout à coup à disparaître?"[43] Not the government, but the union between these forces was to direct a new society, for they "peuvent marcher d'elles-mêmes, et sans lesquelles rien ne pourrait marcher."[44] This new union is what holds the power to advance the general wellbeing of society. In the case of the artist, that means that the ideal world they inhabited could no longer be an exclusive domain, but should serve the public cause. The artist in Saint-Simon's dialogue concluded that:

> C'est nous, artistes, qui vous servirons d'avant-garde; la puissance des arts est en effet la plus immédiate et la plus rapide. Nous avons des armes de toute espèce: quand nous voulons répandre des idées neuves parmi les hommes nous les inscrivons sur le marbre ou sur la toile; nous les popularisons par la poésie et le chant; nous employons tour à tour la lyre ou le galoubet, l'ode ou la chanson, l'histoire ou le roman; la scène dramatique nous est ouverte, et c'est là surtout que nous exerçons une influence électrique et victorieuse. Nous nous adressons à l'imagination et aux sentiments de l'homme nous devons donc exercer toujours l'action la plus vive et la plus décisive; et si aujourd'hui notre rôle paraît nul ou au moins très-secondaire, c'est qu'il manquait aux arts ce qui est essentiel à leur énergie et à leurs succès, une impulsion commune et une idée générale.[45]

As we can see, Saint-Simon in some ways developed Rousseau's ideas on the possible role of the artists by putting their imagination to service as an avant-garde of the common good; in the words of Calinescu: "To Saint-Simon, the artist is the "man of imagination" and, as such, he is capable not only of foreseeing the future but also of creating it."[46] Different from Rousseau, however, Saint-Simon pushed the possibility of a massive rational organization of society to its furthest consequence, by concentrating on the triple powers represented by the artists, scientists, and industrialists-artisans. Saint-Simon rejected what had become known as "l'art pour l'art" – an "art for art's sake," a popular concept which echoed Kant's idea of the "purposeless purpose" of

43 Henri de Saint-Simon, Barthélemy Prosper Enfantin, *Oeuvres de Saint-Simon* (Paris: Librairie de la Société des Gens de Lettres, 1875), p. 202.
44 Ibid., p. 205.
45 Ibid., pp. 210–11.
46 Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity*, p. 102.

aesthetic experience.[47] The introduction of the concept of avant-garde represented what was at stake when the artists would take their proper role in advancing modernity: the objective of not merely representing and propagating, but directly shaping and transforming society through the faculty of art. Although that does not necessarily mean that modernity and the avant-garde can be conflated; Calinescu argues that "The avant-garde is in every respect more radical than modernity,"[48] and concludes: "It is quite clear that the avant-garde would have been hardly conceivable in the absence of a distinct and fully developed consciousness of modernity; however, such an acknowledgment does not warrant the confusion of modernity or modernism with the avant-garde [..]."[49]

What we have seen from Rousseau to Kant and Saint-Simon, is how in mere half a century fueled by a short-lived but profound revolution, a series of concepts were introduced that up until today continue to define our understanding of Western modern art. Notions such as the freedom of art, its autonomy, the artist-genius, the sublime, and the overall idea that the specific sensibilities of art provide an exceptional status that might be used for the betterment of society, if not in the form of an avant-garde, have become an inherent part of our understanding of modern art. Whereas we should shy away from imposing the term propaganda too easily on a timeframe in which it was not in common use, we see that the dilemma between free and instrumentalized art, between "autonomous" and "propaganda art" was already present.

The crises and revolutions sweeping throughout Europe up until the 20th century and the rise of modern technology and industry were a chance to redefine the relation of art to life. New structures of power – and ideological and organizational visions of how to distribute and apply this power – also made a new art possible. The remnants of the autocratic institutions that heralded an art of privilege and exception were to be destroyed for a new world *and* a new art to be born

For example, the futurists, in the spirit of the imperialist, anti-democratic, and patriarchal politics of Mussolini's fascism, famously

47 According to Rose Frances Egan, the origins of the concept of "l'art pour l'art," would have first been uttered in 1804 by the French writer, politician, and journalist Benjamin Constant, who was strongly influenced by German Romanticism. Writing on a meeting with a student of the German philosopher Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, who presented him his work on Kant's aesthetics, Constant writes: "Son travail sur l'Esthétique de Kant a des idées très energiques. L'art pour I'art, sans but, car tout but dénature l'art. Mais I'art atteint un but qu'il n'a pas." Thus grounding the concept historically as an interpretation of Kant's paradigm of art's "purposeless purpose." Rose Frances Egan, The Genesis of the Theory of "Art for Art's Sake" in Germany and in England (Northampton/Paris: Departments of Modern Languages of Smith College, 1921), pp. 10–11.
48 Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity*, p. 96.
49 Ibid., pp. 96-97.

declared their "intend to liberate [...] [Italy] from the countless museums that have covered it like so many cemeteries,"[50] and embraced what they regarded as the cleansing effects of war and technology: "We intend to glorify war – the only hygiene of the world – militarism, patriotism, the destructive gesture of the anarchists, beautiful ideas worth dying for, and contempt for women."[51] By contrast, the Berlin dadaists, strongly allied with German Bolshevism, accused expressionism of operating under the pretext of being "propaganda for the soul" preaching a "comfortable life free from content or strife."[52] In their unambiguous embrace of the "muddle of noises, colors and spiritual rhythms" that composed daily modern urban life, the dadaists declared themselves as a new art movement in which even the businessman could be a creator and "every man is chairman and every man can have his say in artistic matters."[53]

As different as these avant-garde movements were in their ideological orientation, they were all marked by their willingness to embrace and translate the ideas of political revolution into an artistic one and vice versa.

But let us first make three observations based on this first summary of the origins of the concept of modern art:

- The age of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution, gave rise to a conflicting set of concepts that differentiated art from its undifferentiated unity with the ruling powers: the politics of modernity created the foundation for our current conception of modern art;
- The different ideas that fueled the revolution and its outcomes resulted in different structures of power, each of which impacted the practice and outcomes of art differently: a process in which we perceive a continuous relationship between different forms of power and different artistic forms;
- The age of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution, further gave rise to conflicting ideals of how artistic independence was to be gained concretely in relation to new structures of power: either by siding with popular movements (Rousseau, David), by differentiating itself specifically from the realm of political instrumentalization and claiming autonomy of aesthetic experience and freedom of art (Kant), or to form a vanguard of modernity (Saint-Simon).

50 Filippo Marinetti, "The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism," in Lawrence Rainey, Christine Poggi, Laura Wittman (eds.), *Futurism: An Anthology* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2009), p. 52.
51 Ibid., p. 51.
52 Richard Hülsebeck, "First German Dada Manifesto," in Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (eds.), *Art in Theory: 1900-1990* (Oxford/Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1995), p. 254.
53 Ibid., p. 255.

These three conflicting ideals will guide our discussion in the following three sections. Let us now first explore more concretely how artistic revolutionary theories of the politicization of modern art tested the outer limits of Saint-Simon's conception of the avant-garde of the industrial society through the notion of *Avant-Garde Propaganda Art*.

2.2 AVANT-GARDE PROPAGANDA ART

From cubism to futurism, from dadaism to constructivism, the early twentieth century brought about political changes and revolutionary tendencies that generated a variety of avant-garde movements. Of our specific interest are those that articulated their theory and practice in relation to the political realm and engaged with the notion of "propaganda." In no other context than the Russian Bolshevik Revolution this was done with the same rigor and political implications, and in no other context was the complex relation between avant-garde and subsequent "totalitarian art" more explicit.

The First World War of 1914–18 did not only give birth to the first modern propaganda apparatus in the heart of British empire, it also created the conditions that sparked the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution, resulting in the establishment of the Soviet Union, bound to become the main political and ideological challenger of Western capitalist democracy. Similar to the French Revolution, the Bolshevik October Revolution was simultaneously a political and a cultural revolution. Lenin's article "Party Organization and Party Literature" (1905) was foundational for the revolution's perspective on the relation between the Party and the arts. In the text, written in the year of the general strike when the Bolsheviks were not yet in power, Lenin calls for taking literature under party control, demanding that "[n]ewspapers must become the organs of the various party organizations, and their writers must by all means become members of these organizations." As a consequence, "[p]ublishing and distributing centers, bookshops and reading-rooms, libraries and similar establishments—must all be under party control."[54] At the same time, Lenin emphasizes that outside of the party "[e]veryone is free to write and say whatever he likes, without any restrictions." Within the context of the party, however, Lenin demands the same freedom to "expel members who use the name of the party to advocate anti-party views."[55]

Essentially, Lenin questions the very notion of artistic freedom, as he claims that "[t]here can be no real and effective 'freedom' in a society based on the power of money, in a society in which the masses of working people live in poverty and the handful of rich live like parasites." In a context very different from Rousseau and Robespierre, Lenin clearly perceived that a shift to a revolutionary, egalitarian society also entailed a shift in the role of the arts: rather than reducing the notion of artistic freedom to the limited privilege of serving the tsarist regime

54 Vladimir Lenin, *Lenin Collected Works*, Vol. 10 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1965), pp. 44–49.
55 Ibid.

and its ruling feudal classes, a new, genuine freedom loomed, the consequence of the artist's dedication to the proletarian cause.

In 1918, a year after the Bosheviks took power, Lenin published his decree "The Removal of Monuments Erected in Honour of the Tsars and their Servants and the Production of Projects for Monuments to the Russian Socialist Revolution," which called for the erection of "busts or full-length figures, perhaps bas-reliefs" that would depict "predecessors of socialism or its theoreticians and fighters, as well as those luminaries of philosophical thought, science, art and so forth, who, while not having direct relevance to socialism, were genuine heroes of culture."[56] Lenin had organized his list of people to be immortalized in monumental statues in categories varying from "Revolutionaries and Public Figures" which included Robespierre, Saint-Simon, Marx and Engels, "Writers and Poets," such as Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, and Pushkin, as well as "Philosophers and Scientists," "Artists," and "Actors."[57] Anatoly Lunacharsky, the first Soviet People's Commissar of Education was in charge of bringing the decree into practice. Lenin encouraged the monuments to be made of temporary materials, and only to represent dead people, strongly opposing the visualization of living Soviets, including himself.[58] Lenin did not "prescribe the style that the statues should take; sculptors were given a free hand and thus the program also served as a forum for discussion about the virtues of different styles."[59]

Lenin regarded art first of all as a propaganda tool for mass education that could serve in tackling the eighty percent illiteracy rate in his country: art was to build upon the best achievements of the past – the selection of celebrated figures to be monumentalized was an indication of what these achievements were in his eyes – and in the process raise the cultural standards of the masses.[60] In his 1920 "Rough Draft of a Resolution on Proletarian Culture" Lenin wrote:

> Not the *invention* of a new proletarian culture, but the *development* of the best models, traditions and results of the *existing* culture, *from the point of view* of the Marxist world outlook and the conditions of life and struggle of the proletariat in the period of its dictatorship.[61]

In Lenin's ideal of mass education combined with his rather conservative dictate of singular monumental figures to be inserted into the public domain to elevate the masses, we may discern his characteristic pragmatism: knowing fully well that the Soviet Union, devastated by the First World War and the subsequent Civil War, was not yet in any condition to radically re-invent its public institutions, he leaned on existing methodologies that he wished to see cautiously transformed into the new revolutionary reality.

56 Victoria E. Bonnell, *Iconography of Power* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 1999), p. 138.
57 Vladimir Lenin, *Lenin on Literature and Art* (Maryland: Wildside Press, 2008), p. 205.
58 Bonnell, *Iconography of Power*, p. 138.
59 Clark, *Art and Propaganda in the 20th Century*, p. 79.
60 Ibid., p. 76.
61 Vladimir Lenin, *Lenin Collected Works*, Vol. 42 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1971), p. 217

Lenin considered propaganda to be fundamentally different from indoctrination. Propaganda was "designed to mobilize youth and adults for important social and economic tasks,"[62] whereas indoctrination in the form of "memorization or reiteration of Marxist slogans and phrases" seemed to him "unintelligent and unproductive."[63] Lenin essentially considered propaganda to be mass education in action. His concept of education rejected the Enlightenment belief that reason was a self-emancipating force, nor did he believe in Tolstoy's Rousseauian rejection of educational institutions as a corruption of the spontaneous nature of mankind: according to Lenin, education was political in nature, as political revolution preceded cultural development. A revolutionary political consciousness would allow for the construction of socialism and hence the advancement of education. Propaganda – combining the dissemination of ideas with mobilization for direct action – was exactly the type of education that the still fragile Soviet Union needed.[64]

The post-revolutionary period saw a rise of different cultural groups engaged in *agitprop* (agitational propaganda), which organized "street festivals and mass-action dramas" stressing popular involvement and deriving their material both from "festivals of the French Revolution" and "Russian Orthodox ceremonial processions with the carnivalesque styles of folk entertainment, incorporating clowns, life-size puppets, street criers, and circus acrobats as well as the Bolshoi Theatre."[65] During the third anniversary of the October revolution, cultural groups organized a reenactment of the storming of the Winter Place performed by a cast of thousands: a mass theater that re-staged the foundational moment of the Soviet Union. However, groups that deviated too far from the party line would be put back under party control. For example, Proletkult – the Proletarian cultural-educational organization – founded as a result of a 1917 conference organized by Lunacharsky, consisted of more than three hundred groups with over

62 Frederic Lilge, "Lenin and the Politics of Education," *Slavic Review*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (Jun. 1968): pp. 230–57, at p. 255.
63 Ibid., p. 256.
64 Ibid.
65 Clark, *Art and Propaganda in the 20th Century*, p. 77.

four hundred thousand members aimed at generating working class culture from the grassroots.[66] Many of the large cultural events after the October Revolution had been their initiative. But the wish of Proletkult organizers to give autonomous direction to the cultural life of the Soviet Union clashed with the principles that Lenin had laid out in *Party Organization and Party Literature*, as he considered their claim to autonomy to be a "separatist" tendency.[67] Lenin's hostility to the Proletkults seems somewhat paradoxical, due to its effective investment in developing a cultural practice from direct worker participation, but had much to do with his long residing conflict with former Bolshevik member and co-founder of Proletkult Alexander Bogdanov. Whereas Lenin believed that political and economic revolution had to precede cultural revolution – propaganda was the means through which to achieve that process, to politicize *through* culture before culturalizing the country as such – Bogdanov believed that proletarian culture could precede and guide these necessary changes through "fraternal solidarity, the cooperative spirit and work rhythm of human labor in large-scale enterprises."[68]

Despite his own more conservative preferences for figurative monumentalism, Lenin allowed in the early days of the revolution a relative cultural pluriformity that generated a variety of avant-garde movements loyal to the Bolshevik Party line to flourish. While briefly discussing some of the most prominent examples, we will keep in mind Lenin's propaganda paradigm with regard to the role he saw for art in the new Soviet Union.

At the foundation of the Russian avant-garde that would come to pledge support, if not full loyalty, to the Bolsheviks we find the work of the painter Kazimir Malevich. Departing from European avant-garde movements invested in the relation between the construction of the image and technological change, such as the cubists and futurists, Malevich established the concept of "suprematism," which formed a landmark for the pre-Soviet avant-garde. Rejecting figuration in its totality, Malevich set out to establish an art of pure "non-objective" sensation, represented by geometric shapes, of which the most famous example was inevitably the *Black Square* (1914–15). In his manifesto "From Cubism and Futurism to Suprematism: The New Painterly Realism,"

66 In the words of McKenzie Wark, "Proletkult created a network of studios in both the arts and the sciences (although they worked best in the arts). The aim was self-governed activity on the part of workers rather than propaganda or consciousness raising. Proletkult sought liberation from fetishes such as authority, subjectivity, and property. Bogdanov even thought this might be easier in Russia, where everyday life was barely touched by bourgeois norms." McKenzie Wark, Molecular Red: Theory for the Anthropocene (London/New York: Verso, 2016), p. 35.

67 Wim Beeren, Marja Bloem, Dorine Mignot (eds.), The Great Utopia: The Russian Avant-Garde 1917–1932 (Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, 1992), p. 79.

68 Ibid., p. 253.

first published in 1915, Malevich declares to have transformed himself to the "zero of form," thrown off the oppression of the academic standard of painting, and progressed toward an "art that advances towards creation as an end in itself and towards domination over the forms of nature."[69] Malevich rejected the imperative of academic figuration as a "primitive" form of expression; instead he called for an embrace of the "new beauty of our modern life," to create "new form," for "[t]he technological side of our age advances further and further ahead, but people try to push art further and further back."[70] While Malevich's text is not explicitly political, it embraces the possibility of a new modern paradigm through which to assess the possibilities of art.

From 1920 onward, Malevich would continue to espouse his views on suprematism during the Lenin years through the UNOVIS group, the Founders of the New Art. As a teacher at the Popular Art Institute in Vitebsk, he and his former student El Lissitzky explored and taught the possibility of "objects to embody ideals rather than to perform social function."[71] This did not exclude utilitarian applications of suprematist aesthetics. El Lissitzky's famous poster *Beat the Whites with the Red Wedge* (1920), for example, which is composed of a large red triangle penetrating a white circle on a black background surrounded by fragmented cubes and rectangles, could easily have been considered a non-objective painting in line with Malevich's suprematist ideals. Lissitzky's expansion of suprematism added to the image its title, essentially its slogan, clarifying that the red wedge symbolizes the revolutionary Bolsheviks, who are penetrating and defeating their White movement opponents during the Russian Civil War. Lissitzky thus merged the development of the visual vocabulary to construct a new world with the propagation of that new world at the same time.

In Lissitzky's text "Suprematism in World Construction" (1920), the artist explains how suprematism brought the possibility of a "reconstruction of life," rejecting the historical subservient role of the artist as "a moralist, as a story-teller, as a court-jester" and instead turning to "the rebuilding of life cast[ing] aside the old concept of nations, classes, patriotisms and imperialism."[72] Just like his former teacher Malevich, Lissitzky believes that the artistic exploration of technology serves this "reconstruction of life" beyond the models that molded the old world, either in the form of academia in art, or in tsarist autocracy in politics.

69 Kazimir Malevich, "From Cubism and Futurism to Suprematism: The New Painterly Realism," in John E. Bowlt (ed.), *Russian Art of the Avant-Garde: Theory and Criticism 1902–1934* (London: Thames and Hudson), pp. 118–19.

70 Ibid., 120–21.

71 Victor Margolin, The Struggle for Utopia (Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 1997), p. 10.

72 El Lissitzky, "Suprematism in World Construction," in Bowlt, *Russian Art of the Avant-Garde*, p. 153.

After the violence of the First World War, Lissitzky writes, the world saw the destruction of the possibility of technology to contribute to the reconstruction of life, but then "came communism and extolled work as the true source of man's heartbeat."[73] For Lissitzky, art has a central role in this process; the task to develop a new language that redirects the relation of humans to the world as its "master-builders," no longer subjected to the raw laws of nature but as the ones that define its laws through revolutionary artistic and political practice:

> The artist's work lies beyond the boundaries of the useful and the useless. It is the revolutionary path along which the whole of creation is striding forward and along which man must also bend his steps. "Artistic work" is but an obstacle on this path and in consequence a counter-revolutionary concept. The private property aspect of creativity must be destroyed, all are creators, and there is no reason of any sort for this division between artists and non-artists.[74]

This introduction of the notion of the master-builder replacing that of the artist is considered a foundational moment of the subsequent movement of constructivism: a shift away from the suprematist ideas that the painting could in and of itself form the legitimate outcome of an artistic process. Lissitzky, sympathetic to suprematism, pushes its potential and arrives at considering its geometric vocabulary as building blocks in which his ideal of the artist as the master-builder of a new world expresses itself. His famous *Prouns* series (1919–24) that began to transform suprematist aesthetics into more three-dimensional depictions that could be associated with architectural and industrial technical drawings are emblematic for his ideal to expand suprematism into the domain of revolutionary industrial engineering. Similarly, we can see this outcome in the work of constructivist artist Vladimir Tatlin and his *Monument to the Third International* (1919–20): a tower in the shape of stacked transparent rotating cylindrical structures meant to facilitate political offices, a radio station, loudspeakers, as well as a platform for public lectures – although Tatlin himself always refrained from the constructivist label. Combining both Lenin's call for a public, educational, and monumental propaganda art, as well as Malevich's and Lissitzky's ideas of a necessary correlation between technology and new forms of art, Tatlin's *Monument*, even though it was never realized, has become a historical symbol of the conditions in which political, artistic, and technological revolution converged. In this work, art

73 Ibid., p. 154.
74 Ibid., p. 158.

actively contributed to the building of a propaganda interface, instead of merely participating in it.[75]

The political and artistic revolutionaries, had defined a new modern paradigm, a revolutionary modernity that separated itself radically from capitalist modernity. Its propaganda, as Lenin had wished, embodied a desire to directly act and serve revolutionary ideals and tasks. Tatlin's *Monument* was as much a celebration of the industrial and technological progress, as it was a public signifier that served concrete dissemination of the Party's views. We can observe a similar ambition to combine sculptural constructivist aesthetics with practical applications in the domain of propaganda in the work of Gustav Klutsis and his *Propaganda Kiosk* (1922), which took the form of temporal public sculptural constructions that combined a platform for public speeches, radio amplification through loudspeakers and distribution channels for revolutionary books and newspapers. In Klutsis's work, the creation of art and the creation of a new propaganda infrastructure are part of one and the same endeavor: the work of art is both a carrier of propaganda, and a tool through which to perform propaganda by its users. In a Marxist sense, in the context of Avant-Garde Propaganda Art, we could say that the border between what used to be the covert substructure of power and its elite ownership versus the overt superstructure of the normative reality this power aimed to construct was lifted. The proletariat, at least in theory, was to be made co-owner of the means of production and performance that define propaganda. In other words, the multi-layered performance of power – its macro and micro-performative dimension – become part of the project of proletarianization: sender and receiver are to operate equally. The macro-performative dimension is defined by the collective seizing of the means of production, and the micro-performative dimension is defined by the process in which the Soviets bring about the process of redistribution in daily self-governance. No longer is the macro-performative defined by elite interest, but by collective interest. At the risk of being reductive, we could roughly say that the different relationship between the macro- and micro-performative dimension in propagandas is characte-

75 Tatlin drafted a proposal together with the painter Dymshits-Tolstaia in a response to Lenin's decree on the erection of new public monuments in June 1918, in which they suggested – contrary to the relatively chaotic manner in which commissions for the monuments were handed out at that moment – a structural involvement of young and revolutionary artists that had been ignored by the old tsarist regime. Rather than repeating the stylistic character of 19th-century public sculpture and monuments, Tatlin and Dymshits-Tolstaia imagined the monuments to function as "street platforms" from which "new and vital words rousing mind and consciousness of thought would fly forth into the masses." They further proposed a democratization of the creation process, by first showing models of the monuments to the public at large for them to select the final design. See: Vladimir Tatlin and Sofia Dymshits-Tolstaia, "Memorandum from the Visual Arts Section of the People's Commisariat for Enlightenment to the Soviet of People's Commissars: Project for the Organization of Competitions for Monuments to Distinguished Persons," Design Issues, Vol. 1, No. 2 (Autumn 1984): pp. 70–74, at p. 73.

rized by either a vertical or horizontal structure of power. The fact that such a schema is far from absolute, is characterized by the swift changes from the early Russian revolution to Leninist and finally Stalinist rule, in which the Soviet Union from an aspired horizontal structure quickly transformed to a vertical one. But the ideological intention of a vertical or horizontal model of power – whether successful in its implementation or not – does help in our attempts to differentiate propagandas; or, in the case of the Soviet Union: to analyze the different phases in which one propaganda model turns into another.

In his article "Revolution and Art" (1920–22), Anatoly Lunacharsky, the first Soviet People's Commissar of Education, expressed his ideal of a coalition between party-loyal artists and their artistic experiments in relation to the revolutionary government, when he posed: "For a revolutionary state, such as the Soviet Union, the whole question of art is this: can revolution give anything to art, and can art give anything to revolution?"[76] Just like Lissitzky, Lunacharsky claims that the revolution is accompanied by new "ideas of remarkable breadth and depth," and subsequently that "if revolution can give art its soul, then art can give revolution its mouthpiece."[77] Just as the French Revolution aspired, Lunacharsky continues, art now joins the masses and adorns popular holidays and manifestations with art, song, and poetry: "it will unite everything in a common act."[78] The revolutionary artist and Lunacharsky both believe in the unification of art and life. Not only did revolutionary artists propagandize the ideals of the revolutionary government through their work, they educated themselves through the communist ideals just the same. In other words, it was not just the imagery of art that changed, but the very conditions of artistic production and the understanding of the institution of the artist as such. As we noted in the introduction to this chapter, propaganda redefined what was to be understood as art in the first place.

As an example of such a "new artistic soul" that emerged through the revolution, Lunacharsky refers to poet Vladimir Mayakovsky, editor of LEF, the journal of the group Left Front of the Arts (later on, *Novyi Lef*). LEF was mainly organized around the Institute for Artistic Culture (INKhUK) situated within the People's Commissariat for Enlightenment, which "urged artists and theorists to join economic councils and go into the factories to design new products."[79] The Left Front of the Arts in its turn pushed the limits of constructivism toward the subsequent movement of productivism, with a prominent role for the

76 Anatoly Lunacharsky, "Revolution and Art," Ibid., p. 190.
77 Ibid., p. 191.
78 Ibid., p. 193.
79 Margolin, *The Struggle for Utopia*, p. 10.

artist Alexander Rodchenko who criticized the suprematists for their obsession with the "mystique of the material."[80] Rodchenko rejected all former associations and bonds to the idea of a pure art, and declared a commitment to the domain of industry. Productivist art was focused on the formation of "useful objects," the true expression of the ideas that had remained theory in the domain of constructivism.[81] For Rodchenko new designs of productivism reached beyond the realm of aesthetics and formed a "synthesis of ideological, theoretical, and practical factors," that took the form of publications, film titles, advertising posters, furniture, film, and theatrical sets. They were produced according to Rodchenko's conviction that "certain materials would signify communist values by their reference either to communist purpose or methodological construction; that is, carved wooden furniture would not be appropriate, but machined mass-produced pieces would."[82] With his characteristic poetic and bombastic language full of capitals and italics, Rodchenko, in his 1921 manifesto "Slogans," declares art as "one of the branches of *mathematics*," and states that "ART *which has not entered life*" is to be "handed over to the *archeological* museum of ANTIQUITY":

> THE FUTURE doesn't build monasteries for the ROMAN PRIESTS, PROPHETS, and HOLY FOOLS of art.
> Down with ART as a bright PATCH on the mediocre life of a propertied man.
> Down with art as a precious STONE amid the dirty, dark life of the poor man.
> Down with art as a means TO ESCAPE A LIFE that isn't worth living.
> LIFE, a conscious and organized life, capable of SEEING and CONSTRUCTING, is a contemporary art.
> A PERSON who organizes his life, work, and himself is a CONTEMPORARY ARTIST.
> WORK FOR LIFE and not for PALACES, TEMPLES, CEMETERIES, and MUSEUMS.
> Work in the midst of *everyone*, for *everyone*, and *with everyone*.
> DOWN with monasteries, institutes, ateliers, studios, offices, and islands.
> *Consciousness*, EXPERIMENT, goals, CONSTRUCTION, technology, and *mathematics* – these are the BROTHERS of contemporary ART.[83]

80 Boris Groys, *The Total Art of Stalinism: Avant-Garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship and Beyond* (London/New York: Verso, 2011), p. 24.
81 Margolin, *The Struggle for Utopia*, p. 82.
82 Ibid., p. 89.
83 Alexander N. Lavrentiev (ed.), *Aleksandr Rodchenko: Experiments for the Future* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2005), pp. 142–43.

At this stage of Rodchenko's writing, the Soviet Union was still far from an industrially developed country – its own revolutionary modernity remained a mere ambition rather than a reality – making Rodchenko's idea of productivism as means to mass-produce constructivist aesthetics into the large public domain limited in scope. Nonetheless, he made significant contributions, for example the *USSR Worker Club* (1925), which is exemplary of his philosophy. It is a multifunctional space that offered workers a communal table for discussion, study and play, surrounded by new technologies such as a screen for educational materials and a speaker, as well as a corner dedicated to Lenin's ideals of mass literacy and active workers' engagement in social and political life. Exhibited as part of the Soviet pavilion at the 1925 "Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs" in Paris, it formed a testimony to the Avant-Garde Propaganda Art production in the years dominated by Lenin's and Lunacharsky's cultural policies. In the *USSR Worker Club*, we find an artwork transformed into a full infrastructure for political and social activity; the artwork facilitates and provides tools for furthering revolutionary consciousness and practice. The artwork performs revolutionary modernity and simultaneously provides the means for its users to perform and apply its possibilities on their own terms.

By the time Rodchenko presented the *USSR Worker Club,* the peak of the artistic avant-garde had already passed. Lenin had died a year earlier, and the leadership of the Communist Party would direct the country into a model of radical and violent authoritarian and dictatorial policies. The avant-garde, which had embraced the revolutionary moment of the October Revolution and which had claimed a position at the forefront of reconstructing life in the new revolutionary Soviet Union, would be among the first to experience this setback. But before we explore the history of the decline of this artistic experiment, let us attempt to summarize what essentially defined this early model of Avant-Garde Propaganda Art.

As we discussed in the first chapter, modern propaganda is the performance of power in modern society. In the context of the early years of the Soviet Union, we have observed the demand of the revolutionaries to modernize the country, but in a way that ran contrary to the politics of the Western world. Rather than replicating its model of capitalist modernity, it aimed at establishing a revolutionary modernity that would make the construction of socialism and subsequent stateless communism a reality. As such, the Soviet Union attempted to return to some of the initial ideals of the French Revolution, while avoiding what it perceived as the subsequent decline in the form of the bourgeois state.

In the context of the Russian Revolution, the possibility of propaganda is devised by Lenin as a means to educate through politicization, in building the necessary base to achieve an idea of revolutionary modernity. Propaganda emerges simultaneously with the endeavor of constructing modern socialism. Theoretically at least, this is a different form of modern propaganda than that of the British. Rather than being an expression of the height of imperial modernity, propaganda becomes part of the process in constructing a counter-modernity based on revolutionary ideals.

In Lenin's ideals of propaganda as mass education we can discern the real possibility of a propaganda of mass education and emancipation. Just as the avant-garde rejected the separation between art and life, this model of propaganda rejects the separation between the one who creates propaganda and those who are merely subjected to it, what Lenin considered mere "indoctrination." Mass, communal propaganda, on the other hand – a collective performance of power – is a propaganda of politicization and equalization: socialism is constructed through the common, revolutionary consciousness of the proletariat. Its avant-garde leads, but in the process, aims to merge with the true master-builders and constructors of the new world, the revolutionary entity of the people.

This brings us back to a fundamentally important observation in the work of Ellul and Chomsky and Herman: namely the idea that only strongly organized groups that can resist the apparatus of modern propaganda have a chance to build alternatives to its dominance. While Ellul and Chomsky and Herman consider this as a form of "counter-propaganda" in their wish to reject the very notion of propaganda altogether, it would in the context of the Soviet Union and its aim to establish a revolutionary modernity in opposition to capitalist modernity be more precise to speak of a fundamentally *different* form of modern propaganda. Whereas Ellul would certainly not agree with such an assessment – he considered Lenin responsible for the later horrors of Stalinism – we would do well here to take his proposition of discussing propagandas in the plural literally. Although Ellul used the term propagandas to clarify the fact that the technological society uses a variety of propagandas to further its aim to establish "Total Propaganda," we will here part with his absolutist claim on the notion of propaganda as something that should be resisted by definition, and observe in the early Soviet Union the possibility of defining a completely different type of propaganda that Ellul's model is unable to accommodate. Again, this does not mean that this is by definition a "better" propaganda. However what we want to stress here is primarily that we are dealing with a *different propaganda*, following from our earlier analysis that different structures of power generate different propagandas.

We should not idealize the early years of the Soviet Union and Lenin's strong emphasis on party discipline and the centralization of power within the party, leading to alternative cultural and political initiatives to be considered by him as "separatist." This authoritarian and harsh party line might have well contained the seeds of the decline of the revolutionary project in the years after Lenin's death, although we will leave that ongoing debate to the many historians interested in this question. For us the main importance is to conclude that the *attempt* to construct a revolutionary modernity – and its partial successes – provides us with the possibility of articulating different models of modern propaganda as a result of the different character of the structures of power that defines their modus operandi. Whereas British capitalist modernity produced a model of covert propaganda in service of elite interests, the Soviet's engagement with a revolutionary modernity aimed to produce a model of overt propaganda in service of and practiced by the proletarian masses. A different distribution of power – a different structure of power – can thus result in a different model of modern propaganda.

Before continuing our exploration of the role of art and propaganda in the Soviet Union after Lenin's death, let us first summarize the definition of Avant-Garde Propaganda Art as we have discussed it in this segment:

- Avant-Garde Propaganda Art is characterized by a practice of mass education – of mass performance – in which art had to align itself with the vanguard of the Party if it aimed to participate in its revolutionary objectives;
- Avant-Garde Propaganda Art aims at a synthesis between art and life through revolutionary practice, and as such aims at rebuilding the structures of power in a given society: by changing the structure of power, a different propaganda becomes possible as well;
- Avant-Garde Propaganda Art demanded of artists not merely to illustrate political causes, but to alter the very conditions of artistic practice as such: the privileged autonomy of the individualist bourgeois artist was to be rejected in favor of the artist as builder or constructor of a world that would benefit the autonomy of the proletarian collective as a whole;
- Avant-Garde Propaganda Art contributes to changing the structure of power in a given society and propagates its redistribution, leading to the possibility of a collective propaganda, in which the unequal powers between the knowledgeable sender (the propagandist-artist) and its ignorant receiver (the subject-audience) are aimed to become equalized: egalitarian.

In the years following Lenin's death, the importance of art remained acknowledged by the subsequent Stalin regime, although its politicization would take a different turn compared to Lenin's aim of a moderated process of industrialization through the New Economic Policy and the relative pluriformity of cultural life that developed in parallel. We will now explore how, contrary to the ideals of an Avant-Garde Propaganda Art, the Soviet Union after the death of Lenin witnessed the emergence of what would become known as *Totalitarian Propaganda Art:* a complex concept that served very different political functions and operated in a significantly different way.

2.3 TOTALITARIAN PROPAGANDA ART

In his book *The Total Art of Stalinism* (1987), the Russian philosopher Boris Groys discusses the development of the concept of "socialist realism," which was officially declared as the Stalin-sanctioned artistic doctrine of the Soviet Union by Andrei Zhdanov, the Head of the Propaganda and Agitation Department of the Central Committee, during the First Congress of the Writer's Union in 1934.[84] This declaration of socialist realism followed the dissolution of all existing and competing art groups in 1932, and was aimed at shaping Stalinist cultism and his return to political nationalism, putting an end to the relative pluralism of art movements that had existed during the years of Lenin's rule.[85] Groys explains that the notion of "realism" in socialist realism had little to do with the idea of an accurate representation of objective reality, but was rather "oriented to that which has not yet come into being but which should be created."[86] In other words, painters, designers, sculptors, filmmakers, and architects who had now been placed under total control of the state were not supposed to show the world as it was, or as they thought they saw it, but according to the Party line dictated by Stalin. In his *Speech to the Congress of Soviet Writers*, Zhdanov stated that "[i]n our country the main heroes of works of literature are the active builders of a new life – working men and women, men and women collective farmers, Party members, business managers, engineers, members of the Young Communist League, Pioneers."[87] Stalin called upon writers as "engineers of the soul," declaring that the task of the artist was "knowing life, so as to be able to depict it truthfully in works of art, not to depict it in a dead, scholastic way, not simply as 'objective reality,' but to depict reality in its revolutionary development."[88]

Socialist realism was thus a realism located in socialist engineering objectives, which would bring about the inevitable communist future that Stalin was guiding the country toward. Its realism was the realism of the Party's objectives, the inevitable development from feudalism to bourgeois capitalism, and from socialism to communism.[89] It is in the

84 Groys, *The Total Art of Stalinism*, p. 36. The departure from the internationalist artistic avant-garde ran parallel to the increasing nationalist policies of the country, most exemplary through Stalin's maxim of "Socialism in one country" in 1924, claiming that "the working class, in alliance with the laboring peasantry, can deal the finishing blow to the capitalists of our country and build a socialist society, even if there is no victorious revolution in the West to come to its aid." Josef Stalin, *J. V. Stalin: Works*, Vol. 8 (Moscow: Foreign Language Publishing House, 1954), p. 101.

85 Groys, *The Total Art of Stalinism*, p. 33.

86 Ibid., p. 51.

87 Andrei Zhdanov, "Speech to the Congress of Soviet Writers," Harrison and Wood (eds.), Art in Theory 1900–1990, p. 420.

88 Ibid., p. 411.

89 "Because Socialist Realism was a method of creation rather than a style or aesthetic system, its theorists concentrated on abstract definitions of the kind of political consciousness that all the arts had to reflect and through which their success or failure could be judged. The first of these

light of this "realism" that we should consider famous paintings such as *Sketch for Stalin's Speech at the 16th Congress of the Communist Party* (1933) by Alexander Gerasimov, depicting the fatherly figure of Stalin guiding his Party; *To Mother for the Next Feed* (1935) by Taras Gaponenko, showcasing joyous peasants working modern machinery in an overabundant harvest; or *A Relay Race Around the "B" Ring* (1947) by Alexandr Deineka, representing healthy young Soviet athletes running the main streets of Moscow. Few will know the names of these artists, and few will be able to bring to mind the specific imagery of their work, but many will be able to immediately add more of these stereotypical and artificial images in their imagination in the form of heroic fighters of the Soviet army and committed workers of its industry. Similar to the art of Nazi Germany, these are the archetypical images that have come to define our association with the cultist dimensions of propaganda art in dictatorships – and therefore propaganda art in general. They are the product of Stalin's attempt to centralize and standardize all cultural production, rejecting the internationalist and egalitarian objectives of the early Soviet confederacy structured by the Party, oriented toward a relentless claim to power around his single person as father of the glorified Soviet nation. From Avant-Garde Art as a form of mass performance we move to an attempt of a singular performance of the state, directed by Stalin – which Groys refers to as the "Total Art of Stalinism."[90] The macro-performative dimension of propaganda in this case, is again enacted from the position of monopolized power.

Stalin had come to favor figurative art with a romantic air above all else, which benefited conservative art groups such as The Association of Artists for a Revolutionary Russia (AKhRR), whose work hearkened back to the prerevolutionary movement of the *Peredvizhniki*, the "Wanderers" or "Itinerants." This 19th-century group of painters who opposed the tsarist regime had moved to the countryside, and its traveling exhibitions depicted both the proud ethos of the peasantry as well as its hardships.[91] But whereas the aesthetics of the socially engaged Wanderers were adopted owing to their radical historical heritage and

rules of thumb was narodnost' (based on the word for 'people' and 'nation') which was centered around the relationship of the work to popular ideas and sentiments as well as to the ethnic origins of the people it depicted. Klassovost' related to the class awareness of the artist which had been heightened during the Cultural Revolution and to how he or she depicted such concerns. Partiinost' was the expression of the central and leading role of the Communist party in all aspects of Soviet life as well as membership over the party; and ideinost' was the introduction of new thinking and attitudes, of course first approved by the party, as the central content of the artwork." David Elliott, "Moscow: Introduction," in Dawn Ades et al. (eds.), Art and Power: Europe under the Dictators (London: South Bank Centre, 1995), p. 187.

90 The performance of the state in the form of forced industrialization under Stalin was extensively documented by Novosti Press Agency for national and international purposes, see: Mark Holborn and Torsten Nyström, *Propaganda: Photographs from Soviet Archives* (Chichester: Bonnier Books, 2007)

91 Clark, *Art and Propaganda in the 20th Century*, p. 85.

their accessible figurative and naturalistic depictions, their engagement with the actuality of social reality was most certainly not: their means were now employed to represent a romanticized and desired *future* reality dictated by Stalin, rather than the social devastation of his ruthless policies.

For the former Russian avant-garde, the shift of power proved disastrous. Already in 1926, an article "A Monastery on a State Subsidy" had been published, critiquing the work of Malevich and his colleagues at the State Institute of Artistic Culture (GinKhuK). It was subsequently closed and Malevich was arrested and convicted to three months' imprisonment on the charge of being a German spy.[92] This proved to be the beginning of the denunciation of what came to be regarded as the "formalist" art of the suprematist, constructivist, and productivist movements. In 1928, an article in *Sovetskoye Foto* attacked Rodchenko, accusing his photographic work as plagiarizing the "formalist" aesthetics of foreign non-Soviet photographers, initiating a debate that over the following years would develop, in an increasingly eerie way, into the most narrow definition of the "correct" depiction of reality.[93]For example, in 1933 a student asked Rodchenko about a photograph he had taken of a young pioneer from a low perspective: "Why does the pioneer look upwards? It is not ideologically correct. Pioneers and the youth of the Komsomol must look ahead."[94] Under the Stalinist regime, whose paranoia had generated a permanent witch hunt for all "revisionists" that appeared to even marginally deviate from his established Party line, such accusations of formalism and internationalism could lead to death. LEF editor and poet Vladimir Mayakovsky became another target. His replies and counter-articles on formalist accusations were to no effect, leading him to commit suicide in 1930. Artists such as Lissitzky, Rodchenko, and Klutsis saw themselves forced to compromise, publicly apologize for their "formalist" tendencies, and retreat from the public eye while taking on socialist realist commissions following the outlines of Stalin's cultural policies. In some cases, this proved not sufficient to take away the suspicion of their revisionist tendencies, and Klutsis, after having produced a series of posters and other propaganda materials according to the new criteria of socialist realism – many in collaboration with artist Lyubov Sergeyevna Popova, also his life partner – was executed during the Great Purges on Stalin's orders in 1938.

Despite the fact that there seems to be a clear difference between

92 David Elliott, "The End of the Avant-Garde," in Dawn et al., *Art and Power*, p. 195.

93 Ibid., pp. 195–96.

94 Ibid., p. 197.

the Leninist and Stalinist policies in both politics and culture, there have been many theorists and historians who suggest a subsequent relationship. Groys, for example, argues that socialist realism in some respects is a continuation of the ideals of merging art with political life as espoused by Avant-Garde Propaganda Art. Art historian Igor Golomstock, whose work we will discuss below, goes even further by suggesting that the Leninist paradigm of modern propaganda art was a foundation even for Hitler's cultural policies in the Third Reich. We will continue to explore at what level these claims are correct, and how one can distinguish Avant-Garde Propaganda Art from socialist realism.

Whereas the events following Lenin's death may suggest a stark contrast between the Russian avant-garde in the Lenin era and the Stalinist regime, Groys's analysis of socialist realism instead argues for an art-historical relation between the Russian avant-garde's declaration of being the new master builders and artist–constructors, and Stalin's demand of artists to become the engineers of the soul of the Soviet citizenry. Groys criticizes the "myth of an innocent avant-garde,"[95] and argues that whereas the avant-garde might have been naive in believing that they would be allowed to shape the cultural policies of the early Soviet Union, they had themselves aggressed competing art groups – such as the Association of Artists for a Revolutionary Russia, which they considered counter-revolutionary – in their hopes of constructing a new world from scratch. And, within the avant-garde, the struggle for power among its various art groups had been present as well. In its turn, as the regime began to espouse its preferences toward a conservative and romanticized figurative doctrine of culture, the avant-garde now found itself – unsurprisingly – aggressed by the very groups they had wanted to exclude from the cultural life of the Soviet Union. But the essential issue at stake, Groys argues, is not the conflict between the avant-garde and the Stalinist regime, but rather its continuity, for "the Stalin era satisfied the fundamental avant-garde demand that art cease representing life and begin transforming it by means of a total aesthetic-political project."[96] Rather than a break, Groys sees Stalin as the one who took over the avant-garde project, becoming not just a political leader but also an artist-engineer who modeled society by means of brute force, industry, technology, and his cultural apparatus according to his will:

> Stalinist culture brought in to the open the myth of the demiurge, the transformer of society and the universe, which, although it was presumed by the avant-garde, was not explicitly represented in avant-garde artistic practice, and it set this myth in the center of its entire social and artistic life. Like the avant-garde, Stalinist culture continues to be oriented toward the future; it is projective rather than mimetic, a visualization of the collective dream of the new world and the new humanity rather than the product of an individual artist's temperament; it does not retire to the museum, but aspires to exert an active influence upon life.[97]

95 Groys, *The Total Art of Stalinism*, p. 8.
96 Ibid., p. 36.

As mentioned, we find similar ideas to those of Groys in the work of Russian art historian Igor Golomstock, who authored a standard work on the role of art and culture in dictatorships, *Totalitarian Art* (originally published in 1990, revised in 2011). Golomstock, a former member of the Union of Soviet Artists, concurs with Groys that totalitarianism made the "political ideas of total revolution and social transformation" of the avant-garde into a "ready-made," translating them "into their opposite and forges from them a weapon with which to destroy their enemies – including the very creators of these ideas."[98] In his view too, the avant-garde had a role in proposing the necessity of a synthesis between art and life which, in the hands of the dictator-artist, found its true expression in Stalin's totalitarian project.

Different from Groys, however, Golomstock introduces the notion of "totalitarianism."[99] His attempt is to define the notion of Totalitarian Propaganda Art as a specific model of artistic production dictated by the same principles and aesthetic doctrines in the Soviet Union, Nazi Germany, fascist Italy, and Maoist China. Golomstock is convinced that the Russian revolution forms the reoccurring cultural blueprint for each of these regimes. While his study proves enlightening in terms of the specific characteristics of state-sanctioned art within the fascist, Nazi, and Stalinist regimes, we will see that his attempt to argue for a singular and overall homogeneous existence of a Totalitarian Art is untenable.

Golomstock takes the work of the American Lewis Mumford, who introduces the notion of the "megamachine" in his book *The Myth of the Machine* (Vol. I 1967, Vol. II 1970) as a starting point for his definition of the "laws" of totalitarian art. Often compared to the apocalyptic

97 Ibid., p. 113.
98 Igor Golomstock, *Totalitarian Art in the Soviet Union, The Third Reich, Fascist Italy, and the People's Republic of China* (New York/London: Overlook Duckworth, 2011), p. xvi.
99 A term which, according to Rasmussen, was "first put into use by opponents of Mussolini's fascist government in the early 1920s – Mussolini was critiqued for giving excessive power to the fascist party […]. 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." Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen, "Approaching Totalitarianism and Totalitarian Art," in Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen and Jacob Wanberg (eds.), *Totalitarian Art and Modernity* (Aarhus/Copenhagen: Aarhus University Press, 2010), p. 109.

vision of modern technological totalitarianism elaborated by Jacques Ellul, Mumford describes this "megamachine" as an "invisible structure, composed of living, but rigid, human parts, each assigned to his specific office, role and task, to make possible the immense work-output and grand designs of this great collective organizations."[100] For Golomstock, this paradigm of the megamachine embodies the laws of the totalitarian state where Totalitarian Propaganda Art gains its effect. Just like Ellul, Golomstock considers the question of ideology to be secondary. It is the radical centralization of the state apparatus and its attempt to engineer and control all aspects of social, political, and economic life, that is the true creation of totalitarianism, and its art is merely shaped in the image of this mechanical reality. According to Golomstock, the one-party state of totalitarianism defines the doctrines of its art:

> 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 (and culture as a whole) to be an ideological weapon and a means of struggle for 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 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 or artistic progress, etc.[101]

Following these principles of totalitarian art, Golomstock explains how in Nazi Germany this resulted in the foundation of the Reich Culture Chamber (Reichskulturkammer), the Fascist Academy and the National Syndicate of Fascist Visual Art in Italy, the Central Committee's Section for Agitation and Propaganda (Agitprop) and the USSR Union of Artists in the Soviet Union, and the Union of Art Workers in the People's Republic of China. These institutions became instruments of a single dictator–artist, of whom the failed-artist-turned-ruler has become the ultimate embodiment of Golomstock's totalitarian art.[102] In Golomstock's words: "Hitler saw himself as the architect of the Third Reich."[103]

100 Golomstock, *Totalitarian Art in the Soviet Union*, p. xvi.
101 Ibid., p. xiii.

Different from Groys, Golomstock considers the organizational foundation of totalitarian art that demands total cultural control under a single party to be rooted in the works of Vladimir Lenin, and most particularly his text *Party Organization and Party Literature* (1905), which we discussed above. According to Golomstock, Lenin's view on the relation between party and art formed through the German communists Hitler and Mussolini's indirect inspiration for the forging of a cultural propaganda model, and a direct inspiration in the case of Mao Zedong.[104] Despite the relative freedom that Lenin preached for artists outside of the Party, and the cultural lenience toward the party-loyal avant-garde, Golomstock perceives Lenin's orientation on the Party as the main tool of governance as the inevitable foundation for further cultural centralization and control that would find its ultimate expression in the late years of the Stalinist era.

Golomstock's comprehensive comparative study of art production within dictatorships attempts to structurally show organizational and aesthetic overlaps. What strikes us in the propaganda art of dictatorships, he explains, are the reoccurring figures of heroic leaders, heroic soldiers, heroic factory workers, heroic peasants, depicted in styles that reassert the aesthetic models of a glorified past. In Nazi Germany particularly in reference to ancient Greece, in the case of fascist Italy the Roman Empire, and in the Stalinist Soviet Union the bizarre conflation between the romantic aesthetics of the pre-revolutionary rural painters and the tsarist might that these very same artists opposed. This rewriting of history to serve the politics of the present and to project an even more heroic future upon the populace, involved a permanent falsification of history. It depicts Hitler visiting military fronts at

102 We find a very similar approach to the notion of the artist-dictator in the work of Tzvetan Todorov, who argues that Hitler's fascination for the composer Richard Wagner was at the foundation of his understanding of his own role in "directing" the Third Reich as his own Gesamtkunstwerk, or "total work of art." The notion of the total work of art was elaborated in Wagner's 1848 essay "Art and Revolution," in which he took the European revolutions of the time as a starting point to argue for the possible for a "communist" gathering of all creative forces in a single interdisciplinary play. For Wagner, the total work of art was something of a staging of a prefiguration of the possibility of revolution through art. Wagner's later political conservatism and anti-Semitic writings cast a dark light upon his artistic heritage, which Todorov regularly highlights, for example in his essay "Artists and Dictators," in which he writes: "It is common knowledge that the Führer reserved a special place for Wagner who incarnated in German-speaking countries the concept of the artist not as a figure among others in society but as the very model for society," after which he continues to mention Hitler's correspondence with Wagner's son, the fact that Hitler recited Wagner by heart and claimed to have "attended 30–40 performances of Tristan and Isolde" as well as the fact that Wagner's overture of Rienzi was "played regularly at Nazi party congresses." See: Tzvetan Todorov, The Limits of Art (London/New York/Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2010), pp. 36–37.
103 Golomstock, *Totalitarian Art in the Soviet Union*, *p. 166.*
104 Ibid., p. 32.

locations he never went to; masses of Bolsheviks storming the Winter Palace even though in reality the palace was empty and only a handful of revolutionaries had participated; and making political opponents of the regime disappear to the benefit of the new leaders who appear to have always been present.

But Golomstock also observes differences. For example, the emphasis on the rural quality of the romantic depictions of peasant life in the Stalinist Soviet Union versus the more rigid neo-classicist tendencies of Nazi art. Or the near absence of nudity in socialist realism, as the singular naked body would deny its collective social essence, whereas in the work of the Nazi artists the nude body gave proof of the purity of the racial Aryan and as such was a singular "prototypical" model to be followed and aspired to by the collective. But also on an organizational and infrastructural level Golomstock emphasized that especially fascist Italy was never successful in establishing an "iconographic canon," as it never declared a clear fascist cultural doctrine and allowed relative artistic freedom as long as artist groups did not oppose Mussolini's rule. For instance, the futurist avant-garde exhibited at the same time as the more traditional Novecento group, and architectural expressions varied between high modernist aesthetics and more regressive classicist themes derived from the height of the Roman Empire.[105] In the case of the Maoist People's Republic, which receives only a minimal treatment in the book as the "Chinese variant," Golomstock declares Mao's ideals of a "New Democratic Culture" that was to be "nationalist in form, socialist in content"[106] as a mere "second-hand" copy of the cultural model of the Soviet Union.[107]

The problem with Golomstock's conclusion is that all notions of authorship, from the diversity of cultural movements in the early Russian avant-garde to Stalin's supposed integration of these concepts in

105 Ibid., p. 251.
106 Ibid., p. 128.
107 Ibid., p. 122. The claim that Stalinist and Maoist art production can be conflated is strongly refuted by art historian Christof Büttner in his discussion of the sculpture group "Rent Collection Courtyard" (1965), which consisted of 114 dry-clay, life-sized figures. During Maoist rule the installation was copied five times due to its enormous popular acclaim. In seven scenes the sculpture depicts the exploitative politics of landlord Liu Wencai, and shows how farmers deliver their harvest as a form of tax, but are tricked and forced to hand over even their daughters to provide breast milk to the opium-addicted, weakened Wencai. The sculpture group is exhibited in the former house of the landlord, Anren, in the district of Dayi, and was realized by a worker's collective that, basing themselves on the cultural theories of Mao Zedong, refused to place any signature on the work and based their depictions of the scene on studying and discussing with the people having lived through the pre-revolutionary politics in the region. The theatrical use of the sculpture group, its collective production by professionals and amateurs alike, and the rejection of pedestals or durable materials, distinguishes the work strongly from the thesis of socialist realism. Büttner states that "[i]t is a work of art that is so convincing that many interpret it to be the simple, unimaginative depiction of a real event and held it in disdain for exactly that reason. That was all the more true when Western art historians labeled it Socialist Realism and, even worse, stigmatized it as propaganda art for the Cultural Revolution." Christof Büttner, "The Transformations of a Work of Art – Rent Collection Courtyard, 1965–2009," in Esther Schlicht and Max Hollein (eds.), *Art for the Millions* (Munich: Hirmer Verlag, 2009), p. 38.

socialist realism, disappear; the mega-machine of totalitarianism itself – not even Stalin as the ultimate performer, as Groys argues – is the sole creator of dictator and propaganda artist alike. According to Golomstock, this totalitarian condition, generated by war and revolution, stands in absolute opposition to modern democracies: "This monster [the Soviet totalitarian state] functions according to laws unknown in democratic societies, where artistic styles usually emerge spontaneously and only then engender new structures and new forms of organization of artistic life."[108] The ultimate example, he concludes, can be found in the works of former British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, who "himself an artist […] also wrote a treatise on art" and in Churchill's entourage "we find no architects, artists and writers like Rosenberg, Speer, Goebbels and Shirach – the leader of the Hitler youth and self-styled outstanding lyrical poet of National Socialism."[109]

Golomstock's remarks are crucial for understanding the political implications of the concept of Totalitarian Art, for here, through the writings of Churchill, it becomes clear that the term serves to establish an absolute opposition between Totalitarian Art and Democratic Art. Churchill being as an exemplary leader of a "democratic" society, his essay "Painting as a Pastime" (1921-22) is the most important example of a mode of artistic production that is non- or even anti-totalitarian. In this text, the future British Prime Minister, who would lead his country in the Second World War against the Nazis, elaborates on one of his private cultural passions, landscape painting. Explaining his passion as a military leader in the medium of painting, Churchill writes:

> In all battles two things are usually required of the Commander-in-Chief: to make a good plan for his army and, secondly, to keep a strong reserve. Both of these are obligatory upon the painter. To make a plan, thorough reconnaissance of the country where the battle is to be fought is needed. Its fields, its mountains, its rivers, its bridges, its trees, its flowers, its atmosphere – all require and repay attentive observation from a special point of view.[110]

Apart from Churchill's evident militaristic perspective on studying a landscape – seemingly evoking the same gaze, whether going to war or when merely painting its environment – there are at least two troubling elements to the opposition with which Golomstock ends his thorough elaboration on art and dictatorship.

108 Ibid., p. 216.
109 Ibid., p. 136.
110 Winston S. Churchill, *Painting as a Pastime* (London: Unicorn Press, 2013), pp. 48–49.

The first is the equation of avant-garde art in the Soviet Union with Stalinist-sanctioned socialist realism. Neither Groys nor Golomstock claim that they are exactly the same, but they both argue that the aim to create a synthesis between art and life was introduced by the avant-garde and formed the cultural blueprint of Stalinism. In other words, Stalin realized what the avant-garde was only dreaming of. Groys is right to say that there was no "innocent" avant-garde; they were employed in politics and the shaping of new structures of power. But the engagement of the avant-garde with the question of power in egalitarian terms radically differed from Stalin's authoritarian, nationalist, and bureaucratized dictatorship. Totalitarian Propaganda Art under Stalinist rule meant a rejection of proletarian, collective dictatorship in favor of a singular and cultist nationalist rule by Stalin himself. There is no point in idealizing the October revolution and its stated objectives of classless communist society that were always far from reality, but Stalin rejected the very possibility of this thesis and repurposed art as propaganda back to its role as a servant tasked with the glorification of the tsar. Again, we should avoid here a moral judgment that declares the avant-garde "innocent" and the art of dictatorships "guilty," but rather, we should emphasize the explicit difference in the structures of power that each represents as well as the clearly conflicting artistic outcomes that are their result.

The second problem, mainly related to Golomstock, is the question how "total" the notion of "totalitarianism" has to be? Mussolini's cultural apparatus, according to Golomstock, was not "total enough," and the "Chinese variant" too much of a copy to be as "total" as the Soviet one. Without ignoring the absolute and evident brutality of the Stalinist or Nazi regime, how does this notion of totalitarianism actually help us to gain an understanding of its cultural and propaganda machinery other than through the term "dictatorship"? The term totalitarianism seems to be devised in this case to declare something of a "sublime evil,"[111] which, in the words of Golomstock, knows its own laws, and no creator except for itself. This in turn generates something of an art beyond analysis, a totalitarian monstrosity that exists under its own laws, in its own time, and which is irreconcilable with the "laws" of our democratic present. But how then does such a thoroughly propagandistic art relate to our exploration in the previous chapter, in which it

111 *Slavoj Žižek, who often returns to the mechanisms of Soviet politics and propaganda in his work, writes in this regard:* "Throughout its entire career, 'totalitarianism' was an ideological notion that sustained the complex operation of […] guaranteeing the liberal-democratic hegemony, dismissing the Leftist critique of liberal democracy as the obverse, the 'twin', of the Rightist Fascist dictatorship. […] [F]ar from being an effective theoretical concept, [totalitarianism] is a kind of stopgap: instead of enabling us to think, forcing us to acquire new insight into the historical reality it describes, it relieves us of the duty to think, or even actively prevents us from thinking." Slavoj Žižek, Did Someone Say Totalitarianism? (London/New York: Verso, 2001), p. 3.

became clear that modern propaganda finds its origins in the imperial democracy of the British, whose heritage Churchill would later on defend against the Nazi regime? Here, it becomes clear that our study faces not a distinction between totalitarian propaganda and democratic freedom, but of two propagandas with overlaps *and* differences.

In short, there is something propagandistic about the notion of Totalitarian Propaganda Art as such, both that it would be wholly "other" from art produced under democratic regimes, and that it is a logical continuation of the avant-garde experiment to merge art with life. Through the notion of Totalitarian Propaganda Art, we essentially define what is free art; making all regimes that do not fit the radical label of totalitarianism automatically the potential protectors of artistic autonomy. Not only does this deny the actual differences between various dictatorships and their cultural apparatuses, it also denies the reoccurring role of propaganda art in modern democracy, while fully rejecting the very idea that the notion of democracy may in fact very well serve "totalitarian" objectives. As such, the concept of Totalitarian Propaganda Art serves a dual function: it offers a "complete" description of the role of art within specific 20th-century dictatorships on the one hand, but on the other also serves to create the myth of democratic exceptionalism when it comes to the use of propaganda.

Before continuing our exploration of the role of art and propaganda in the context of democracies – those that define the propaganda art of others as "totalitarian" – let us first summarize the definition of Totalitarian Propaganda Art as we have discussed it in this section:

- Totalitarian Propaganda Art is the category which describes the centralization of art and cultural production under extreme authoritarian regimes: we think of Nazi Germany or Stalinist Russia when it comes to the enforcement of narrowly defined scripts through which the artists unambiguously have to contribute to the cult of dictator and dictatorship alike;
- Totalitarian Propaganda Art is at the same time meant to conceal both the differences between the art of various dictatorships – think of the relative cultural differences tolerated under fascism compared to the total subjugation of "Aryan" artists under Nazism – and as such aims at defining totalitarianism as radically opposed and irreconcilable with modern democracy;
- Totalitarian Propaganda Art is a dualistic term: on the one hand, it is a category with which to describe the art produced under control of 20th-century dictatorships, while on the other, the term totalitarianism serves political regimes to distinguish themselves as opposed to dictatorial influences of the past – and therefore "free";

- Totalitarian Propaganda Art is thus both a descriptive term as well as a form of propaganda in and of itself: as a form of democratic propaganda it is used to define the universe of democracy and totalitarianism as radically oppositional, and thus risks at leading to a blindness to the existence of propaganda in modern democracies: as such this use of Totalitarian Propaganda Art can also be considered as part of the vocabulary of *Modernist Propaganda Art*

For many years after the collapse of Mussolini's and Hitler's regimes, the Soviet Union would serve as the Evil Empire against which Western democracy could position itself. The cultural legacy of Stalin's socialist realism functioned as its very own counter-propaganda, and was extensively used by democratic regimes as a proof of the cultist and "totalitarian" aesthetics of their opponents. In the following, final section of this chapter, we will explore how this discourse was in fact part of a propaganda effort best described as *Modernist Propaganda Art*.

2.4 MODERNIST PROPAGANDA ART

Whereas the notion of modern art applies to different and conflicting art movements around the world that sought to define an artistic vocabulary in relation to the political, industrial, and technological changes throughout the 19th and 20th century, the concept of *modernist* art became closely defined within the paradigm of capitalist democracy in the United States. It curiously combines Kantian and Saint-Simonian terminology in an attempt to define an art that fits the ideal of American political and cultural exceptionalism. We find the results of this endeavor most precisely articulated in the work of one of the most influential art critics of the interwar and post-World War II era in the United States, Clement Greenberg.

When Greenberg published his essay "Avant-Garde and Kitsch" (1939) in the Marxist-oriented journal *Partisan Review,* he essentially laid out a theoretical framework of modernist art that assembled all concepts mentioned in the first section of this chapter, ranging from notions such as artistic freedom, beauty, the sublime, genius, autonomy, and the avant-garde. In his essay, Greenberg discusses the appearance of "avant-garde culture" as a result of Western bourgeois society, and refers to it as a "superior consciousness of history."[112] Greenberg argued that through avant-garde culture bourgeois society had proved itself to be "not an eternal, 'natural' condition of life, but simply the latest term in a succession of social orders."[113] Avant-garde artists such as Picasso, Braque, Mondriaan, Miró, Kandinsky, Brancusi, and even Klee, Matisse, and Cézanne had parted from the distracting turmoil of their times to dedicate their work to an "art for art's sake" of "pure poetry":

> The avant-garde poet or artist tries in effect to imitate God by creating something valid solely on its own terms, in the way nature itself is valid, in the way a landscape – not its picture – is aesthetically valid; something given, increate, independent of meanings, similar or originals. Content is to be dissolved so completely into form that the work of art or literature cannot be reduced in whole or in part to anything not itself.[114]

Greenberg thus conjoins Saint-Simon's idea of the artist as the avant-garde of society with Kant's aesthetic vocabulary – while bypas-

112 Clement Greenberg, *Art and Culture: Critical Essays* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), p. 4.
113 Ibid.
114 Ibid., p. 6.

sing the latter's emphasis on autonomy in relation to aesthetic experience, rather than the autonomy of art itself. The artist stands at the forefront of society by employing what Greenberg calls the artist's "relative values," which are essentially the "values of aesthetics" through which the "absolute is invoked."[115] Greenberg here refers to the New York artists that would become known as the *abstract expressionists*, who abandoned the domain of figurative representation in favor of the non-figurative.

In "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," Greenberg claims that this avant-garde is at risk of being abandoned; for art that seeks an "experience to expression for the sake of expression"[116] – and that is what he considered the project of abstract expressionism to be – generates a sense of alienation with its former patrons, those to which the artist has always been "attached by an umbilical cord of gold."[117] The avant-garde needs a social basis, and this basis is to be found in a ruling class. But the ruling class seemed all too easily drawn to the "rear-guard," what Greenberg considers the rise of "kitsch."[118] Kitsch, in Greenberg's view, takes on a manifold of forms in popular and commercial culture, operating as a market devised for the masses of urbanized Western Europe and America who are incapable of engaging with "genuine culture."[119]

Greenberg observed that kitsch was winning the sentimental support of the masses and, in order to gain political support of the populace, that elites embraced and encouraged kitsch as a legitimate culture, instead of resisting it: "The encouragement of kitsch is merely another of the inexpensive ways in which totalitarian regimes seek to ingratiate themselves with their subjects."[120] He considered the rejection of avant-garde art by the regimes of Nazi Germany, the Soviet Union, and fascist Italy the first signs of such cultural decay. For fascists and Stalinists avant-garde art was too complex to employ as a tool of propaganda; for this purpose kitsch was far more effective, so Greenberg argued. What remained, he claimed, was the hope that in opposition to totalitarian states and modern capitalism, a genuine socialist state would arise that would be able to support and establish a "new culture" in defense of the avant-garde, and thus, of civilization as such.

In the fifties, Greenberg had assembled a canon of artists who represented this new culture, those whom he considered the most important "living culture" of his time.[121] But in terms of patronage, he did not have to hope for a future socialist government, as the success of the abstract expressionists had skyrocketed in the sphere of private collectors, galleries, and museums. After all, it turned out that American capitalist democracy had given birth to the elite that Greenberg had hoped for. Thus, the critic who only a decade earlier published a major article in a Marxist journal became one of the prominent voices in defining the meaning of this new culture, which he would increasingly define as a true American contribution to the progress of art history. Greenberg's essay "American-Type Painting" (1955) is exemplary for this new endeavor.

115 Ibid.
116 Ibid., pp. 7–8.
117 Ibid., p. 8.
118 Ibid., p. 9.
119 Ibid., p. 10.
120 Ibid., p. 19.

Greenberg saw the answer to what he considered to be the retrograde mannerisms of the European avant-garde, in the work of the New York abstract expressionists. Whereas he thought that artists such as Arshile Gorky and Willem de Kooning were still clinging to a certain European cubist vocabulary, artists such as Clyfford Still, Barnett Newman, Mark Rothko and – most of all – Jackson Pollock were liberating themselves from the European heritage, and advancing the cause of a truly autonomous art. Greenberg emphasized in their work the importance of "flatness," the absence of spatial depiction, but the full recognition of the painterly object as a reality per se – the painting as nothing more or less than the painting itself.[122] Pollock became the embodiment of the project of abstract expressionism: jumping around his studio or in the open air, "dripping" industrial paint upon canvasses, which, instead of being mounted on the wall, were placed on the floor. Aggressively approaching the canvas from all sides, Pollock's "action painting" had a ritual, spontaneous side while being at the same time rigorously conceptually planned. His practice perfectly embodied the Greenbergian paradigm of the neo-Kantian modernist artist: the avant-garde did not form a break with history, but rather wanted to advance it, resulting in a new culture of American modernist art.

Kant, Greenberg would further argue in his essay "Modernist Painting" (1965), was essentially the "first real Modernist," as he had articulated the process through which art was able to engage in a self-critical process; and it was this process of questioning one's "own foundations" that Western – and in this case, specifically American – society had progressed the furthest.[123] The shift from *modern* art to *mo-*

121 Ibid., p. 21.
122 Ibid, p. 226.
123 Clement Greenberg, "Modernist Painting," Art & Literature, No. 4 (Spring 1965) reprinted in: Charles Harrison & Paul Wood, Art in Theory. 1900-1990. An Anthology of Changing Ideas. (London: Paul Chapman, 1982): pp. 754-760, p. 754. It is interesting to note that Greenberg named Jacques-Louis David as an important contributor to the rise of modern art, not because of his revolutionary work – for this could only implied an instrumentalization of art which would make it mere kitsch – but because of David's plea to differentiate painting specifically from the

dernist art meant for Greenberg that this process of self-exposure had reached a historical culmination in the new American culture it was establishing. This process of self-criticism and self-interrogation led to a true "purity" of appearance, one that formed the "guarantee of its standards of quality" as much as its "independence."[124]

As it became clear that a growing capitalist elite was eager to provide all the necessary support to the booming market of American abstract expressionism, Greenberg's defense of modernist art became increasingly characterized by an explicit sympathy for liberal politics, which would turn into an active aversion to Marxist ideology. This is exemplified by his membership of the American Committee for Cultural Freedom in the early 1950s, an organization that aimed at reinvesting in the project of political liberalism, discrediting ideology, and campaigning against communism.[125] This organization was symptomatic for the beginning of the Cold War, and the rise of McCarthyism – named after US senator Joseph McCarthy, who became notorious for fueling the so-called Red Scare, the fear that the Soviet Union would attempt to infiltrate and subvert the US government. Greenberg would serve as a prominent member of the American Committee for Cultural Freedom in 1952–53, and the level at which he sympathized with the organization's agenda is expressed by his fall-out with fellow member and historian Arthur M. Schlesinger, whom Greenberg accused of being too soft by merely proposing to defend cultural freedom, rather than actively pursuing anti-communist activities.[126] He was also one of the core members of the organization who refused to denounce the anti-communist campaigns of Senator McCarthy.[127]

The American Committee for Cultural Freedom was affiliated with the CIA-backed Congress for Cultural Freedom, and was as such an entity with a clear political and ideological purpose. During the Cold War, the Congress for Cultural Freedom had the task of covertly propagating abstract expressionist – modernist – art in Europe to win sympathy for the American cause by highlighting its exceptional avant-garde culture, engineered as a counterpart to the production of state-sanctioned socialist realism in the Soviet Union. Characteristic of Greenberg's implication in this propagandistic effort was his speech "Modernist Art" for an international broadcasting emission of the Voice of America, the official external broadcast institution of the US federal government, which received direct policy orders from the White House, reaching millions of listeners worldwide. As we may recall from the first chapter, this was the very same period that the CIA engaged in a series of covert operations to establish client regimes abroad. The art historian Meyer Schapiro, for example, had chosen not to join the American Committee for Cultural Freedom explicitly for this reason.[128]

practice of sculpture: a first step in questioning the reality of one's own medium, and thus a first step toward an art that would become its own primary subject.

124 Ibid, p. 755.

125 Nancy Jachec, "Modernism, Enlightenment Values, and Clement Greenberg," *Oxford Art Journal*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (1998): pp. 123–32.

126 Ibid., p. 125–26.

127 Frances Stonor Saunders, *Who Paid the Piper. The CIA and the Cultural Cold War* (London: Granta Books, 2000), p. 199.

In 1951, Greenberg publicly attacked the journal *The Nation,* which he claimed to be pro-Soviet, leading to Republican Congressman George Dondero – a prominent supporter of McCarthyism and ironically a fervent opponent of modernist art – to include Greenberg's accusations against the journal in the Congressional Records that documented possible pro-Soviet subversives in the United States.[129] Art historian Francis Frascina, who researched Greenberg's implications in the Red Scare, concludes that the critic was more than aware of the fact that he was operating in the interests of a government-funded, unofficial "Ministry of Culture":

> [B]y the 1950s Greenberg had become an anti-communist not least because he saw communism as dominated by a tendency that was not self-critical and which had forced art and literature to be criticized and altered by outside agendas. But, equally, organizations and institutions in the United States, such as the ACCF [American Committee for Cultural Freedom], the USIA [United States Information Agency, a diplomatic agency involved in the propagation of American culture], and the State Department had their agendas; those of a ruling elite, backed up by overt and covert funding. With "Modernist Painting" Greenberg was attached to this elite by an umbilical cord of gold.[130]

This does not mean that Greenberg was necessarily aware of the extent to which his plea for a modernist art of American exceptionalism was being instrumentalized, certainly not to the level of the CIA. While rumors of governmental involvement in intellectual and artistic circles had been continuous, it was not until democratic Senator Mike Mansfield called for a wide-ranging congressional investigation into all clandestine financing of the CIA and the subsequent Katzenback Committee's 1967 report, that a large scale debate ensued on a range of American covert operations, including cultural ones.[131] It was that

128 Francis Frascina, "Institutions, Culture, and America's Cold War Years: The Making of Greenberg's Modernist Painting," *Oxford Art Journal*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (2003): pp. 71–97, at p. 76.

129 Ibid.

130 Ibid., p. 92.

131 Saunders, Who Paid the Piper, p. 405.

same year that *Ramparts* magazine published a lengthy investigative report on CIA covert operations, exposing the range of seemingly independent, private, and philanthropic organizations that had been operating as fronts for its activities.[132]

The role of art in Cold War propaganda would famously become the topic of the 1974 *Artforum* essay "Abstract Expressionism: Weapon of the Cold War" by art historian Eva Cockcroft. Cockcroft's essay specifically focuses on the structures of "self-perpetuating boards of trustees composed primarily of rich donors," which often form "the same 'prominent citizens' who control banks and corporations and help stage the formulation of foreign policy."[133] She mentions the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York, which from the early 1940s onward had supported war-related cultural programs, and now, in the context of the Cold War, had expanded its activities overseas through Porter McCray, MoMA's head of international programs and former employee of the Office of Inter-American Affairs during the Second World War. Cockcroft describes that abstract expressionist artists were of great importance to McCray, who displayed them prominently in international exhibitions such as *The New American Painting* (1958–59), which also toured eight different European countries. According to the introduction to the show's catalogue by art historian and former MoMA director Alfred H. Barr, the abstract expressionists "defiantly reject the conventional values of the society which surrounds them, but they are not politically *engagés* even though their paintings have been praised and condemned as symbolic demonstrations of freedom in a world in which freedom connotes a political attitude."[134] For Cockcroft, this ideological reading of modernist American art as "non-ideological" is exactly what made it so effective in the Cold War policies opposing the figurative doctrines of Stalinist socialist realism. While the MoMA might not have been directly tied to the government and CIA Cold War effort, there were certainly suspicions of mutual interests, due to its private donors and former political affiliations of some of its employees, as well as their shared ideological project of promoting American exceptionalism in Europe:

> [T]he Abstract Expressionists succeeded in creating an important new art movement. They also contributed, whether they knew it or not, to a purely political phenomenon – the supposed divorce between art and politics which so perfectly served America's needs in the cold war.[135]

132 Ibid., p. 382.
133 Eva Cockcroft, "Abstract Expressionism, Weapon of the Cold War," *Artforum*, Vol. 12, No. 10 (Jun. 1974): pp. 39–41, at pp. 174–48.
134 Ibid., p. 153.
135 Ibid., p. 154.

The most detailed account of this cultural Cold War was published by historian Frances Stonor Saunders under the title *Who Paid the Piper?* (1999). Essentially, Saunders's book is a detailed reconstruction of the operations initiated by the CIA in the domain of cultural warfare from 1950 until 1976 under the umbrella of Congress for Cultural Freedom, which "had offices in thirty-five countries, employed dozens of personnel, published over twenty prestige magazines, held art exhibitions, owned a news and features service, organized high profile international conferences, and rewarded musicians and artists with prizes and public performances."[136]

The Congress for Cultural Freedom originated from the post-war years in Berlin, which after its division became the site of political contestation between the Americans and Soviets. Cultural policy was crucial in winning over the hearts and minds of the Europeans, and in that regard the Americans lagged far behind. In the field of what Saunders refers to as the "Kulturkampf," the Soviets were experienced in appealing to international intellectual and cultural elites, and as early as 1945 they had opened a State Opera in Berlin, followed in 1947 by a House of Culture: "Thanks largely to Russian propaganda, America was widely regarded as culturally barren, a nation of gum-chewing, Chevy-driving, Dupont-sheathed philistines."[137] Whereas from 1948 onward the Marshall Plan offered financial credits and material assistance to strengthen Western European countries in their future role as valuable NATO alliances, the educated and cultured classes were still to be won over. The CIA, which had been founded in 1947 through the National Security Act, was going to prove crucial to this endeavor.

A key figure in the American cultural offensive was the Estonian-American Michael Josselson, who, with much of his family killed by the Bolsheviks, held a strongly anti-Communist position. Enlisted at first in the US army to assist the denazification process and as a cultural advisor, Josselson was approached by the CIA to join its Berlin station for Covert Action in 1949. After a disappointing American counter-conference to the successful Soviet "World Congress for Peace" that had taken place on April 20, 1949, launching Picasso's lithograph *La Colombe* (The Dove) as its permanent icon, Josselson, in his new position as a CIA operative, proposed to his superiors the establishment of a permanent structure to organize intellectual resistance. This proposal became the foundational document of the Congress for Cultural Freedom (codename QKOPERA), the new CIA-backed

136 Saunders, *Who Paid the Piper*, p. 1.
137 Ibid., p. 19.

cultural arm of the American Cold War machinery.[138] However, to be successful, it was crucial that the Congress for Cultural Freedom would uphold an image of utmost independence. Josselson was the only CIA-operative in the core group, and, formally, his colleagues were unaware of the exact sources of the funding transferred to the organization through a complex series of seemingly private American initiatives and foundations that supported the promotion of democratic cultural values in response to the Soviet threat.[139] Here, the newly developed covert "civilian" structures of the CIA came to being, and Saunders effectively describes them as the American counterpoint of the Cominform – its very own "Deminform."[140]

On Monday June 26, 1950, the first five-day Congress for Cultural Freedom opened in the Berlin Titania Palast in the presence of prominent American figureheads such as US senator Schlesinger, writer Tennessee Williams, actor Robert Montgomery, as well as strategically selected prominent "black" figures, such as journalist Max Yergan, who were chosen to counter the Soviet critique of American's failure to ensure civil rights for its African-American population. Part of the British delegation were composer Peter de Mendelssohn and historian Hugh Trevor-Roper and the French provided philosopher and sociologist Raymond Aron as well as the writer André Malraux, who would later become the Minister of Cultural Affairs under De Gaulle, a role in which he would continue to support and appear in the projects of the Congress. These figures give a sense of the variety of international intellectual and cultural key players that in the course of more than two decades after would be paid to participate in the many activities of Josselson's organization.

While the American administration considered the congress a success, receiving praise from President Truman himself, doubts had risen about its intentions: the impressive scale of the congress was unique to impoverished Europe and raised suspicion.[141] And though suspicions around the Congress would never fully disappear, Josselson forged an organizational strategy that henceforth would include dissident opinions that the American government itself might reject, but that would

138 Ibid., p. 72.

139 According to Saunders's research, in the whole period of the operation's existence the financing of the Congress for Cultural Freedom by the CIA mounted to "tens of millions of dollars" (p. 129). Important organizations that operated as "fronts" for the CIA, to avoid the money to be traced directly to the Agency, were the Fairfield Foundation (p. 125) and the Ford Foundation (pp. 129, 142), among others.

140 Ibid., p. 57.

141 In the case of state-sanctioned media, this was different of course. For example, Wolf von Eckardt writes in a review that "In contrast to the rigid unity which Soviet-controlled cultural meetings in Breslau, New York and Paris displayed in their effort to hold a propagandistic monopoly over peace and culture, the Berlin Congress resulted in a creative association which drew its very strength from the diversity and richness of different opinions." Wolf von Eckardt, "Congress for Cultural Freedom: Review," *Information Bulletin* (Sep. 1950): pp. 19–23, at p. 21.

nonetheless draw leftist cultural classes closer:

> The real objectives of the Congress were clarified. It was not to be a center for agitation, but a beachhead in Western Europe from which the advance of Communist ideas could be halted. It was to engage in a widespread and cohesive campaign of peer pressure to persuade intellectuals to disassociate themselves from Communist fronts or fellow travelling organizations. It was to encourage the intelligentsia to develop theories and arguments which were directed not at a mass audience, but at a small elite of pressure groups and statesmen who in turn determined government policy.[142]

Under the guidance of Josselson, the Congress for Cultural Freedom embarked on a great diversity of cultural projects. It established parallel institutions, such as the Italian Association for Cultural Freedom, the British Society for Cultural Freedom and the American Committee for Cultural Freedom. It published cultural and literary magazines such as *Preuves* in France, *Encounter* in England, and *Tempo Presente* in Italy – the latter literally copying the title of *Les Temps Modernes,* edited by arch-enemy, philosopher, and Communist sympathizer Jean-Paul Sartre. But its publications also reached beyond Europe with the journals *Cuadernos* in Latin America, *Quest* in India, *Quadrant* in Australia and *Jiyu* in Japan, and later on integrated existing journals such as the American *Partisan Review* into its organization.[143] The congress further initiated public and cultural manifestations, notably the "Masterpieces of the Twentieth Century" in Paris, 1952, presenting works by Samuel Barber and Igor Stravinsky. The music-oriented events were orchestrated largely by Russian-American composer Nicolas Nabokov, who had been tasked with controlling musical manifestations in Germany on possible Nazi influences, and gained historical fame when confronting the Russian composer Dmitri Shostakovich.[144] Nabokov also took charge of "The International Conference of Twentieth Century Music" in Rome in 1954, which presented young composers that created atonal and dodecaphonic composition, music that was despised by the Stalinist regime. Remarkable was also the CIA's clandestine book program

142 Saunders, *Who Paid the Piper*, pp. 98–99.

143 Ibid., p. 160.

144 Nabokov had interrogated Shostakovich at a Soviet-organized "Cultural and Scientific Conference for World Peace" in New York on March 25, 1949. Confronted by Nabokov's question whether the composer agreed with the denunciation of "formalist music" by the Soviet regime, the terrified Shostakovich could not but mumble in confirmation. Ibid., pp. 12, 50. For a more detailed account of the cultural hostage situation in which Shostakovich operated within the Stalinist regime, see the work of his student Solomon Volkov, who describes the symphonies the composer developed during Stalinist rule as part of an ongoing and terrifying dialogue with and covert critique of the regime. Solomon Volkov, *Sjostakovitsj en Stalin – De kunstenaar en de tsaar (Amsterdam/Antwerpen: De Arbeiderspers, 2003), pp. 308–9.*

that used fronts in the form of independent publishers and literary agents to distribute books from American figures such as T.S. Eliot as well as Soviet writers, such as Boris Pasternak, whose novel *Dr Zhivago* (1957) was prohibited in his own country due to its critical relation to the state. These books were produced and distributed under the auspices of the Congress for Cultural Freedom, and under the guidance of the CIA T.S. Eliot's *Four Quartets* (1943) was even translated and airdropped into Russia.[145] And naturally, when the Russians invaded Hungary in 1956 and Sartre for the first time fully distanced himself of the Communist Party in an article in *L'Express*, the Congress made sure to have thousands of copies distributed instantly.[146]

Through progressive culture, the Soviet enemy could be exposed in its barbarity, both politically and culturally. But precisely here one of the great paradoxes of the Congress for Cultural Freedom is evident, namely that its preference for modernist art was far more progressive than any other, overt national program of the United States itself. For example, "President Truman articulated a view held by many Americans that linked experimental, and especially abstract art to degenerate or subversive impulses."[147] And under Senator McCarthy's witch hunt for Communist conspirators this sentiment was only strengthened. McCarthy's close ally, Dondero, even proclaimed that "[a]ll modern art is Communistic," claiming cubism, futurism, dadaism, expressionism, abstractionism, and surrealism to be "primitive," "insane," and "in denial of reason."[148] But the Congress for Cultural Freedom, in line with the writings of Greenberg, saw in the work of the modernist artists something entirely different, and supported the dissemination of its works in the form of large-scale touring exhibitions such as *Modern Art in the United States* (1955) and *The New American Painting* (1958–59) – a campaign that Saunders describes as a form of "reverse *Entartete kunst,*" meant to show that "modernism owed its survival – and its future – to America"[149]:

145 Saunders, *Who Paid the Piper*, p. 248.
146 Ibid., p. 306.
147 Ibid., p. 252.
148 Ibid., p. 253.
149 Ibid., p. 119. David Caute challenges Saunders's research on the international work of the Congress for Cultural Freedom, when he writes that while the CIA "certainly involved itself in clandestinely promoting literary magazines, music festivals, and orchestral tours, along with much else in the United States, the financing of American art exhibits abroad was largely the work of the Rockefellers, the Whitneys, and the Guggenheims," claiming that "Western attention post-1967 has been so fixated by the machinations of the FBI, and the KGB, that no historical episode is now deemed worthy of attention unless some clandestine agency of the state can be shown to be at the back of it." What Caute bypasses is that Saunders does not argue for some "totalitarian" cultural apparatus of the CIA, but rather lays out the much more complex and decentralized structures through which American exceptionalism was promoted in the Cold War period. Her research is not so much one of "guilt by association," but an exposé of the many different levels of involvement and different grades of awareness of actors involved in the process. See: David Caute, *The Dancer Defects: The Struggle for Cultural Supremacy during the Cold War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 540–41. See further: Robert Burstow, "The Limits of Modernist Art as a 'Weapon of the Cold War': Reassessing the Unknown Patron of the Monument to the Unknown Soldier," *Oxford Art Journal*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (1997): pp. 68–80, at p. 80.
150 Saunders, *Who Paid the Piper*, p. 254.
151 Ibid., p. 277.
152 Ibid., p. 275.
153 Ibid., pp. 276–77.

> [F]or them, it [modernist art] spoke to a specifically anti-Communist ideology, the ideology of freedom, of free enterprise. Non-figurative and politically silent, it was the very antithesis to socialist realism. It was precisely the kind of art the Soviets loved to hate. But it was more than this. It was, claimed its apologists, an explicitly *American* intervention in the modernist canon. As early as 1946, critics were applauding the new art as independent, self-reliant, a true expression of the national will, spirit and character.[150]

Saunders also argues that the modernist artists were not as "depoliticized" and unaware of the instrumentalization of their work as is often claimed. Apart from the painter Ad Reinhardt, who, unlike most abstract expressionists who had espoused Marxist sympathies, remained loyal to his leftist political orientation, and who was the only one of the group to participate in the March on Washington in support of black rights in 1963, many of the artists had direct and voluntary links to the anti-Communist movement.[151] Barnett Newman had no problem to speak publicly of his work as a reflection of the "new America,"[152] Motherwell and Pollock – just like Greenberg – were members of the American Committee for Cultural Freedom. In 1940, Rothko and Gottlieb even helped to establish the Foundation of Modern Painters and Sculptors, "which started by condemning all threats to culture from nationalistic and reactionary political movements," but in later months became an active agent in the anti-Communist movement by "exposing Party influence in various art organizations" with the aim to "destroy all Communist presence in the art world."[153]

From this point of view, Pollock's "drippings" suddenly demand a fundamentally different contextual reading than the one preferred by Greenberg. Rather than being questionable neo-Kantian culminations of radically self-interrogating autonomy, the figure of Pollock becomes a performer in a much larger geopolitical construct: his work operates within the micro-performative dimension of propaganda, directed through the macro-performative dimension of the Cold War. His wild dances around his canvasses while throwing paint in all directions are not merely an attempt to arrive at a truth located within the act of painting itself, but should rather be understood as a ritual performance of the doctrine of freedom espoused by the structures of power

in capitalist democracy, a doctrine to which Pollock himself declared his loyalty through his membership of the American Committee for Cultural Freedom, a doctrine that further connected him with anti-Communist leagues of the United States through an "umbilical cord of gold." The privilege that resulted from this political affiliation cannot be underestimated. While Pollock's works would gain international fame and win the artist great financial success, an artist like Reinhardt, who was unwilling to distance himself from his political convictions, remained largely ignored until the 1960s. Pollock's works might be criticized by American conservatives at home, but in the international sphere they were successfully capitalized as the embodiment of American exceptionalism and the doctrinal freedom it wished to export to the rest of the world.

Pollock's work means little as propaganda, but this is essentially true for every work of propaganda art. As we saw in the first chapter, modern propaganda always demands a larger political, economic, and technological structure in which singular gestures become of importance in propagating a larger set of power interests. In this context, Greenberg's notion of a modernist autonomy of purposeless purpose clearly shows its limits: Pollock does not perform in relation to the canvas alone, but in relation to the entire apparatus that guarantees the circulation and financial and ideological validation of his work as a cultural weapon in the Cold War. From the perspective of the CIA's avant-garde, the purposeless purpose of modernist art thus becomes of true purpose in its merger of art with the reality of capitalist-democratic life. In declaring modernist art as the ultimate culmination of modernity, Greenberg opened the way for the avant-garde of the CIA to translate these ideas into the construction of a new reality.

Nonetheless, even though the general public today has been made aware of the use of Modernist Propaganda Art in the Cold War for several decades, the omnipresent faith in modernist art remains unshaken, in stark contrast to the fate of Avant-Garde Propaganda Art and Totalitarian Propaganda Art. The work of the Soviet avant-garde has certainly been recognized in the historical canon as one of the most important alternative histories of modern art, and its works well represented in international art institutions. Yet they continue to be exhibited with caution. The works tend to be politically contextualized, and the implication of the artists in the relation to the regimes of their time and their tragic end as propagators or victims of Stalinism is usually mentioned – often with a moral question hanging in the air: were the artists of the avant-garde ultimately at the side of democratic change

or complicit to dictatorship and totalitarianism?[154]

In the case of Totalitarian Art, socialist realist artworks are rare items in international museum collections, except when concerning the work of acknowledged avant-garde artists that had been forced to dedicate their talents to the Stalinist cult. Socialist realist works of art only travel in exhibitions that take the form of *Entartete Kunst* displays, inviting spectators to witness the horrors of totalitarianism, rather than to genuinely study the process through which these artworks came into being and the larger social and political context in which they operated. In the case of both Avant-Garde Propaganda Art and Totalitarian Propaganda Art, the political subtext of the works is emphasized as a means of defining their historical place. Hardly ever are they presented as autonomous art in the Greenbergian sense of the word.

In complete contrast, Modernist Propaganda Art is present in every major museum collection of the United States and most museum collections in and outside Europe. Only with the greatest exception, when shown in exhibitions with a very specific political investment, do we find any reference to the anti-Communist political orientation of its artists or its use as Modernist Propaganda Art. This absence of any political context shows us the all-encompassing success of the Congress for Cultural Freedom. Even though we know, or could easily know, the implications of these works as Modernist Propaganda Art at a time in which the CIA and the American Government were implicated in gruesome military takeovers of democratic and popular governments, those works are still not acknowledged for the propaganda that they are. In our mind, the drippings of Pollock remain abstract; they do not "depict" heroic American leaders or evil communists, even though, in fact, *they do*. In essence, there is nothing non-figurative about the works of Modernist Propaganda Art: *it offers figurative representations of the freedom supposedly inherent to non-figurative representation.*

Modernist Propaganda Art represents the capitalist democratic imaginary of what liberation is supposed to be. We might not directly recognize the heroic American soldiers and tragic victims of Communist violence, but presented within the right context, they are inevitably present in Pollock's drippings – as inevitably as they are present in each and every work of Soviet socialist realism. But our museums still decide differently: Modernist Propaganda Art is not exhibited in

154 Jonathan Jones's recent comments on an exhibition of Soviet avant-garde art at the occasion of the 100-year anniversary of the Russian Revolution are exemplary, when he writes: "It is a lazy, immoral lie to keep pretending there was anything glorious about the brutal experiment Lenin imposed on Russia – or anything innocent about its all-too-brilliant propaganda art." It would be hard to imagine any such similar critique regarding overviews of Modernist Propaganda Art. See: Jonathan Jones, "We cannot celebrate Russian art – it is brutal propaganda," *The Guardian*, Feb. 1, 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/jonathanjonesblog/2017/feb/01/revolutionary-russian-art-brutal-propaganda-royal-academy.

a dark corner of propagandistic *Entartete Kunst*, but at the very heart of museums, as the true backbone of Western democracy and capitalist modernity. Even when we are told that these images are propaganda, and that their makers openly endorsed the ideological warfare for which they were used, we somehow remain deeply convinced that they are not, or otherwise, that it is a mere mistake. In the face of Modernist Propaganda Art, we enact democratic freedom. For democracy's intentions *must* be different, such is our presumption. That makes Modernist Propaganda Art, more than any of the art in the past, still effective and operational. *Visible as art, invisible as propaganda*: that is the core of the enormous success of Modernist Propaganda Art.

Before arriving at a general comparison and conclusion to our exploration of categories that help us to define the history of modern propaganda art, let us first summarize the definition of Modernist Propaganda Art as we have discussed it in this section:

- Modernist Propaganda Art is a form of modern propaganda employed by Western capitalist democracies which propagandizes ideals of individualist and "purposeless" freedom in contrast to the dogmatic, collective, and instrumentalized nature of Totalitarian Propaganda Art;
- Modernist Propaganda Art demands of the artist a visual vocabulary that can be effectively positioned as the absolute opposite of Totalitarian Propaganda Art and thus at first sight must not be associated with any specific political objective, but instead suggest an internal autonomy that defines its reason of being in the world;
- Modernist Propaganda Art functions through the use of images not associated with propaganda, and as such is a propaganda that propagates liberation from all forms of propaganda as such: its rejection of all overt political messages is part of its core political message;
- Modernist Propaganda Art is visible as art and invisible as propaganda: our incapacity to recognize it as propaganda, even when we are made aware of its use as such, is the essence and proof of its persistence and continuous value in embodying, performing, and thus propagating the doctrines of capitalist democracy.

2.5 CONCLUSION

In the first chapter, we concluded that modern propaganda is the performance of power in modern society; in this second chapter, we have traced the process in which modern propaganda performs power as art. We have done so not by analyzing artworks in and of themselves, but by contextualizing them within specific political, economic, and technological developments, beginning with the very origins of modern art in the period surrounding the French Revolution. Through the work of Rousseau, Kant, and Saint-Simon we observed that this revolutionary moment allowed for a liberation of art from its subservience to ruling powers, although the exact form of a "free art" proved to be subject to very different interpretations. From the notion of an "autonomous" aesthetic experience as elaborated by Kant to the role of art in furthering the common good as described by Rousseau, and the more radical stance of Saint-Simon, who rejected "art for art's sake" and emphasized its role as an avant-garde of society in service of revolutionary ideals located in mass industrialization and the rejection of the state.

We continued this specific political reading of the foundations of modern art in the context of the Russian Revolution and its attempt to contribute to the creation of a revolutionary modernity in opposition to western capitalist modernity. From these contextual readings of the role of art in modern propaganda, we observed that different structures of power are performed as different models of propaganda art. For example, the modern propaganda of imperial British democracy privileged an elitist approach, in which the figure of the propagandist and its public are clearly distinct, whereas in the early years of the Russian revolution these distinctions were – at least in theory – rejected in favor of an educational or "emancipatory" propaganda enacted through an avant-garde but aimed for and by the masses. In the latter case, political alliances between the Bolshevik Party and the Russian Avant-Garde, advanced a distinctively different form of conscious politicization by artists and art movements, which we discussed as Avant-Garde Propaganda Art. We have noted that such differences impact the interplay between the macro- and micro-performative dimensions that define propaganda.

We also investigated the conflation of different developments in art in modern propaganda through the concept of Totalitarian Art, proposed by Igor Golomstock. We tried to show how his usage of the concept of totalitarianism obfuscates both the differences between specific cultural doctrines of dictatorships – from fascist Italy to the Third Reich – but also between different political and cultural developments within

the Soviet Union; for example, between the relative freedom provided by the Bolshevik Party in relation to the Russian Avant-Garde and the radical, state-imposed doctrine of socialist realism under the Stalinist regime. We concluded that the concept of Totalitarian Propaganda Art in this respect, is not just a term used to describe art within dictatorships, but used to obscure its differences. Golomstock's insistence on an absolute distinction between Totalitarian Propaganda Art and art created in modern democracies further serves as a reminder that our critical capacity to analyze the implications of modern democracies in propaganda analysis can be undermined, and proves to be a propagandistic mechanism in and of itself.

This led us to the final analysis of Modernist Propaganda Art, as theorized by Clement Greenberg. Here we became aware of the complex and decentralized usage of modernist art as propaganda by the CIA in service of American exceptionalism during the Cold War period. We saw how through covert channels, reminiscent of the development of propaganda in imperial British democracy, movements such as abstract expressionism served as a cultural counterpoint to Soviet-sanctioned socialist realism, with the goal to build support for American capitalist democracy as the new safe haven of modernity. Crucial in this regard is the detachment between what an artwork depicts and how it is deployed: we noted the non-figurative nature of the works that were privileged in the CIA's investment in Modernist Propaganda Art, which represented an abstracted notion of depoliticized freedom and non-ideological expression. Although these Modernist artists were not completely aware of the overall apparatus in which they operated, we also highlighted the direct and willful implication of a number of them in anti-Communist activities.

Although the history of Modernist Propaganda Art is today known to the public, its artists and their works remain insulated from the history of Totalitarian Propaganda Art and displayed publicly without mention of their implication in some of the most devastating US-led wars and covert operations in history. Therefore, Modernist Propaganda Art is recognizable as art, but invisible as propaganda, and thus continues to be one of the most effective forms of modern propaganda in history. Whereas Avant-Garde Propaganda Art and Totalitarian Propaganda Art are always politically and historically contextualized, Modernist Propaganda Art remains largely free from such critical inquiry and continues to express the idea of an a-historical and non-ideological freedom of expression and artistic autonomy, born from capitalist democracy in the United States. From these three historical models of modern propaganda art, we may conclude that Totalitarian Propaganda Art remains effective in terms of defining what a democratic art

should *not be*, and that Modernist Propaganda Art is the only one that in theory and image remains fully operational today.

The process through which we investigated different structures of power and art thus allowed us to differentiate models of modern propaganda art. This allows us to speak even more concretely of propagandas in the plural. Let us for now, based on this chapter, propose the following definition of Modern Propaganda Art in general:

- Modern propaganda art is the performance of power as art in modern society

Now, our challenge will be to translate our definitions of modern propaganda, as well as modern propaganda art to the current, 21st century. As we have now concluded that modern propaganda and democracy do not exclude one another, and that democracy's impact on the domain of modern propaganda art continues to affect our present era, our task will be to analyze both the heritage of modernity and modern art in our present time, and to locate the dominant – and often conflicting – structures of power that define our current condition: that which we refer to as the contemporary. We will do so by testing how our definition of modern propaganda relates to what we will now define as *contemporary propaganda*. Our aim will be to analyze three structures of established and emerging powers that have a particularly prominent impact in our time, in the form of the War on Terror, popular mass movements, and stateless peoples. Subsequently, in the final chapter, we will explore how the structures of power that define contemporary propaganda shape *contemporary propaganda art*.