

# ART AND POWER

## Europe under the dictators 1930-45

The XXIII Council of Europe exhibition

Council of Europe  
Conseil de l'Europe



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Frontispiece: International Exhibition, Paris 1937. Regatta in progress on 13 June, with Italian Pavilion in foreground (sculpture by Giorgio Gori), German Pavilion at right and Soviet Pavilion in the background (sculpture by Vera Mukhina).

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# PREFACE

Klaus Gallwitz

In 1977 the Western part of Berlin witnessed the exhibition *Tendenzen der zwanziger Jahre* (Tendencies of the 1920s). In the divided city, the Neue Nationalgalerie, the Orangerie of Schloss Charlottenburg and the Akademie der Künste housed the work of the avant-garde of one of the great decades of European art.

That was in the middle of the Cold War, and the exhibition, the fifteenth organized by the Council of Europe, was inaccessible to people beyond the Wall: a view of 'Modernism Undivided' without Eastern participation. The exhibition *Westkunst*, shown in Cologne in 1981, was a statement of this political and artistic reality: the postwar aesthetic was defined in Atlantic terms.

And so there has been no sequel to that exhibition in Berlin. The 1930s, the age of totalitarianism and war, have been tabooed, disregarded, or else looked at only from specialized aspects. After all, who was in a position to be unbiased? Memories in postwar Europe differed too widely; the ideological pressures of the present were too strong. The title of our exhibition, *Art and Power*, is a deliberate reference to this continuing dilemma.

In 1930 José Ortega y Gasset gave this diagnosis: 'For good or ill, the decisive factor that governs public life in Europe at present is the rise of the masses to full social power.' This was our starting point. Early in 1988, in discussions within a small group of museum colleagues at the Council of Europe in Strasbourg, the concept took shape: it was that of art in Europe between the Great Depression and the Potsdam Conference, between dictatorship and freedom.

London commended itself to us as the setting for the exhibition. Great Britain had held out against Fascism, and during the Second World War the chimes of Big Ben in Westminster reached us from the BBC. This was the voice of freedom; anyone in our countries who listened to it, or passed it on, was risking his or her life. In itself, this made the island capital seem the appropriate setting for this contradictory, conflict-laden chapter in the history of art.

We were not disappointed in the response. Our colleagues at the Hayward Gallery took up the suggestion and made the project their own. The results of intensive researches on an international scale are

now before us; and the opening of the Eastern borders has lent the project an unexpected impulse and a new motivation.

In the exhibition, architecture and film are given the prominence that their historical importance demands – as against the controversial position of painting and sculpture in the service of totalitarian ideologies, which is also represented here. The British capital itself turns out to have been a particular focus for Continental contradictions. Almost in the very style of his adversaries – and as a scornful indictment of them – Oskar Kokoschka (who later moved to London) painted himself in 1937 as a 'Degenerate Artist'. Here, too, Salvador Dalí was introduced to the refugee Sigmund Freud by the writer Stefan Zweig. Dalí, who did not hide his admiration for the movement of the soft flesh of Hitler's back packed tightly into his uniform, sketched, in a state of fascination, two portraits of the Viennese scholar. At the same time, as a riposte to the Munich exhibition in which 'Degenerate Art' was pilloried, the New Burlington Galleries in London held an exhibition of those same artists who were outlawed in Germany. Again, it was here that Elias Canetti, tucked away in Hampstead, was assembling his notes for the book that became *Crowds and Power*. Shortly after the outbreak of war, Henry Moore made his first *Shelter Drawings*: glimpses of a 'human condition' that looked much the same all over Europe. London bears the marks of a European decade.

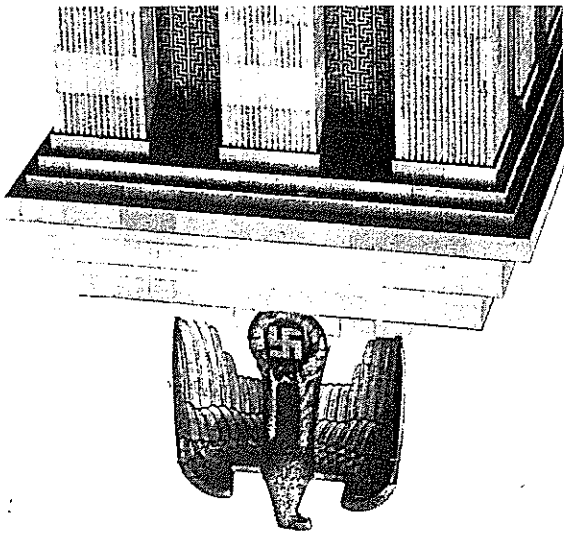
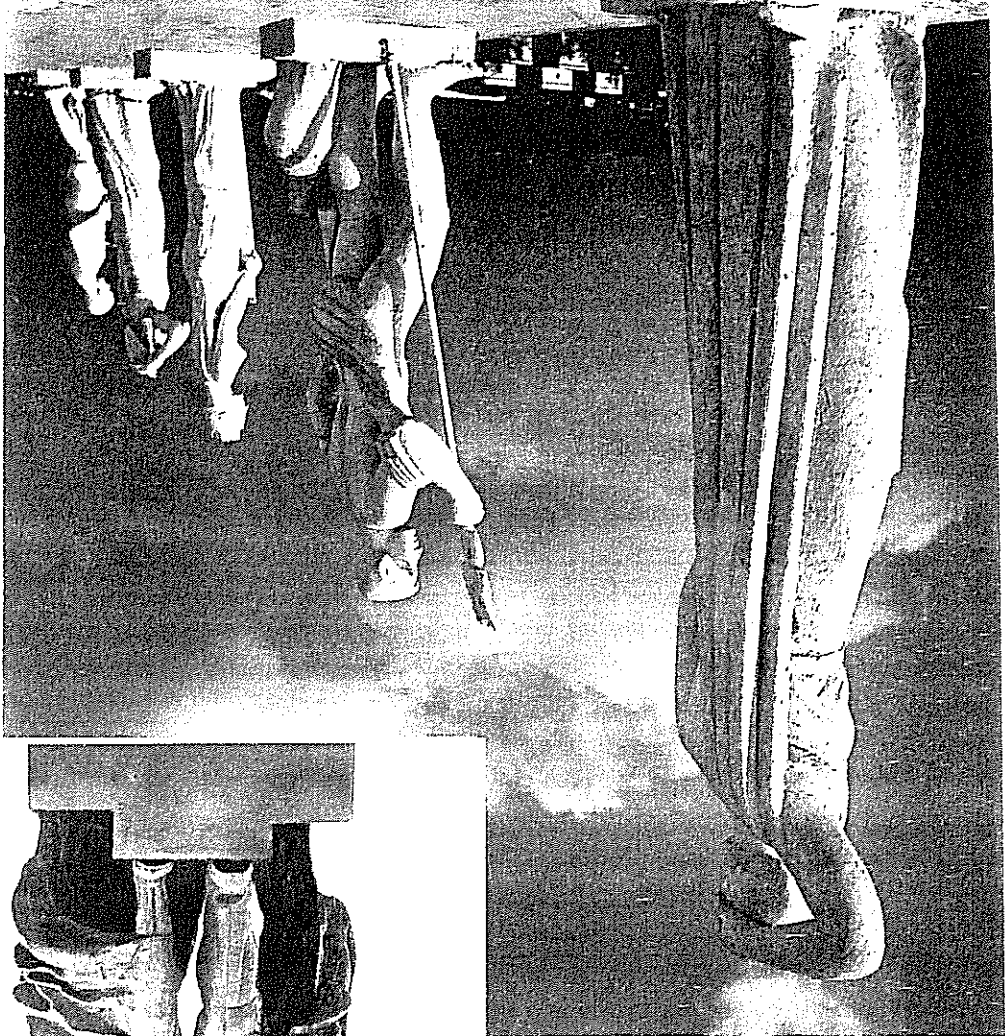
That the exhibition became possible is to the credit of all the staff of the Hayward Gallery, and of the selectors and specialists who have participated in the enterprise. We are indebted to Henry Meyric Hughes and Andrew Dempsey, but also to Joanna Drew, David Sylvester and Nicholas Serota (who were involved in the early stages). I am grateful to my colleagues at the Council of Europe in Strasbourg for their support over many years – and in particular to David Mardell, who has the responsibility for exhibitions, for his tireless and ever-present support of this, the Twenty-Third Council of Europe Exhibition.

As Europe once more seeks to find its voice, this exhibition seeks to contribute to the regaining of a common memory – in London as well as in Barcelona and in Berlin, where it will subsequently be shown.

LES MOTIFS DE SCULPTURE QUI COURONNENT TROIS DES PRINCIPAUX PAVILLONS ETRANGERS

*Photographies: Schiff et A. Steinmann*

L'Allemagne (Aigle, professeur Schmidt-Ehmen) - L'U.R.S.S. (l'industrie et l'agriculture, groupe en acier de Mme Mouchina) - L'Italie (les diverses corporations, par les sculpteurs Serretaz, Mascherini, Fontana, Minguzzi et Bortolotti).



# FOREWORD

Eric Hobsbawm

Esthétique de la politique

Art has been used to reinforce the power of political rulers and states since the ancient Egyptians, though the relationship between power and art has not always been smooth. The present exhibition illustrates probably the least happy episode in this relationship in the twentieth century, in what has been called the 'Europe of the Dictators', between 1930 and 1945.

For a century before the First World War it had been confidently assumed that Europe was moving in the direction of political liberalism, civil rights and constitutional government by elected authorities, though not necessarily republics. Shortly before 1914 even democracy – government by the vote of all adult males, though not yet of females – was making rapid progress. The Great War seemed to accelerate this development dramatically. After it ended Europe consisted of parliamentary regimes of one kind or another, except for war-torn and revolutionary Soviet Russia. However, almost immediately, the direction of political development was reversed. Europe, and indeed most parts of the globe, moved away from political liberalism. By the middle of the Second World War no more than twelve out of the sixty-five sovereign states of the interwar period had anything like constitutional elected governments. The regimes of the political right which took over everywhere except in Russia were hostile to democracy in principle. Communism, still confined to Russia, claimed to be democratic in theory and nomenclature, but was in practice an unlimited dictatorship.

Most of the regimes with which this exhibition is concerned consciously and deliberately broke with the immediate past. Whether this radical break was made from the political right or left – outside Europe, as in Kemal Atatürk's Turkey, these labels were sometimes beside the point – is less important than that such regimes saw their role, not as maintaining or restoring or even improving their society but as transforming and reconstructing it. They were not landlords of old buildings but architects of new ones. Equally to the point, they were ruled, or came to be ruled, by absolute leaders whose command was law. Moreover, although these were the opposite of democratic, they all claimed to derive from and operate through 'the people' and to lead and shape them. These common characteristics distinguished both Fascist and Communist regimes in

this period from the older states, in spite of their fundamental differences and mutual hostility. In them, power not only made enormous demands on art, but art found it difficult or even impossible to escape the demands and controls of political authority. Not surprisingly, an exhibition on Art and Power in this period is dominated by the arts in Hitler's Germany (1933–45), Stalin's USSR (c. 1930–53) and Mussolini's Italy (1922–45).

However, it cannot overlook the public arts of the states whose governments were being subverted. Appropriately, therefore, this exhibition begins with the one occasion when all states and their arts were in public confrontation: the Paris International Exhibition of 1937, the last before the Second World War of a series of such displays which had begun in London in 1851. They had been perhaps the most characteristic form in which art and power collaborated during the era of bourgeois liberalism. While providing prestige for the countries which organized them, rather as Olympic Games do today, what they had celebrated was not the state but civil society, not political power but economic, technical and cultural achievement, not conflict but the coexistence of nations. Descended from fairs (the American ones were even called 'World Fairs'), they were not designed as permanent structures, though they left some monuments behind, notably the Eiffel Tower.

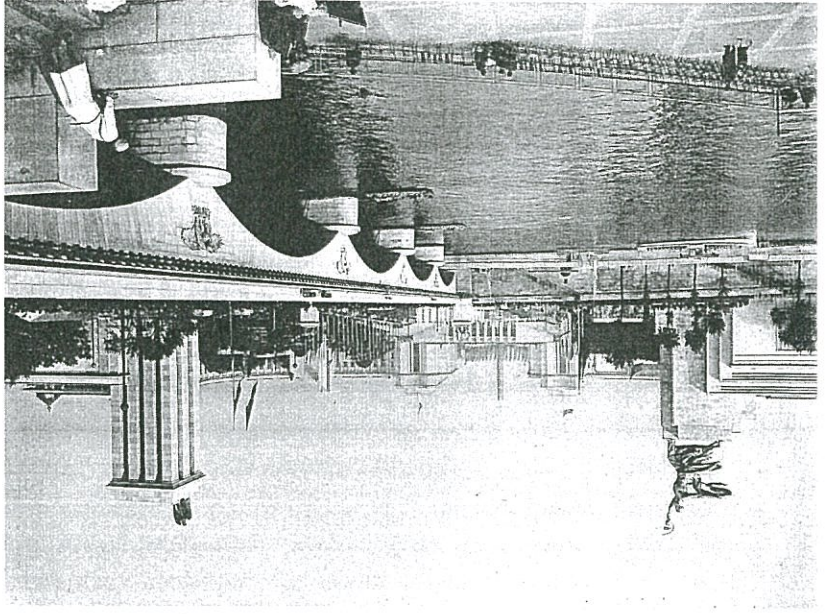
Small 'national' pavilions had first appeared in 1867, but became increasingly prominent in what developed into public competitions between states. In 1937 they dominated the Exhibition totally. The thirty-eight rival displays – more than in any previous exhibition – represented a higher proportion of the world's sovereign states than ever before or since. All, or almost all, made political statements, if only by advertising the virtues of their 'way of life' and arts. The show itself was designed to bring glory to France, then governed by a Popular Front of the left under its first Socialist prime minister, and its most permanent memorial is probably Picasso's *Guernica*, first shown in the pavilion of the embattled Spanish Republic. Yet the 1937 Exhibition was clearly then, and is still in retrospect, dominated by the German and Soviet pavilions, huge and deliberately symbolic, which confronted each other across the mall.

later, to Mussolini's harangues. The rise of public mass entertainment, and above all mass sport, provided an additional supply of public certainties and structures custom-built for the expression of mass emotion, notably stadia. These could be and were used for the purposes of power. Hitler both spoke at the Berlin Sportpalast and discovered the political potential of the Olympic Games (1936).

The importance of art for power in this field lay not so much in the buildings and spaces themselves, but in what took place inside or between them. What power required was performance art in the enclosed spaces, elaborate ceremonies (the British became particularly adept at inventing royal rituals of this kind from the late nineteenth century onwards); and, in the open spaces, processions or mass choreography. The leaders' theatre of power combined military and civilian components and preferred open spaces. The contribution to crowd choreography of labour demonstrations, wars, stage spectacles and the new cinema epics pioneered before 1914 by the young Italian cinema remains to be adequately investigated.

A third service that art could render power was educational or propagandist: it could teach, inform and inculcate the state's value system. Before the era of the people's participation in politics these functions had been left mainly to churches and other religious bodies, but in the nineteenth century they were increasingly undertaken by secular governments, most obviously through public elementary education. The dictatorships did not innovate in this field, except by banning dissident voices and making state orthodoxy compulsory.

However, one traditional form of political art requires some comment, if only because it was rapidly on the way to extinction: monumental public statuary. Before the French Revolution, it had been confined to princes and allegorical figures; in the nineteenth century, however, it became a sort of open-air museum of national history as seen through great men. (Unless they were royal or symbolic, women were absent.) Its educational value was patent. Not for nothing did the arts in nineteenth-century France come under the Ministry of Public Instruction. Thus, in order to educate a largely illiterate people after the 1917 revolution, Lenin proposed to put up monuments to suitable persons – Danton, Garibaldi, Marx, Engels, Herzen, assorted poets and others – in conspicuous spots in cities, especially where soldiers could see them. What has been called 'statuemania' reached its peak between 1870 and 1914, when 150 statues were erected



International Exhibition, Paris 1937, showing Soviet and German pavilions

There are three primary demands which power usually makes on art, and which absolute power makes on a larger scale than more limited authorities. The first is to demonstrate the glory and triumph of power itself, as in the great arches and columns celebrating victories in war ever since the Roman Empire, the major model for public art. Rather than by single constructions, the dimensions and ambitions of power in the age of the great leaders were to be demonstrated by the sheer scale of the structures they planned or realized and, typically, not so much by single buildings and monuments as by giant ensembles – replanned cities or even regions – for example, the motorways pioneered in an Italy with few cars. These could best express the planned reshaping of countries and societies. Pomp and gigantism were the face of power they wished the arts to present.

The second major function of art under power was to organize it as public drama. Ritual and ceremony are essential to the political process, and with the democratization of politics power increasingly became public theatre, with the people as audience and – this was the specific innovation of the era of dictators – as organized participants. The construction of wide rectilinear professional avenues for secular political display belongs essentially to the nineteenth century. The Mall in London (1911) with its vista from the Admiralty Arch to Buckingham Palace is a characteristic if late example. Increasingly, national monuments, built to stimulate or provide expression for mass patriotism, also included planned spaces for special ceremonies. The piazza Venezia in Rome was as essential to the awful Vittorio Emanuele monument as,

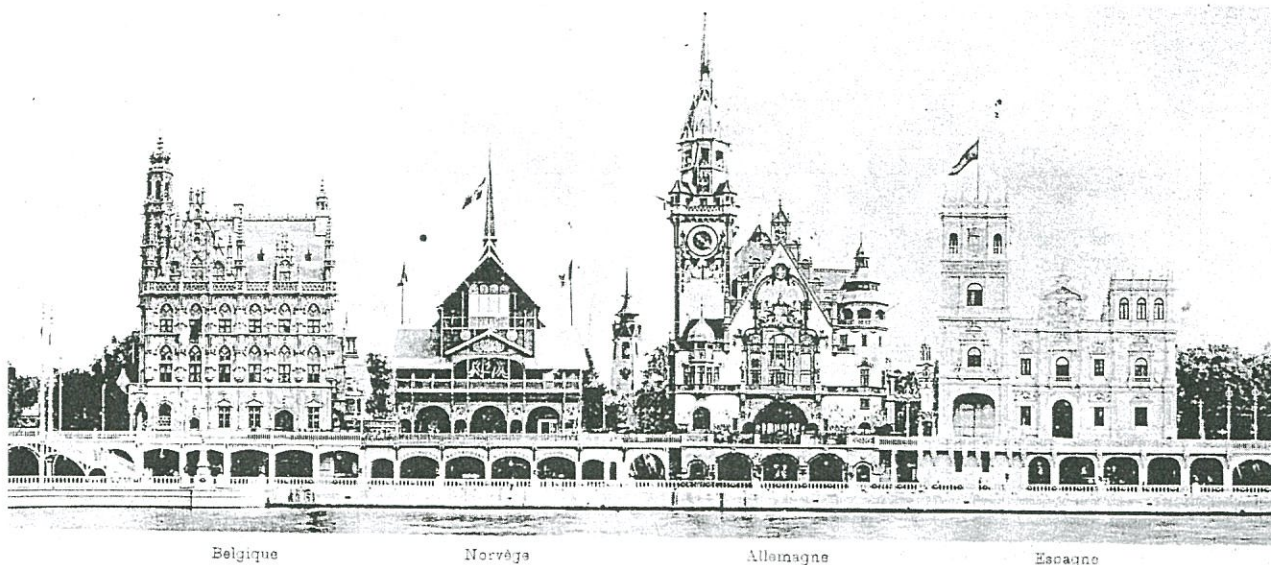
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Universal Exhibition, Paris 1900: national pavilions

in Paris, as against only twenty-six from 1815 to 1870 – and those primarily military figures, which had almost all been removed after 1870. (Under the German occupation in 1940–44 a further seventy-five of these glories of Culture, Progress and Republican identity were removed by the Vichy government.) Yet after the Great War, except the now universal war memorials, bronze and marble went distinctly out of fashion. The elaborate visual language of symbolism and allegory became as incomprehensible in the twentieth century as the classical myths now were for most people. In France the Paris municipal council (1937) feared that ‘the tyranny of commemorative statuary rests like a heavy weight on projects that might be proposed by gifted artists and administrators with good taste.’ Only the USSR, true to Lenin’s example, maintained its unqualified attachment to public statuary, including giant symbolic monuments surrounded by workers, peasants, soldiers and arms.

Power clearly needed art. But what kind of art? The major problem arose out of the ‘Modernist’ revolution in the arts in the last years before the Great War, which produced styles and works designed to be unacceptable to anyone whose tastes were, like most people’s, rooted in the nineteenth century. They were therefore unacceptable to conservative and even to conventional liberal governments. One might have expected regimes dedicated to breaking with the past and hailing the future to be more at ease with the avant-garde. However, there were two difficulties which were to prove insurmountable.

The first was that the avant-garde in the arts was not necessarily marching in the same direction as the political radicals of right or left. Probably the Soviet revolution and revulsion against the war attracted many

to the radical left, although in literature some of the most talented writers can only be described as men of the extreme right. The German Nazis were not entirely wrong to describe the Modernism of the Weimar Republic as ‘cultural Bolshevism’. National Socialism was therefore *a priori* hostile to the avant-garde. In Russia, most of the pre-1917 avant-garde had been non-political or doubtful about the October Revolution which, unlike the 1905 revolution, made no great appeal to Russian intellectuals. However, thanks to a sympathetic minister, Anatoly Lunacharsky, the avant-garde was given its head, so long as artists were not actively hostile to the Revolution, and it dominated the scene for several years, although several of its less politically committed stars gradually drifted westwards. The 1920s in Soviet Russia were desperately poor, but culturally vibrant. Under Stalin this changed dramatically.

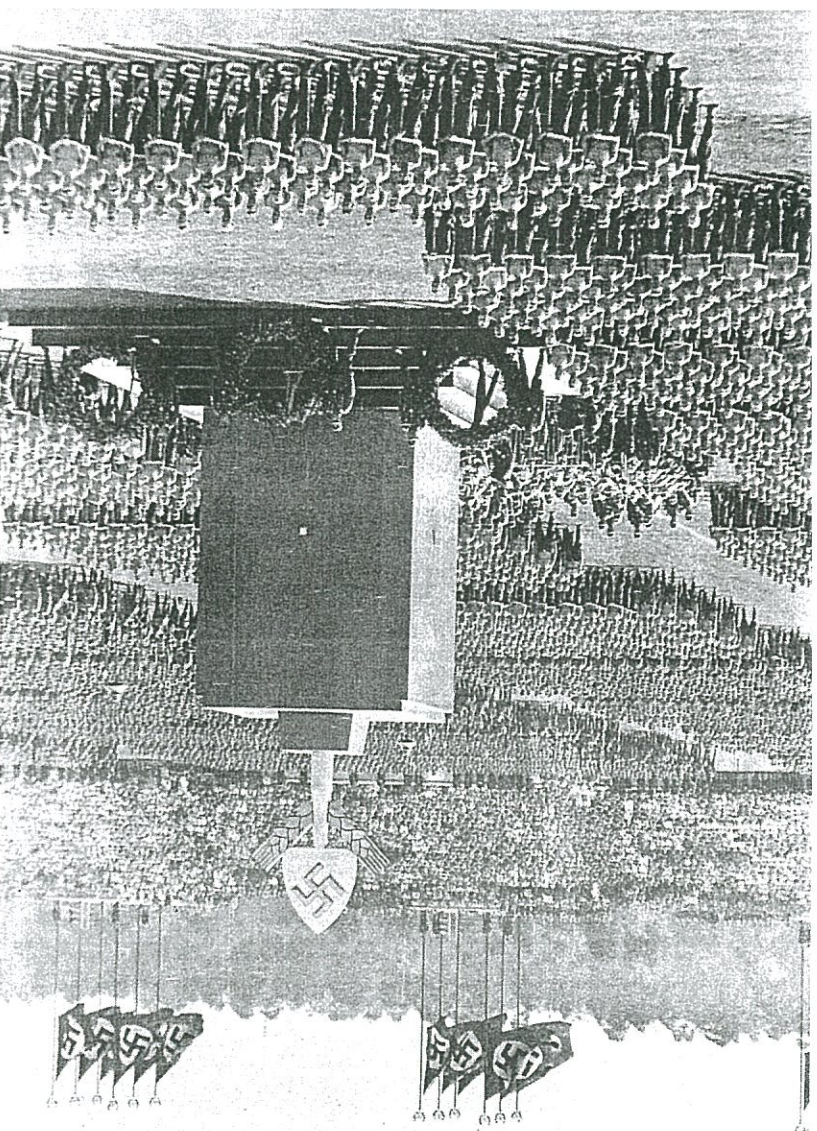
The only dictatorship relatively at ease with Modernism was Mussolini’s (one of whose mistresses saw herself as a patroness of contemporary art). Important branches of the local avant-garde (for example the Futurists) actually favoured Fascism, while most Italian intellectuals not already strongly committed to the left did not find it unacceptable, at least until the Spanish Civil War and Mussolini’s adoption of Hitler’s racism. It is true that the Italian avant-garde, like most of the Italian arts at the time, formed a somewhat provincial backwater. Even so, it can hardly be said to have dominated. The brilliance of Italian architecture, later discovered by the rest of the world, had little chance of emerging. As in Hitler’s Germany and Stalin’s Soviet Union, the mood of official Fascist architecture was not adventure, but pompous rhetoric.

conflicts between power and art, since it did not raise the problem of how to represent any reality other than itself. Nevertheless, in one important respect power and Modernist architecture (did not Adolf Loos proclaim that 'Ornament is Crime?') remained part of the artistic instrumentarium both of populist regimes and commercial producers for the mass market.

Consider the London and the Moscow Undergrounds – the Metro being probably the largest artistic enterprise undertaken in Stalin's Soviet Union. The London Tube, thanks to the patronage and decisions of an enlightened manager, became the largest showcase of a stripped, simple lucid and functional Modernism in interwar Britain, running far ahead of public taste. The stations of the Moscow Metro, though initially still sometimes designed by surviving Constructivists, increasingly became subterranean palaces full of marble, malachite and grandiose decoration. They were, in a sense, a far more ambitious counterpart to the gigantic Art Deco and Neo-Baroque movie palaces which went up in Western cities during the 1920s and 1930s with the same object: to give men and women who had no access to individual luxury the experience that, for a collective moment, it was theirs.

One might even argue that the less sophisticated the mass public, the greater the appeal of decoration. It probably reached its peak in the architecture of postwar Stalinism, from which the surviving vestiges of early Soviet Modernism had finally been expunged, to produce a sort of echo of nineteenth-century taste. How are we to judge the art of the dictators? The years of Stalin's rule in the USSR and of the Third Reich in Germany show a sharp decline in the cultural achievement of these two countries, compared to the Weimar Republic (1919-33) and the Soviet period before 1930. In Italy the contrast is not so great, since the pre-Fascist period had not been one of such creative brilliance – nor, unlike Germany and Russia in the 1920s, had the country been a major international style-setter. Admittedly, unlike Nazi Germany, Stalin's Russia and Franco's Spain, Fascist Italy did not drive out its creative talents *en masse*, force them into silence at home or, as in the worst years of Stalin, kill them. Nevertheless, compared to the cultural achievements and international influence of post-1945 Italy, the Fascist era does not look impressive.

Hence, what power destroyed or stifled in the era of the dictators is more evident than what it achieved. These regimes were better at stopping undesirable artists creating undesirable works than at finding good art to express their aspirations.



Labour Convention, Zeppelinfeld, Nuremberg, September 1937

The second difficulty was that Modernism appealed to a minority, whereas the governments were populist. On ideological and practical grounds they preferred arts that would appeal to the public, or at least be readily understood by it. This was rarely a top priority for creative talents who lived by innovation, experiment and quite often by provoking those who admired the art displayed in official Salons and Academies. Power and art disagreed most obviously over painting, since the regimes encouraged works in older academic, or at any rate realistic, styles, preferably blown up to large size and filled with heroic and sentimental clichés – even, in Germany, adding a little male erotic fantasy. Even in broadminded Italy official prizes like the Premio Cremona of 1939 (with seventy-nine contestants) were won by what could almost serve as a photofit portrait of public painting in any dictatorial country. Perhaps not surprisingly, since its subject was listening to a speech by Il Duce on the radio.

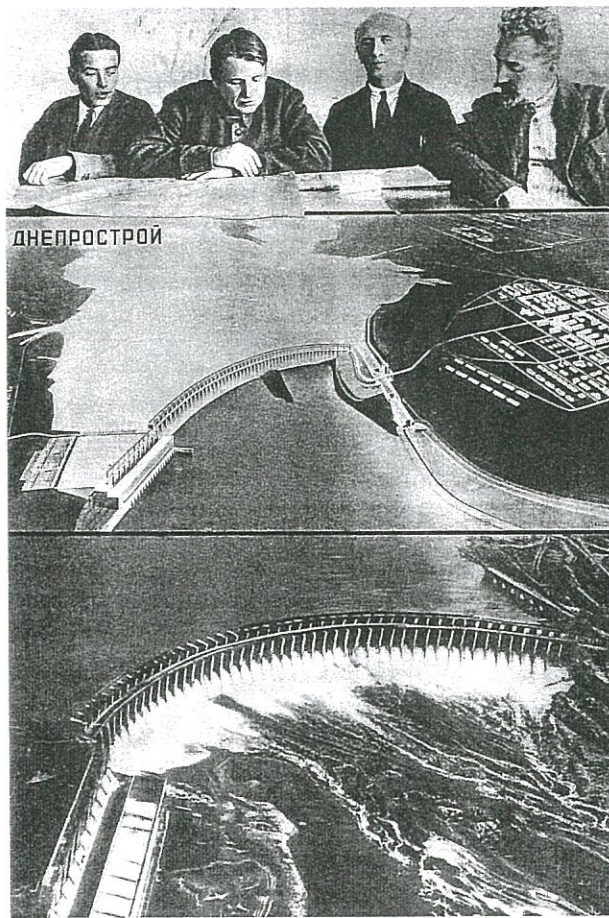
Architecture did not produce equally dramatic

They were not the first to want buildings and monuments to celebrate their power and glory, nor did they add much to the traditional ways of achieving these objects. And yet, it does not look as though the era of the dictators produced official buildings, spaces and vistas to compare with, say, the Paris of the two Napoleons, eighteenth-century St Petersburg or that great song of triumph to mid-nineteenth-century bourgeois liberalism, the Vienna Ringstrasse.

It was harder for art to demonstrate the dictators' intention and ability to change the shape of their countries. The antiquity of European civilization deprived them of the most obvious way of doing so: the building of entirely new capital cities like nineteenth-century Washington and twentieth-century Brasilia. (The only dictator who had this opportunity was Kemal Atatürk in Ankara.) Engineers symbolized this better than architects and sculptors. The real symbol of Soviet planned world-change was 'Dneprostroi', the much-photographed great Dnieper dam. The most lasting stone memorial to the Soviet era (unless the distinctly pre-Stalinist Lenin Mausoleum on Red Square manages to survive) is, almost certainly, the Moscow Metro. As for the arts, their most impressive contribution to expressing this aspiration was the (pre-Stalinist) Soviet cinema of the 1920s – the films of Eisenstein and Pudovkin, and V. Turin's unjustly neglected *Turksib*, the epic of railway building.

However, dictators also wanted art to express their ideal of 'the people', preferably at moments of devotion to, or enthusiasm for, the regime. This produced a spectacular quantity of terrible paintings, distinguished from each other chiefly by the face and costume of the national leader. In literature the results were less disastrous, though seldom worth turning back to. However, photography, and above all film, lent itself rather successfully to the aims of power in this respect.

Lastly, the dictators wished to mobilize the national past on their behalf, mythologizing or inventing it where necessary. For Italian Fascism the point of reference was ancient Rome, for Hitler's Germany a combination of the racially pure barbarians of the Teutonic forests and medieval knighthood, for Franco's Spain the age of the triumphant Catholic rulers who expelled unbelievers and resisted Luther. The Soviet Union had more trouble taking up the heritage of the tsars which the Revolution had, after all, been made to destroy, but eventually Stalin also found it convenient to mobilize it, especially against the Germans. However, the appeal to historic continuity across the



Dneprostroi  
(from *USSR in Construction*)

imagined centuries never came as naturally as in the dictatorships of the right.

How much of the art of power has survived in these countries? Surprisingly little in Germany, more in Italy, perhaps most (including the magnificent postwar restoration of St Petersburg) in Russia. Only one thing has gone from all of them: power mobilizing art and people as public theatre. This, the most serious impact of power on art between 1930 and 1945, disappeared with the regimes that had guaranteed its survival through the regular repetition of public ritual. The Nuremberg Rallies, the May Day and Revolution Anniversaries on Red Square, were the heart of what power expected from art. They died forever, along with that power. States which realized themselves as show-politics demonstrated their and its impermanence. If the theatre-state is to live, the show must go on. In the end it did not. The curtain is down and will not be raised again.



# THE BATTLE FOR ART

David Elliott

## 'Freedom' versus Autonomy

'The [French] Revolution wrote, as it were, the word freedom on its banner but, in truth, it equated freedom with the arbitrary will and licentiousness of the individual . . . This idol of 1789, which [in fact] was the enemy of freedom and individuality, has been destroyed by us and replaced by a monument to true freedom . . . [The German Revolution] has effected a complete change from the concept of "I" to the concept of "we", from the individual to the whole.' (Otto Dietrich, 1939.)<sup>1</sup>

'In October 1917 we overthrew the Tsar, the landlords and capitalists, and the Great Proletarian Revolution has since developed in our country. The great Lenin, our father and educator, proclaimed that from that time forward we would no longer have either rulers or ruled, and that the people would be equal and free. In this way he buried the old bourgeois politics of the Tsarist era and proclaimed the new politics of Bolshevism, the politics of friendship, the politics of the brotherhood of the peoples of our country.' (Joseph Stalin, 1935.)<sup>2</sup>

'To truly understand Fascism, one must first understand this truth: that it is not a reactionary tyrannical movement nor a blind ferocious hatred of change. On the contrary, it is and intends always to grow into an even more democratic aristocracy, governed not by the people but for the people and for their interests, ruled by a hierarchy which is always open, in which all can join, and into which the interests of all have penetrated.' (Margherita Sarfatti, 1934.)<sup>3</sup>

Unconvincing as it may be to hear the representatives of National Socialism, Communism or Fascism speaking about 'freedom', they all, in their different ways, believed that their collective, corporate states had created new forms of living which, because they were ostensibly for the benefit of all their citizens, were implicitly more 'free' than previous, more limited structures which had benefited only despots or bourgeois democrats.

In his speech to the party faithful, Otto Dietrich, Joseph Goebbels's Chief of Press, unwittingly touched on one of the central paradoxes of modern history when he noted that the third annual celebration organized for the Day of Art in the great 'City of Art'

of Munich had coincided with the 150th anniversary of the French Revolution. Here, within the intellectual ferment of the European Enlightenment, he identified the germ of the series of conflicts in which the meaning of 'modernity' may be understood.

Logically, the free expression of the rights of the individual would, by definition, become less free if they were collectivized – a point which had been articulated with extreme passion by the Marquis de Sade. Individual freedoms soon agglomerated into new forms of nationhood, in which the people were governed not by despots but by their own collective will. Only in such states as these, Dietrich argued, could 'true freedom' be found. Yet, when it was analysed, the power of collective will was as confining, as confused and as mystical an entity as the divine right of kings had ever been.

The dictators of the 1930s were the apotheosis of modernity. By looking simultaneously at both the past and the future, they were able to sustain the fantasy of being able to stand outside their own time. They were prepared to draw a line through the past but would then have no compunction in reinvoking and remodelling its culture to suit their own ends.<sup>4</sup>

Aggressively modernizing, they were modern but hated Modernism. Their impulse to repudiate both modern art and modern culture, however, has to do with the semantic confusion between the 'modern' and the 'Modernist'.<sup>5</sup>

The aesthetic foundation upon which all 'modern art' has been built – the notion that an artist's individual conscience or sensibility can lead to personal or universal redemption – is in direct opposition to this corporate view of culture, and was violently repudiated both by Stalin and by Hitler. There were similarly repressive tendencies within the Italian Fascist party, though Mussolini long refused to give them a free hand.

The idea of the autonomy of artistic expression was crystallized towards the end of the eighteenth century in the *Critiques* of Immanuel Kant. These set out the notion of a subjective but altruistic form of aesthetics which expressed, symbolically and intuitively, what Kant described as the Absolute – a universal moral consciousness. Art was purely an end in itself; and, if its practice happened to illustrate other forms of reality, this was coincidental to the act of transcendent creation

1 Dr. Otto Dietrich, opening speech at the Third Day of German Art, Munich, 14 July 1939, reported in *Die Münchner Zeitung*, 15–16 July; cited in Robert S. Wistrich, *Weekend in Munich. Art, Propaganda and Terror in the Third Reich* (London, 1995), 74.

2 Joseph Stalin, from a speech made at a conference of elite collective farm workers from Tadzhikistan and Turkmenistan and government and party leaders, Moscow, 4 December 1935, in *SSSR na stroike*, nos. 9–12 (1937), 33.

3 Margherita Sarfatti, from a talk broadcast on the NBC radio network, New York, 2 April 1934, in Philip V. Cannistraro and Brian R. Sullivan, *Il Duce's Other Woman* (New York, 1993), 425.

4 Boris Groys identifies the radicalism of Stalinism as its preparedness to exploit the art and culture of the past; the avant-garde, he claims, was still working within the same cultural continuum as the art of the past although it was careful to repudiate it. Groys, *The Total Art of Stalin* (Princeton, 1992), 41–45.

5 The beginning of Modernism is usually attributed to the formalistic experiments embarked on by visual artists, writers and musicians from the beginning of this century.

whereby art became a paradigm of individual and social freedoms.

Kant's ideas had been influenced by the ferment of opinion about the nature of law, morality and society which had consumed Europe during the previous century. In 1750 Jean-Jacques Rousseau had pointed out in a seminal essay, *Discours sur les Sciences et les Arts*, that science, art and literature – far from representing a universal ideal – had for many years been the agents of servility and corruption:

'Princes always view with pleasure the spread among their subjects of the taste for the arts . . . besides fostering that spiritual pettiness so appropriate to slavery, they know well that the needs that people create for themselves are like chains binding them . . . The sciences, letters and arts . . . wind garlands of flowers around the iron chains that bind [the people and] stifle in them the feeling of that original liberty for which they seemed to have been born, makes them love their slavery and turn them into what are called civilized people.'

And from this point onwards, the idea of a specialized, fragmented and modern world became a pervasive double to that of the romantic, unitary being of the alienated but 'noble savage' – the human being who had not been corrupted by the decadence and idleness of despotism. Rousseau summarized the cause of this corruption as simply 'inequality . . . Wherever men are equal, there will be neither rich nor poor. Wealth inevitably leads to luxury and idleness; luxury permits a cultivation of the arts, and idleness that of the sciences'.<sup>6</sup>

Under despotism, art had reflected and reinforced the immoral power of the state. As an antidote, Rousseau maintained that the search for freedom and equality demanded that a moral sense should pervade all aspects of the new culture. By the end of the eighteenth century, Kant had provided an idealistic framework for such convictions, in which autonomy in the arts represented a field of non-specific, secular, symbolic and insignificant morality.

Kant's mapping out of the field of the aesthetic, as full of potential conflict as it may be, remained important because it constituted a symbolic space through which artists could move and work and in which they represented, as much as depicted, alternative forms of reality. In modern societies, 'Bohemia' and the avant-garde have fulfilled symbolic functions as counter-cultures in which aesthetics was established as an ethical field.

The concept of the avant-garde developed in

6 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Observations* (Paris, 1751).

7 Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford, 1990), 70–100.

8 See Linda Nochlin, 'The Invention of the Avant-Garde', in: *Nochlin, The Politics of Vision* (London, 1991), 1–18.

9 'Art as a weapon of struggle' was taken up in 1920 by the Communist party, but the National Socialist party's leftists origins also led to share the same cultural attitude. See Adolf Behne, 'Kunst als Waffe', *Die Hefte*, no. 34 (1931), 101–04.

10 Adolf Hitler, from speech at opening of Kunst in Munchen, 1937, in edn. cat. *Führer durch die abstrahierende Kunst* 'Kunst' (Munich, 1937), 26; reprint in: David Barron, ed., exh. cat. *Degenerate Art* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1991), 39ff.

11 Andrei Zhdanov, from keynote speech to Congress of Soviet Writers, Moscow, 1934, in Zhdanov et al., *Problems of Soviet Literature. Reports and Speeches at the First Soviet Writers' Congress* (New York, 1935).

12 Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, from *Futurist Cookbook*, ed. L. Chabert (London, 1989), 102.

parallel with that of modern art. The term had originally been taken from military usage by Henri de Saint-Simon in the 1820s to denote those revolutionaries and artists who could sense the future: 'By the beginning of the twentieth century, however, its meaning had moved away from what was essentially a positivist model of progress to evolve a discourse along Kantian lines, creating a 'politics' and an 'ideology' that were entirely specific to art.

Inevitably, at times, this discourse became both conflated and confused with political ideology as such; when faced by the naked reality of power its fragile autonomy soon crumbled. In the brave new worlds of the dictators, the idea of an avant-garde could seem either like an unwelcome reminder of the past or a rallying point for counter-revolution. It was, accordingly, one of the first manifestations of the old order which had to be obliterated.

As the heirs of the French Revolution, the dictators believed that they had at last fulfilled Rousseau's demand: men were now 'equal', and there were no longer rich nor poor. But the price the people had to pay for this was high: in an inversion of Rousseau's original model, the chains which bound the people were fashioned not by despots but by themselves. The 'noble savage' had lost his autonomy as well as his integrity; the modern, ignoble barbarian was firmly in control.

'A new epoch is moulded not by literary men but by warriors.' (Adolf Hitler, 1937).<sup>10</sup>

'In our hands we hold a sure weapon, thanks to which we can overcome all the difficulties besetting our path. This weapon is the great and invincible doctrine of Marx-Engels-Lenin-Stalin, a doctrine that has been put into practice by our Party and our Soviets.' (Andrei Zhdanov, 1934).<sup>11</sup>

'A group of soldiers who at three o'clock on a January afternoon will have to get into a lorry to enter the line of fire at four, or go up in an aeroplane to bomb cities or counter-attack enemy flights, would seek in vain the perfect preparation for these in the grieving class of a mother, of a wife, of children or in rereading passionate letters . . . Instead these fighters should sit around a table, where they are served a [meal of] "Dram Roll of Colonial Fish" and some "Raw Meat Torn by Trumpet Blasts";' (Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, 1932).<sup>12</sup>

Art as a Weapon'

In the words of Hitler, a failed painter, more successful politician and would-be architect of the Thousand Year Reich; of Zhdanov, a party hack, Stalin's mouthpiece and Soviet cultural supremo; and of Marinetti, a bellicose Futurist, anarchist and strong supporter of Fascist ideals, the rhetoric of war and struggle echoed across the 1930s like a trumpet blast. In Germany, the USSR and Italy, increasingly intense battles for the control of art and culture were an integral part of the establishment of power and prefigured the real war which started in Spain and then spread throughout Europe. These battles for art – or cultural revolutions – were part of the process of purging or cleansing through which each 'threatened' nation could be healed and made whole. Its enemies could be found everywhere; but first they had to be eliminated at home – where they seemed to threaten its very existence. Art was a weapon that could be used for this end. Only when a firm hand had taken control could attention be directed further afield, to those unknown enemies who lurked beyond the frontiers.

Both Hitler and Stalin had departed from Marx in that they believed that the control of culture was as important as that of the economy; both agreed with Lenin that, in a revolutionary society, culture had to be engaged with the party.<sup>13</sup> But party culture did not already exist: it had to be created, and during the 1930s, both in Germany and in Russia, cultural revolutions took place during which all autonomous Modernism was eliminated, to be replaced with a compliant officialdom.

For Stalin and Hitler, cultural purity had to be imposed. Both, in differing degrees, paid homage to the Greek and Roman heritage;<sup>14</sup> but Mussolini had a less defensive attitude. For him, this was already part of a living history; it was firmly rooted in the soil of the first Roman Empire which he now sought to emulate.<sup>15</sup>

These new states, which had all been created out of the chaos of the First World War, were essentially hermetic, self-referential bodies which set out consciously to establish new world orders. They were driven by utopian ideals and shared a common lineage in the traditions of messianic Socialism to which idiosyncratic admixtures of Nietzsche, Nordau and Marx had been added.<sup>16</sup> And all, to a greater or lesser extent, believed in the eugenic theory of the creation of a higher race.<sup>17</sup> The achievement of their programmes was schematized in a process of bureaucratic categorization and pseudo-rational centralized planning, regimented by weighty ministries and fuelled by an obligatory sense of solidarity and enthusiasm. In the religion of dictatorship, facts became fetishes;

unpalatable realities, which denied the onward march of progress, were ignored or obliterated.

In spite of these obvious similarities, however, the ideologies of the dictatorships were distinct. Hitler's book *Mein Kampf* (My Struggle, 1926), the wellspring of the Nazi political programme, advocated the necessity of racial purity as a precondition for the future development of the German peoples according to the destiny which had been ordained for them.<sup>18</sup> Written long before Hitler became a serious political force, it clearly set out the tenets of a totalitarian, racist, military state. The Aryan, Teutonic and Nordic fantasies of the Nazis were based on the desire to establish a *Kultur* which was worthy of a chosen people. This inversion of the Jews' belief in themselves as chosen marked the beginning of the racial policy that culminated in the Holocaust. The Jews were labelled as 'impure': the opposite of all the 'positive' values embedded in the Aryan race.

The ideology of Stalinism was tabulated some time after Stalin had assumed control, as part of the general rewriting of history which resulted from the Central Committee decree of May 1934 *On the Teaching of Civil History in the Schools of the USSR*. This dealt with the issue of Stalin's political legitimacy as the natural and chosen heir of Lenin; the converse was the obliteration and demonization of such enemies as Trotsky and Bukharin. From this Stalin derived his mandate to forge ahead with the construction of heavy industry and the collectivization of agriculture in the Five Year Plans.<sup>19</sup> The *Short Course in the History of the All-Union Communist Party (of Bolsheviks)* finally appeared in 1938 after the Great Purge and provided the correct party line on historical development to date.<sup>20</sup> It was a justification of the increasingly florid Stalin cult, as well as mandatory reading for all painters of historical subjects. Such a version of events was grossly mendacious, but it provided a seamless narrative to support the image of Stalin which had been regularly appearing in propaganda and art since the beginning of the decade. Gustavs Klucis's Five Year Plan poster, *Under the Banner of Lenin for Socialist Construction* (1930; p. 221) shows the face of Lenin as a mask, with that of Stalin emerging behind him; it was one of the first and most telling manifestations of this lie.

The ideology of Marxism-Leninism-Stalinism which supported the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was non-racial, although racial discrimination undoubtedly existed. As a result, its ethos was imperial rather than national and incorporated many races under a single leader (see p. 239; Shegal: *Leader, Teacher, Friend*). Much

13 See V. I. Lenin, 'Party Organization and Party Literature' (1905) and 'In Memory of Herzen' (1912), in C. Vaughan James, *Soviet Socialist Realism: Origins and Theory* (London, 1973), 101-11.

14 In both Germany and the USSR, Neoclassicism was marked in sculpture (but in Germany it was also an important feature of Nazi architecture and painting). Of Soviet sculptors, the work from the late 1930s by Matvei Manizer is closest to the featureless muscular classicism of the Nazis and was influenced by them.

15 Mussolini was initially contemptuous of Hitler's racism, making the point that if he were correct 'the Lapps must be considered the highest type of humanity', and adding that 'Thirty centuries of history have enabled us to look with majestic pity at certain doctrines taught on the other side of the Alps by the descendants of people who were wholly illiterate in the days when Rome boasted a Caesar, a Virgil and an Augustus.' Speech at Bari, 1934, in Christopher Hibbert, *Benito Mussolini. The Rise and Fall of Il Duce* (Harmondsworth, 1965), 98-99.

16 Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), German classical scholar, philosopher and critic. Wrote *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), *Thus Spake Zarathustra* (1883-84) and *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886). He analysed the differences between the higher 'Apollonian' and primal 'Dionysian' impulses within culture and developed the idea of a Superman (*Übermensch*), whose Will to Power took him beyond the realms of conventional morality. Nietzsche's ideas established an influential anti-rationalist current within European thought. Max Nordau (1849-1923), German writer, physician and early Jewish nationalist whose popular and widely translated book *Entartung (Degeneration)*, 1892 first linked this term to the discussion of modern art and literature by suggesting that modern artists had lost the power of accurate observation and reflected instead their own nervous deformities. Nordau's discredited theories were later taken up by both Stalinist and Nazi ideologues.

17 Both the New Soviet Man and the Nazi Aryan Superman can trace their origins back to this source.

Victims and Losers

'The triumph was short-lived, of course: triumphs are always short-lived and, as it is written, the Jew's joy ends in fight' (Primo Levi, 1982).<sup>23</sup>

Rome's and Berlin's vainglorious dreams of world domination were soon to crumble to dust. The cult of the warrior met its nemesis. By May 1945, the war was drawing to a close; Hitler and Mussolini were dead and Allied troops had swept across Europe. But the battle for art was not yet won. Under the dictatorships non-party artists and writers, along with many others, had been murdered, forced into exile or had to cover their tracks at home.<sup>24</sup> And the new Europe was characterized by a terrible vacuum where once stood people, language and art.

Energy and power had begun to slip across the Atlantic, with those many artists who had gone into exile, to New York, where a new generation of American artists was about to change the scale and ambition of modern painting. In Europe, modern art revived, but haltingly. The Cold War narrowed its social and political horizons, and optimism seemed either foolish or subversive. In Italy, a divide developed between realist, Communist-inspired painters such as Renato Guttuso and abstract artists such as Lucio Fontana (who, during the 1930s, had been a strong supporter of the Fascists). But it was now a world of superpowers, in which America vied with the Soviet Union to dominate the world stage. Italy was firmly rooted within the American camp, as was the German Federal Republic.

Nationalism of the old kind was unthinkable in the empires of either East or West, and new forms of international culture had to be put in its place. For a time, Socialist Realism became the lingua franca of the Eastern bloc. In the West, Modernism had always aspired to be a universal and international movement but increasingly – in economic and political as well as in cultural terms – it was America that called the shots. Germany was split between the USSR and the West, and started to construct two separate cultures and histories with which to justify its respective positions. In the Federal Republic there was an active debate about the relative merits of abstraction and realism, which had political parallels in the jiggled conflict between the rival doctrines of individual 'freedom' and collective 'democracy'. In the German Democratic Republic there was a continuation of the Moscow party line, but by 1953, after the death of

Stalin, this position was modified as a younger

stress was laid on the fact that the land area of the USSR covered one-sixth of the earth, from the Pacific Ocean to the White Sea. The history of antisemitism in Russia dates from long before the Revolution, but – since Karl Marx, and some active party functionaries, such as Lazar Kaganovich, were Jewish – it did not become enmeshed in party policy until the Cold War, by which time Stalin's power in the party was unchallenged, and 'cosmopolitanism' rather than 'formalism' became the main enemy of the state.<sup>21</sup>

Italian Fascism, like Nazism, was a nationalist ideology which attracted for a time a much broader range of adherents. A streetwise amalgamation of nationalism and Socialism, forged in the social ferment which followed the First World War, it established its credibility in the image of the fasces – the insignia of the Communist Party of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Italy. Stalin in his will had about the ambition of the Communist Party of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Italy. Lenin had warned the party, this was printed along with a revision of the main text. By 1939 the book had sold 5.2 million copies in Germany.

Blackshirts helped Mussolini to suppress opposition, but beyond a state-sponsored syndicalism there was little coherent ideology to the movement which incorporated many different and conflicting viewpoints which Mussolini manipulated. Thus, during the 1920s he was critical of Nazi racism,<sup>22</sup> but a significant wing of his party did not share this view; it was eventually adopted as party policy in 1938 when, under German influence, the anti-semitic Racial Laws were enacted. No formal summary of Fascism appeared until 1932, when Mussolini published the 'Dottrina del Fascismo' (Doctrine of Fascism) in the *Enciclopedia Italiana*. Typically, this built an ideology out of pragmatism: 'Our programme is simple. We wish to govern Italy. They ask us for programmes, but there are already too many. It is not programmes that are wanting for the salvation of Italy but men and willpower.'

Equally telling was the showpiece *Mostra della Rivoluzione Fascista* (Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution), which opened in Rome in the same year, to mark the tenth anniversary of the party's advent to power. The most modern and striking display techniques were used, and artists and architects of all tendencies were invited to participate in the design (pp. 39, 140–41).

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18 The first part of *Mein Kampf* was written in 1923 in Landsberg

Hitler was imprisoned after the Beer Hall Putsch, and was published in Munich in 1926. A second part of the book was written between 1925 and 1927,

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Lenin's death in 1924, which ensued after suppressed this post, but Stalin

document during the power struggle with Trotsky and Bukharin

of strengthened in unity but also of the penal power of the state – both corporal and capital. Fascist gangs of

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21 See Matthew Under Saint (Oxford, 1991), 93–94.

22 See note 15.

23 Primo Levi, *If Not Now, Then When* (London, 1982), 112.

24 Of the artists shown in the exhibition: in the USSR Aleksandr Drewn, Vera Vernoblayeva, Gussers Klucis, Vasily Kupsov and Kazimir Malevich were imprisoned by the NKVD – Klucis and Drewn were murdered; Heartfield, Max Beckmann, Walter Gropius, Oscar Kokoschka, Paul Klee and Miles van der Rohe went into exile; Hans Grundig and Felix Nussbaum were confined in concentration camps – only Grundig survived; in Italy Corrado Cagli went into exile, and Arturo Nathan was killed in Belson.



generation of East German artists began to invent a revised form of realism which tried to accommodate leftist traditions within both the history of German art and European Modernism.<sup>25</sup>

In the Darmstadt Dialogues of July 1950, Willi Baumeister passionately and effectively defended abstract art from attack by the realist painter Carl Hofer and right-wing critics such as Hans Sedlmayr who blamed modern art for the 'loss of centre' in our culture.<sup>26</sup> Modernism – but only of an international kind – won the day in the West and received official patronage. And it was not until the 1960s that the generation of painters which included Georg Baselitz, Gerhard Richter, Sigmar Polke, Jörg Immendorff, Anselm Kiefer and Markus Lüpertz was able, authentically and unapologetically, to reintegrate a concern with German cultural history and sensibility in their work.

One dictator – Stalin – had survived, and the purges continued in the USSR as Zhdanov, and latterly Georgi Malenkov, imposed an increasingly constricted concept of art. Opposition was impossible, but after Stalin's death an independent, autonomous art again slowly began to take root within an unpromising, sterile seedbed.<sup>27</sup> Within the system itself, however, deprived of its supreme leader and no longer fuelled by terror, entropy took its toll.<sup>28</sup> Mikhail Gorbachev's *perestroika* and the collapse of the Berlin Wall dealt the *coup de grâce*. Although it had enlisted some talented artists, the dogma of Socialist Realism could now be perceived as a nightmare rather than as a creative method or a style; it is one from which Russia has only recently, haltingly and painfully, begun to awake.

This battle for art has now come to an end, but it has been replaced by other no less vital contests. One paradox is clear: the point at which art becomes a weapon is the very moment when it loses its power. But the converse is also true: when power tries to enlist art for its own purposes, it runs the risk of curtailing other basic freedoms. In this battle there can be no winners, only losers and victims; and being a loser is probably the more convivial fate.

Like all ideals, complete artistic autonomy is impossible, but it is a symbol which should be cherished. For a free society, art is both a reflection of its complexity and an intimation of its capacity for change. As a result, modern art – almost by definition – often has an incompatible or critical relationship with the culture in which it is made. In a politics of totalitarianism (or even of consensus), where democracy is elevated at the expense of freedom, it is easy to

overlook its value. But, like a canary down a coalmine, its state, no longer allied to power but dependent on it, may be an indicator of potential disaster.

In the world of metaphor which art resolutely occupies, the health of the canary is of the greatest importance; the essence (and paradox) of the autonomy of modern art is that it should be valued not only for itself but also as a sign and guarantor of other freedoms – particularly when it turns to peck the hand that solicitously tries to feed it.

25 See David Elliott, 'Absent Guests. Art, Truth and Paradox in the Art of the German Democratic Republic', in Irit Rogoff, *The Divided Heritage. Problems in German Modernism* (Cambridge, 1991), 24–49.

26 Willi Baumeister, 'Ansprache in Darmstadt', in Baumeister, *Das Unbekannte in der Kunst* (Cologne, 1974), 200–12.

27 See 'Drugoye ukrustvo'. *Matéria* 1956–76, 2 vols (Moscow, 1991).

28 See Aleksandr Sidorov, 'The Thaw', in exh. cat. *Engineers of the Human Soul: Soviet Socialist Realist Painting 1930s to 1960s* (Oxford: Museum of Modern Art, 1992), 30–40.

# SPEAKING WITHOUT ADJECTIVES

Architecture in the Service of Totalitarianism  
Tim Benton

of dictatorial regimes: the need to be familiar as well as autocratic, to be of the people<sup>1</sup> but not of a specific region or class. Some of it is technical: communicating to vast, agitated crowds requires a language which can be broken up into segments, articulated in bold, abstract bursts, placing great stress on single words or groups of words whose staccato rhythms, guttural consonants, rippling Rs and open vowels can carry the violence of the message more emphatically than the lexical meanings of the words. Public art and architecture, too, had to work to a beat, at a gigantic scale, to convey a message at a distance.

The new order had to be demonstrated in city centres, in wide avenues or squares lined with imposing buildings. The new, semi-industrialized building methods allowed huge buildings to be put up at reasonable cost, meeting the needs of burgeoning bureaucracies. These buildings, typically, were short on quality detailing, humanistic scale and proportion. Some of this, too, is technical and not restricted to totalitarian regimes.

To compare buildings and urban interventions with the political harangue does not tell the whole story, but it's a start. Many of them were designed precisely to support and amplify demagoguery. There was a specialized architecture of the public rally. The most famous piece of rally urbanism was the layout of avenues, parks and assembly buildings at Nuremberg, designed to host the annual Nazi party rallies. The Zeppelinfeld, designed by Albert Speer, was the built receptacle for a climax of processions, from home town parades to the arrival in the city, the march along broad parkland avenues to a packed and regimented space where members could be addressed by the Führer and perform party ceremonies. To walk round the Zeppelinfeld (now partly demolished), to stand on Hitler's podium, to see again the images from Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will*, is to explore disturbing corners of the uncanny. Here there is no new function, no comforting replacement iconography, to distance us from the personalities and intentions of the National Socialists.

In Italy, the Fascist oratorical pulpit, the *wingo* or *wingwario*, had many precedents in medieval and Renaissance urban design: many old Italian cities had a *trigbiera* – a balcony or raised platform attached to the

'I am a flat-chested highbrow. I can "cure" the whole trouble simply by criticism of style. Oh can I? Yes. I have been saying so for some time.' (Ezra Pound, 1933.)<sup>2</sup>

I believe it necessary to suppress the adjective and the adverb, because they conspire (taken together and individually), the multicoloured festoons, the *trompe-l'œil* swags, pedestals, parapets and balustrades of the old traditional period.' (F. T. Marinetti, 1912.)<sup>3</sup>

Building for Rhetoric

The natural means of communication, for a totalitarian regime, is propaganda, and it is often by absurd slogans that totalitarian leaders have been judged. 'Mussolini is always right' was as important an element in wearing down a people's common sense and judgment as the slogans of the Fascist party (Believe, Obey, Fight),<sup>4</sup> or the oaths of personal loyalty to the leader sworn by the Fascist militia or youth organizations.<sup>5</sup>

The typical instrument of propaganda in the 1930s, in all regimes, was the microphone. Some successful leaders mastered the artificial intimacy of radio, as Baldwin and Roosevelt did; but the totalitarian regimes of the Soviet Union, Germany and Italy used the microphone mainly as a public address system.<sup>6</sup> These regimes placed great importance on public demonstrations of authority and obedience: rallies, sporting displays, speeches relayed to urban public spaces. And at every site where large numbers of people gathered, buildings, sculptures and paintings were enlisted to transform comradeship into tribalism, pride into a sense of superiority, a sense of belonging into hatred of outsiders, progress into conscription for a Five Year Plan or the 'Battle for Grain'.<sup>7</sup> Buildings played a crucial role in this political process.

Many of the public buildings of the 1930s can best be approached as propaganda, not simply by virtue of the insignia, heroic narratives and inscriptions which cover them inside and out, but of the expressive form of the architecture. Propaganda has its characteristic sounds and syntactic patterns;<sup>8</sup> and so, to an extent, does 'regime architecture'. Much of this follows from the contradictions that establish themselves at the heart

1 Ezra Pound, *Jefferson and/or Mussolini* (London, 1933), 17.

2 F. T. Marinetti, 'Risposta alle obiezioni', 11 August, 1912.

3 Response to criticism of the *Manifesto tecnico della letteratura futurista*, 11 May 1912, reprinted in Luciano de Maria, ed., *Marinetti e il Futurismo* (Milan, 1973).

4 *Mussolini ha sempre ragione*, in the later 1930s, it was common for popular demonstrations of loyalty, for example, by schoolchildren, to include this phrase:

5 *Credere, obbedire, combattere*. The slogan was adopted by the Crocetta Italiana del Littorio (CILI), the Fascist youth movement founded in 1937 in succession to the Opera Nazionale Balilla (ONB).

6 Most controversial was the oath of loyalty to King and the Fascist regime imposed on university professors in August 1931: a dozen professors refused to sign and were sacked or resigned their posts, while 1,250 complied.

7 The GIL oath was: 'In Italy I swear that I will execute the orders of the Duce and serve with all my strength and, if necessary, with my blood Fascist militia or youth organizations.'

8 The typical instrument of propaganda in the 1930s, in all regimes, was the microphone. Some successful leaders mastered the artificial intimacy of radio, as Baldwin and Roosevelt did; but the totalitarian regimes of the Soviet Union, Germany and Italy used the microphone mainly as a public address system.

9 These regimes placed great importance on public demonstrations of authority and obedience: rallies, sporting displays, speeches relayed to urban public spaces. And at every site where large numbers of people gathered, buildings, sculptures and paintings were enlisted to transform comradeship into tribalism, pride into a sense of superiority, a sense of belonging into hatred of outsiders, progress into conscription for a Five Year Plan or the 'Battle for Grain'.

10 Buildings played a crucial role in this political process.

11 Many of the public buildings of the 1930s can best be approached as propaganda, not simply by virtue of the insignia, heroic narratives and inscriptions which cover them inside and out, but of the expressive form of the architecture.

12 Propaganda has its characteristic sounds and syntactic patterns; and so, to an extent, does 'regime architecture'.

13 Much of this follows from the contradictions that establish themselves at the heart of the architecture.

14 The *wingo* or *wingwario*, had many precedents in medieval and Renaissance urban design: many old Italian cities had a *trigbiera* – a balcony or raised platform attached to the

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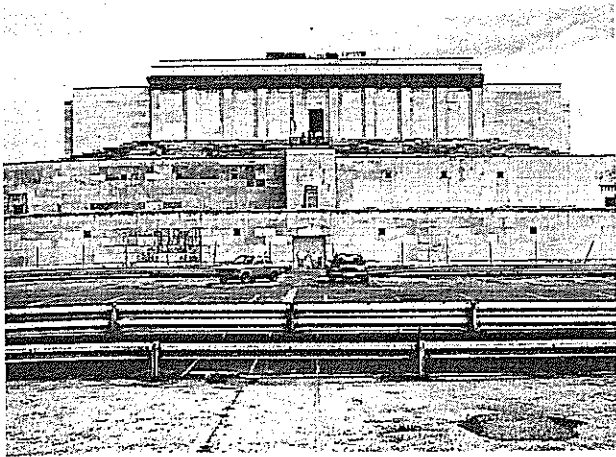
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Albert Speer, Zeppelinfeld, Nuremberg, 1934 (as seen in 1979)



Antonio Maraini, Arengo, Brescia, 1928–32, showing relief of First World War and emergence of Fascism

government building – where rulers could address the public, proclamations could be made and punishments meted out.<sup>9</sup> In Rome, the most famous Fascist *arengario* was the balcony of the fifteenth-century Palazzo Venezia where, above a piazza carved out of medieval and baroque Rome, Mussolini made his most bombastic speeches, which were simultaneously relayed to piazzas all over Italy. There, on 2 October 1935, he declared the general mobilization before the Ethiopian campaign:

‘Revolutionary Blackshirts! Men and women of all Italy! Italians all over the world, beyond the mountains and beyond the seas! Hear this!

‘A solemn hour is about to strike in the history of the fatherland. Twenty million men are, at this moment, occupying the piazzas of the whole of Italy. Never in the history of mankind has a more gigantic spectacle been seen. Twenty million men: a single heart, a single will, a single decision.’<sup>10</sup>

Sometimes we find a free-standing *arengario*. An unusual example is the porphyry pulpit that now stands forlornly in the car park of the Piazza della Vittoria, Brescia. Designed by Antonio Maraini, it has a modern,

cantilevered form and is faced with nine reliefs illustrating the history of the city, each in the style of the time, from the Byzantine Exarchate to the first World War and its Fascist aftermath. The *arengario* commemorates the fierce independence and fighting spirit that led the Brescians, after the humiliating defeat of Caporetto in 1917, to the eventual victory of Vittorio Veneto.

The Fascist urban intervention in Brescia, designed by Marcello Piacentini in 1927–28 and built between 1928 and 1932, exemplifies the elements of totalitarian propaganda. At a functional level, the new plan was modern, ruthlessly demolishing the medieval heart of the city in the interests of freeing up traffic circulation. Modern and quintessentially Fascist, too were the buildings defining the piazza: a post office and the organs of the developing corporative state (insurance buildings and banks). Making the post work, and the trains run on time, were central planks of the Fascist campaign against the bourgeois, liberal and democratic order. Most Italian cities still have a Fascist railway station and post office;<sup>11</sup> the efficient, modern style of these buildings, together with their more or less discreet iconography of fasces, shrines to Fascist martyrs and Italian or Latin inscriptions, entrenched the claims of state propaganda.

## Rewriting the Song Sheet

To many committed Fascists, the March on Rome (1922) and the gradual absorption of all social functions within a totalitarian regime was a social, economic and political revolution, appropriately represented in terms of youthful, avant-garde enthusiasm. The problem was that there were structural contradictions (to be found in Germany and Russia as well), between the radical roots of the movement and the coercive requirements of authority (which needed stability, an element of respectability and confidence).

The case of propaganda music is revealing. Speaking of the street-fighting days of 1919–22, the compiler of an Italian ‘revolutionary’ song book asserted: ‘Fascism won, because it had more beautiful songs than the opposition.’<sup>12</sup> The ‘Fascist hymns’ were to evolve in a way that was prophetic for art and architecture.

The fate of what became the anthem of the Fascist party, *Giovinezza*, was characteristic. A lively prewar ode to youth,<sup>13</sup> this was taken over, and given new words, by the *arditi*: the desperadoes who, after

10 *Popolo d'Italia*, 3 October 1935, xxii.

11 Apart from Florence railway station, won in competition amid much public controversy by a group of young Florentine architects led by Giovanni Michelucci (1932–34), Ufficio V (a design department in the Ministry of Communications), and one of its architects Angiolo Mazzoni, built post offices and railway stations all over Italy which were always original and often very striking; A. Forti, exh. cat. *Angiolo Mazzoni (1894–1979): Architetto nell'Italia fra le due guerre* (Bologna, 1994). Competitions led to the appointment of four young modern architects to design the main post offices in Rome (1932) and to the gigantic post office in Naples (1929–31), designed by Giuseppe Vaccaro. Sergio Poretti, *Progetti e costruzione dei palazzi della parte a Roma 1933–35* (Rome, 1990).

12 A. Gravelli, *I canti della Rivoluzione* (Rome, 1934), 13.

13 Originally composed by Giuseppe Blanc in 1910 while on a ski training exercise with some students from Ostia, it was adopted as ‘The Hymn of the Alpini Skiers’. The *arditi* version was written by Marcello Nanni during the First World War.

created contradictions between the popular roots of Fascism and authority. Thus, the song that most successfully captured the euphoria of the Ethiopian campaign was *Facetta Nera* (Little Black Face), by the prolific composer Rucione. The beautiful Abyssinian girl ('slave among slaves') dreams of the Italian soldiers who will set her free and carry her off in triumph to Rome, where she, too, will wear a 'black shirt', become a Roman and march past the King and Mussolini. It is characteristic of the times that *Facetta Nera* was later censored on the grounds that it might encourage interracial cohabitation. The very expression of aggressive male dominance that had made the song so popular, and matched the mood of imperialism, was considered too rich for the public radio.

The task which faced Mussolini and his balding Blackshirt *gerarchi* was to retain the fervour and charisma of the early days while disciplining the faithful into a compliant party bureaucracy. The manipulators of Fascist culture attempted this by keeping the slogans but changing the emphasis. The slogans of violent *arditismo* and *squadristo* – 'Eia, eia, eia allala!',<sup>17</sup> 'A noi!',<sup>18</sup> 'Me ne frega!',<sup>19</sup> 'Noi tireremo dritto'<sup>20</sup> – reappear throughout the official culture of the 1930s, but increasingly give way to more pompous slogans evoking the Roman Empire and the Augustan age: *Roma rivendica l'Impero* (Rome reclaims its Empire) or *Civiltà, ordine, autorità* (Civilization, order, authority).

Gentile, was explicit about this: 'Fascism is a religious concept, in which man is seen in his immanent relationship to a higher law, with an objective will that transcends the individual human being and elevates him to be a conscious member of a spiritual society.'<sup>21</sup> Modernist architects responded with enthusiasm to the challenge of evoking this 'religious concept' and spiritual allegiance. Modernism or Rationalism in Italian architecture had developed its most coherent

Caporetto, added their fanaticism and courage to the Italian military recovery. Organized into volunteer outfits – the *fiamme nere* – whose ranks were swollen by released convicts with nothing to lose, they invented their own uniform. Their shaven heads, fez hats, black shirts and skull-and-crossbones insignia, and their preferred weapons (dagger and grenade), acquired a morbid fascination for the youth of the postwar period. Many of them later joined up as Fascist *squadristi*, in *fasci di combattimento* under local war-lords – or *Ras* – or followed the call of Gabriele d'Annunzio in his freelance seizure of Fiume (Rijeka). The very real violence and intimidation of the *squadristi* underpins the fundamental illegality of Fascism; it erupted during the Matteotti crisis (1925–26), when Fascist gangs saw an opportunity to see off their enemies in the political centre and on the left. Almost all the *gerarchi* (hierarchs) who took leading roles in the Fascist administration had been blooded in *arditismo* or *squadristo*. The words they sang to *Giovinezza* captured the full flavour of death-or-glory nihilism:

With dagger and grenade / *Col pugnale e con la bomba*  
Living with terror / *Nella vita del terrore*  
When the shell explodes / *Quando l'obice rimbomba*  
Our hearts are steadfast / *Non ci trema in petto il cuore*  
Our one true flag / *Nostra unica bandiera*  
Has one colour only / *Seti un unico colore*  
A flame that is all black / *Set una fiamma tutta nera*  
Blazing in every heart / *Che divampa in ogni cuor!*<sup>14</sup>

To the same tune, the official 'Triumphal Hymn of the National Fascist Party', as recorded in the 1930s, had very different words:

Hail, o people of heroes, / *Salve, o Popolo d'Eroi,*  
Hail, o immortal fatherland! / *Salve, o Patria*  
Immortale!  
Thy children are reborn / *Sono rinati i figli tuoi*  
With faith in the Ideal / *Con la fe nell'ideale*

The valour of thy warriors / *Il valore dei tuoi guerrieri,*  
The virtue of the pioneers / *La virtù dei pionieri*  
The vision of Dante Alighieri / *La vision*  
dell'Alighieri<sup>15</sup>

Shines today in every heart / *Oggi brilla in tutti i cuor.*<sup>16</sup>  
By the 1930s the party had been made subservient to the state, the *squadri* reformed into the Fascist militia, and the image of Fascism tidied up. This

<sup>14</sup> A. V. Savona and M. L. Starniero, *Canit del'Italia fascista* (Rome, 1979), 55.

<sup>15</sup> Dante came to play an increasingly important role in Fascist myth-making; see Domenico Venunni, *Dante Alighieri e Benito Mussolini*, 2nd ed. (1932), (as note 14), 205.

<sup>16</sup> Savona and Starniero (as note 14), 205.

<sup>17</sup> A battle cry which d'Annunzio claimed to have invented in the trenches, though it was current much earlier.

<sup>18</sup> d'Annunzio's rallying cry from Fiume, subsequently a street-fighting call to arms.

<sup>19</sup> Decorously translated as 'I don't give a damn', it expresses disdain for the pain of a wound, as well as contempt for intellectuals. A song based on its initials, *M.N.F. Emme, Emme, Effi*, by Vittorio Mastroloni with words by Angelo Boffi, 1929, was a loud attack on intellectuals ('*Idioti*') and the bourgeoisie.

<sup>20</sup> We will shoot straight, coined at the time of the Ethiopian War but recalled by Mussolini to characterize the new Racial Laws that followed from Hitler's visit in May 1938.

<sup>21</sup> Ansemunt voices had been heard in Italy in the early 1930s, but were not given official sanction until the Manifesto of Racial Science, in July 1938. This document, probably written by Mussolini, intended a press and legal campaign which led to the exclusion of Jews from schools, public services, the professions and intermarriage with non-Jewish Italians.

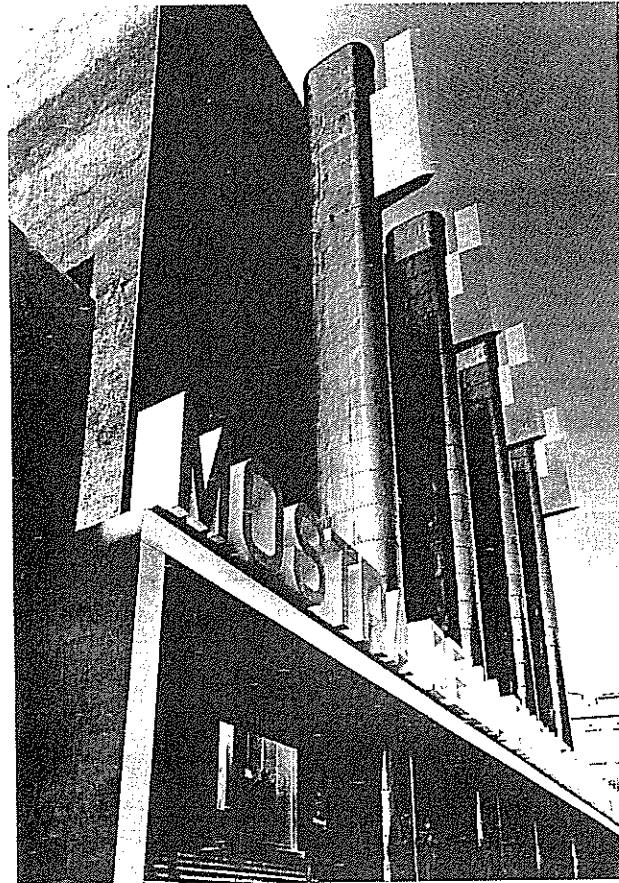
<sup>22</sup> Giovanni Gentile, writing under Mussolini's signature, 'Fascismo, in the Treccani *Enciclopedia Italiana* (1935–40).

and enthusiastic groupings in Milan and Como.<sup>22</sup> After a successful exhibition in 1928,<sup>23</sup> the Rationalists went on the offensive in the Second Italian Exhibition of Rationalist Architecture, held at the Galleria Bardi in Rome in 1931. Mussolini himself came to the opening and was handed a pamphlet claiming that the Rationalists were the only true Fascist architects:<sup>24</sup>

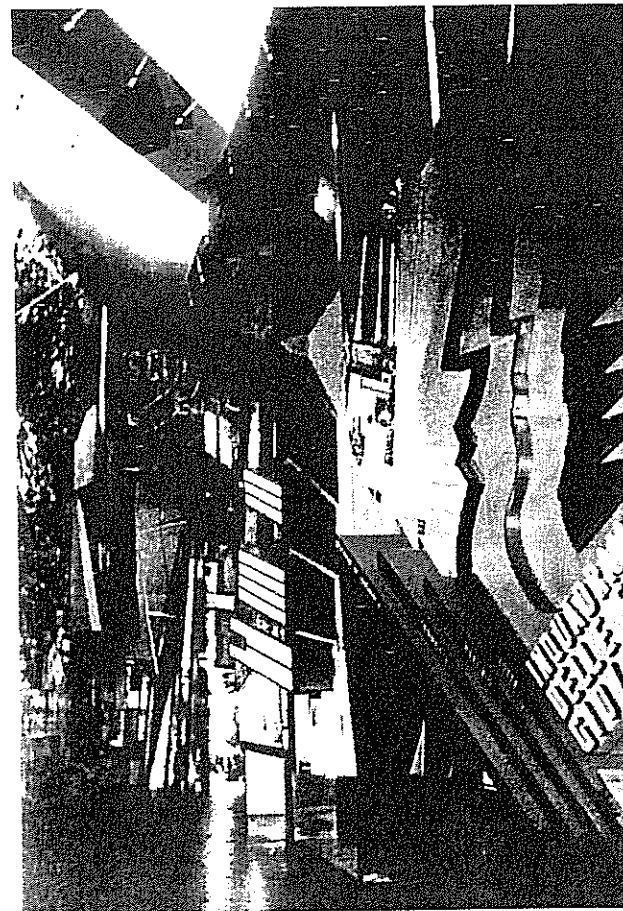
'Mussolini wants an art of our times, a Fascist art . . . The architecture of the era of Mussolini must respond to the character of masculinity, force and pride of the Revolution. The old architects are an emblem of impotence which won't do . . . Our movement has no other moral mission than that of serving the Revolution in hard times.'<sup>25</sup>

Mussolini gave them some support in a brief speech in Perugia, where he called for 'a new art, an art for our times, a Fascist art'. At first they thought they could take on the architectural establishment and win. P. M. Bardi (editor of the Roman journal *Quadrante*) assembled a photomontage, entitled 'Panel of Horrors', in which the most ludicrous examples of eclectic classicism were contrasted with the work of architects like Enrico del Debbio, Giovanni Muzio and Marcello Piacentini: established architects who were transforming their work in a more Rationalist direction.<sup>26</sup> Henceforth, the attempt to win favour with Mussolini depended on delicate alliances with the architects in power, and especially with Piacentini.<sup>27</sup> A key figure here was Giuseppe Pagano, editor of the magazine *Casabella*.

The Rationalists now proceeded to demonstrate that they could be superbly effective propagandists. Giuseppe Terragni, Adalberto Libera and Mario de Renzi, with the artist Mario Sironi, were given the key task of celebrating the tenth anniversary of Mussolini's March on Rome in 1932. Libera and De Renzi designed a temporary façade for the Palazzo delle Esposizioni on the via Nazionale, consisting of four giant Modernist fasces faced in steel sheeting, adding an aggressive political symbol to the neo-baroque building. Stripped to essentials, Libera's internal decor achieved just the right mixture of symbolism and theatrical effect; and Terragni and his associates produced some of the most spectacular pieces of violent agitprop outside Russia (p. 140). Similarly, at the Triennale in Milan, in 1933, the Italian Rationalists assembled one of the most impressive collections of Modernist pavilions in Europe. None of these young architects was apparently much troubled with scruples about working for the regime; all were members of the Syndicate of Fascist Architects.



Adalberto Libera and Mario de Renzi, Façade of *Mostra della Rivoluzione Fascista*, Rome 1932



22 Gruppo 7 (S. Larco, G. Frette, C. E. Rava, L. Figini, G. Pollini, G. Terragni, Castagnoli (replaced by A. Libera)) formed in 1926 in Como and published manifesto texts in *La Rassegna italiana* from December 1926 to May 1927. Around it gathered a number of Rationalist architects in Turin, Milan and the rest of Lombardy. They exhibited at the Third Triennale, Monza, in 1927. See Giorgio Ciucci and Francesco Dal Co, *Architettura italiana del '900* (Milan, 1990), 100-01.

23 The exhibition was held at the Galleria Bardi, Rome, in 1928 and included the work of Piero Bottoni, Calza Bini, Piccinato and Matte-Trucco, as well as the Lombard Rationalists.

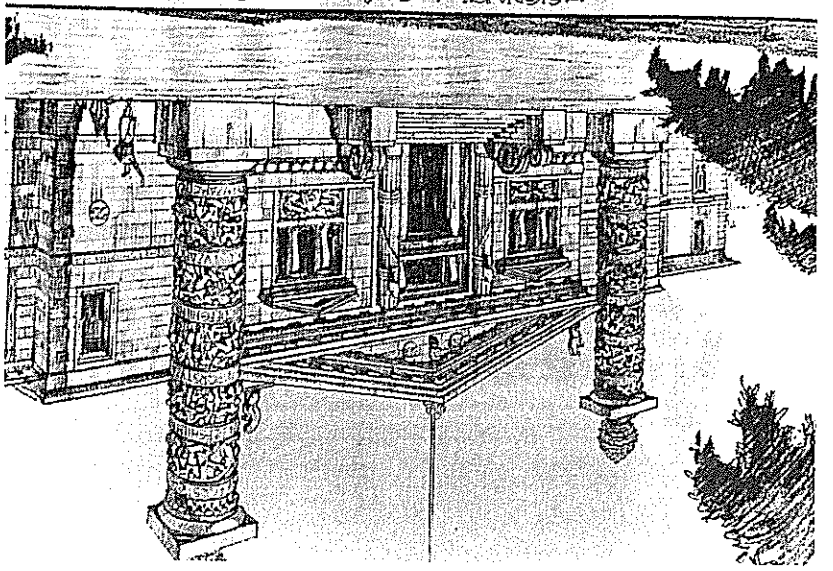
24 P. M. Bardi, *Rapporto sull'architettura (per Mussolini)* (1931).

25 Manifesto presented to Mussolini at the MIAR exhibition, 30 March 1931, in L. Patetta, *L'architettura in Italia 1919-1943. Le polemiche* (Milan, 1972).

26 The complexity of these relationships is illustrated by the facts that both Muzio and Terragni worked closely with Sironi, that Muzio collaborated with the young Modernists Paniconi and Pediconi on part of the E'42 project, and that Pagano saw similarities of approach in their work: a shared willingness to go for formal external effects rather than an organic, rational unity between plan and elevation. Giuseppe Pagano, 'Tre anni di architettura in Italia', *Casabella*, no. 10 (February 1937), cited in Giorgio Ciucci, *Gli architetti e il Fascismo* (Turin, 1989), 74.

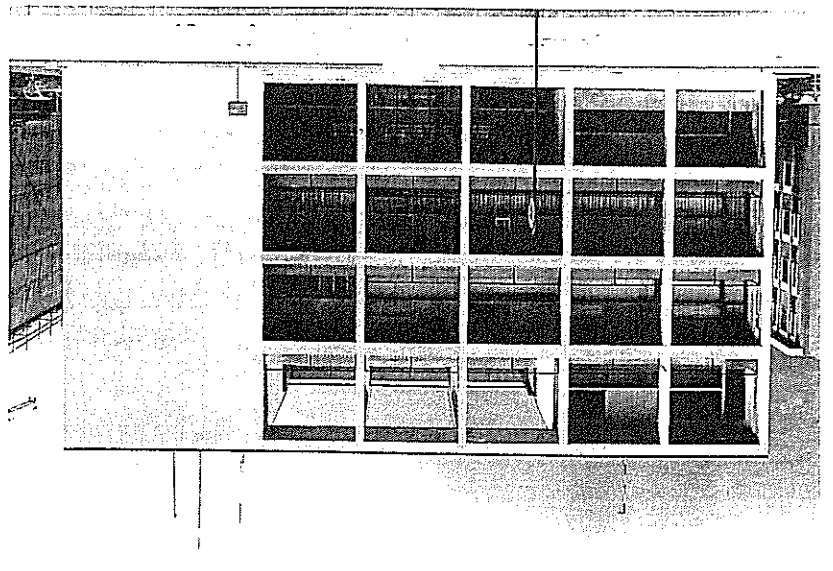
27 Richard A. Etlin, *Modernism in Italian Architecture 1899-1940* (Cambridge Mass., and London, 1991), ch. 10, 'The Rationalist Discovery of Fascism', traces this history.

a radical modern building. It seems that he, or one of his associates, tried the same trick with the headquarters of the Como Fascist party.<sup>30</sup> When the Casa del Fascio was opened in 1936, the building had no representational sculpture on the outside, and only abstract decorations on the inside, apart from icons of Il Duce. But, though the imagery of the building may appear apolitical, this was contradicted by the architect's own explicit statements. It was steeped in rhetoric: 'The moving quality of the work is no longer the rhetorical figure with spade or pick on his shoulder and the sun sinking behind him. It resides rather in acknowledging the thousands and thousands of black-shirted citizens amassed in front of the Casa del Fascio to hear the voice of their leader announce to Italians and foreigners the advent of the Empire.'<sup>31</sup> A contemporary photograph, in which photomontage seems to be used to swell the crowd, records this definitive image. Terragni made a practice of supplying lengthy theoretical justifications for his buildings, in which designs apparently 'empty' of explicit meaning were associated with the correct political rhetoric. For the Casa del Fascio he took as his text Mussolini's statement that 'Fascism is a glass house.' No secrets, no obfuscating bureaucracy, should separate the Fascist leaders from their people: 'The past and the Fascist faith are the flame and life which cannot, and should not, be forgotten or diminished. The great moral significance is thus linked to the typically functional concepts which must preside in the construction of the Casa del Fascio.'<sup>32</sup> Pressure was put on Terragni to include more of explicit Fascist symbols: a *torre del Littorio* (Tower of the Lictorate, intended to represent Fascist authority) and an *avangurio*. Some elevation drawings record variants of a tower. It is not clear whether drawings like these were ever intended for execution, or simply to demonstrate political commitment. In the end, the only vestige of this tower is the section of blank wall on the right of the principle facade. The *avangurio* function has been subsumed into the open loggia which occupies the rest of the facade. At the time, Bardi made a determined effort to promote the Casa del Fascio as a Fascist Parthenon, a celebration of military conquest in a perfect form. Pagan, on the other hand, while admiring Terragni's invention, accused him in *Casabella* of a certain 'rhetoric of unusual forms', of what he calls a 'Mannerism of Functionalism'.<sup>33</sup> Is the Casa del Fascio a building of political



Adolfo Coppede, Casa del Fascio, Signa, 1928 (later built)

Many new buildings were designed to celebrate the triumph of Fascism in towns and cities of all shapes and sizes. Some, such as the neo-Imperial pastiche by Adolfo Coppede in Signa (1928),<sup>28</sup> were an absurd attempt to evoke the Imperial past. At the other extreme, Terragni was able to design and build a Fascist headquarters building, the Casa del Fascio in Como (1932-34), which has been generally regarded as one of the very best buildings in Europe of its period.<sup>29</sup> The circumstances were peculiar. Terragni's brother became mayor of Como in 1934, while the building was being designed. Terragni had just successfully built a Modernist block of flats (1928), by cleverly inducing the building authorities to approve a traditional design, which he adapted in stages until it took on the form of Giuseppe Terragni, Casa del Fascio, Como, 1934-36



Giuseppe Terragni, Casa del Fascio, Como, 1934-36

28 Carlo Cresti, *Architettura e Fascismo* (Florence, 1986), 26-27.  
 29 Peter Eisenman has devoted a number of articles to analysing Terragni's work: 'Casa del Fascio', *Perpecta*, 13/14 (1971), 62-65; 'Dall'aggettivo alla razionalita': la casa del Fascio di Terragni', *Casabella* (January 1970), 38-41.  
 30 Some non-descript elevation drawings published in Aldo Franceschi Marcano, *Giuseppe Terragni, Opera Completa 1925-1943*, 91, are attributed to Zucchi and dated 1928. Edin (as note 27), 452-57, argues that Terragni was himself involved in this deception as late as 1933.

rhetoric, indelibly marked by its Fascist message? Terragni certainly went to great lengths to say so; and it included some highly charged iconography. The 'Shrine to the Fascist Martyrs', just inside the entrance, incorporated a glass block in which relics of local Fascists killed in street fighting were embedded. Brooding images of Il Duce and slogans (Order, Authority, Justice) by the sculptor Mario Radice decorated the interior, alongside abstract relief sculptures.

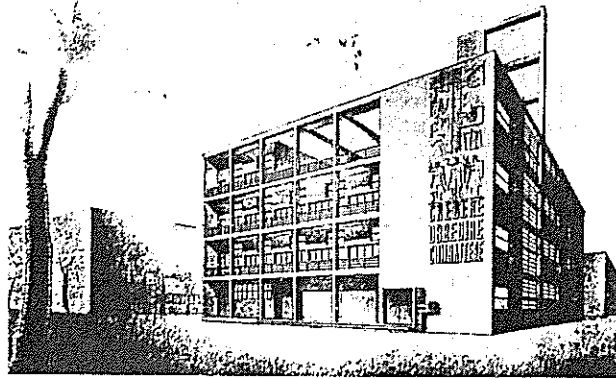
However, Terragni's belief that party officials would understand the building proved ill-founded. The secretary general demanded that the blank wall should be decorated with clearly propagandistic imagery. Terragni asked Sironi and then Marcello Nizzoli to devise something. Nizzoli came up with some lightweight frames, on which propagandistic images on enamel panels could be hung. Several photomontage sketches were produced, but the wall was in the end left unmarked.

The Casa del Fascio achieved great acclaim among modern architects, but it also contributed to disunity among Modernist groupings. The rift between Terragni and Pagano was to take an ugly turn when, on the introduction of Mussolini's Racial Laws in 1938, Terragni began to attack Pagano as Jewish (he wasn't) and to describe him and his colleague Gino Levi-Montalcini as 'foreigners'.<sup>34</sup>

Pagano and his journal *Casabella* (co-edited by Edoardo Persico until his early death) remained the main platform for promoting the employment of modern architects for official buildings. The battle was not finally lost until after 1940, when Pagano and four other architects were dismissed from the EUR (E'42) project; but the turning point had occurred much earlier.

## The Rhetoric of Empire

By 1934, when the first competitions for Il Duce's new official headquarters, the Palazzo del Littorio, were held in Rome, a number of symbolic elements were coming together in Fascist architecture.<sup>35</sup> Rhetorical forms were becoming codified. A tower, the *torre del Littorio*, sometimes even detailed as a lictor's axe<sup>36</sup>, had come to stand for a combination of the medieval civic tower and an abstract symbol of authority. Many quite modest Fascist municipal buildings can be recognized, even today, after the flags and fasces have been stripped off, by the presence of a vertical feature representing



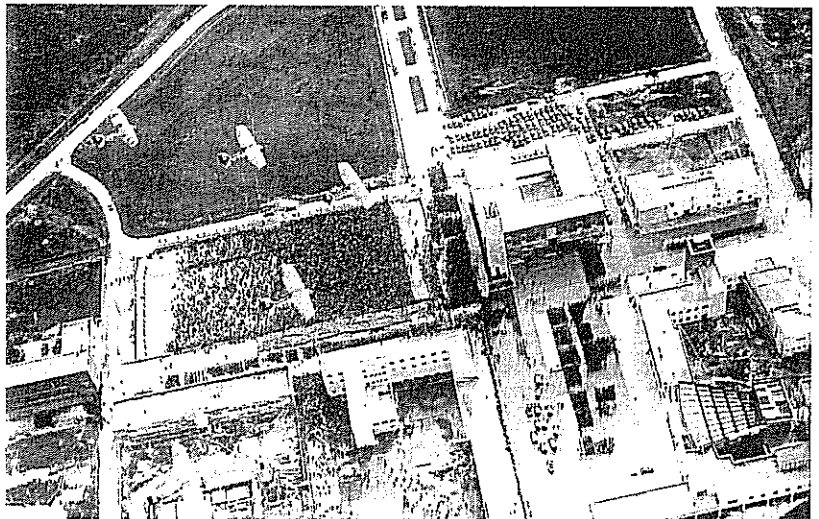
Giuseppe Terragni or associate, design for Como with possible modifications, c. 1932

the *torre del Littorio*. To this was attached the typical Fascist *arengario*, usually in the form of a projecting balcony, decorated with relief sculpture and inscriptions based on texts from Mussolini's speeches. These were the necessary substantives of Fascist composition, which required few architectural 'adjectives' to embellish them.

In its definitive form – of which Marinetti certainly approved – the Fascist urban centre must be seen from above, filled with people. Some of the new towns in the newly drained Pontine marshes, beginning with Littoria (Latina) and Sabaudia, showed how all these elements could be deployed within a modern architectural and urban idiom.<sup>37</sup>

By the time Terragni designed another Casa del Fascio in the little Milanese town of Lissone, in 1938–39, it was equipped with a *torre del Littorio*, a demonstrative *arengario* and the motto, 'Believe, Obey, Fight.' Terragni complained in his accompanying text of the 'disorientating, uncalled-for return to the ambiguous antimodern polemics of 1938'.<sup>38</sup> Room for

inauguration of the new town of Sabaudia



31 Giuseppe Terragni, 'La costruzione della Casa del Fascio di Como', *Quadrante* 35–36 (1936), translated in Thomas L. Schumacher, *Surface and Symbol: Giuseppe Terragni and the Architecture of Italian Rationalism* (New York, 1991) 151.

32 Terragni (as note 31), 153.

33 'Seicentismo del funzionale', 'Tre anni di architettura in Italia', *Casabella*, no. 110 (February 1937).

34 Eulín (as note 27), 580ff.

35 This was self-consciously seen as a search for a *stile fascista* or *stile littorio*: F. Palozzi, *Il nuovo stil littorio: I progetti per il palazzo del Littorio e della MRB in via dell'Impero* (Milan and Rome, 1936).

36 Libera was particularly fond of this device, using a lictor's axe, either alone or in a row, for the façade of the *Mostra della Rivoluzione Fascista*, Rome, 1932, for the *Littorio Pavilion* at the Universal Exhibition, Brussels, 1935, and in a design for the Italian Pavilion in Chicago, 1939. See F. Garofalo, *Adalberto Libera* (Bologna, 1989), 80.

37 For Sabaudia, a competition was held (1933) in which a group of young Roman urbanists, led by Piccinato, was successful. Ricky Burdett, *Sabaudia, Città nuova fascista* (London, 1982).

38 Marciano (as note 30), 234.





## ROME RECLAIMS ITS EMPIRE

Architecture *Tim Benton*

Rome reclaims its Empire / *Roma rivendica l'Impero*  
 The hour of the Eagle has struck / *L'ora dell'Aquil sonò*  
 Trumpet blasts salute the flight / *Squilli di trombe*  
*salutano il vol*

From Capitol to Quirinal / *Dal Campidoglio al Quirinal*  
 Earth, we want to dominate you / *Terra ti vogliamo*  
*dominar*

Sea, we want to navigate you / *Mare ti vogliamo navigar*  
 The Lictor returns as the signal / *Il Littorio ritorna*  
*segnal*

Of power and civilization / *Di forza, di civiltà!*  
 (March of the Legions, 1926.)<sup>1</sup>

'The Italian people has created the Empire with its blood, will make it fertile with its labour and defend it against whomsoever with its arms. In this certain hope, raise high, legionaries, the standards, the steel and your hearts, and salute, after fifteen centuries, the reappearance of the Empire on the fated hills of Rome.'<sup>2</sup>

From the moment when it was decided to locate the capital of unified Italy in Rome (1870), Italian politicians and urbanists were faced with contradictory pressures. The city offered two claims for universal authority: the Roman Empire and the Papacy.<sup>3</sup> Any attempt to recruit these two great authorities in support of the regime inevitably pointed up deficiencies: initial efforts to develop colonies led to the humiliating defeat of Adowa in Ethiopia, while the Papacy at first refused even to recognize Rome as the capital of the new state.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, any attempt to modernize a city whose population grew from 244,000 in 1871 to over a million in 1931, to provide offices, wide thoroughfares, public transport and utilities, meant destroying the churches and disturbing the archaeological sites on which this reflected authority depended.<sup>5</sup> To make matters worse, Mussolini and successive Governors of Rome,<sup>6</sup> not to say the whole Chamber of Deputies and the nation's press, felt it necessary to interfere at every stage in any proposed change to the nation's heritage. Some excellent architects and urbanists contributed to the architectural discourse in Rome in the 1930s. Many of their best ideas were dashed on the rocks of these fearsome circumstances. As Margherita Sarfatti wrote in 1925: 'In Rome architecture is made and unmade rather more than elsewhere.'<sup>7</sup>

As Giorgio Ciucci has observed,<sup>8</sup> the key issues of planning in the 1930s had been well established before the Fascist era. From the outset, it seemed to be very difficult to find a middle way between conservation and demolition; the monument to Vittorio Emanuele II and its associated clearances and road widening (1884–1910) had already involved cutting a swathe through medieval and Renaissance Rome.

The Plan of 1931, produced under Mussolini's eye by a committee representing divergent views, was necessarily a compromise. Nevertheless, certain assumptions gradually won general acceptance. First, archaeological sites (especially those of the Augustan era) were central to the presentation of Fascism as a revival of Empire. Second, a triumphal way (the via dell'Impero) would have to be created to link the piazza Venezia (where Il Duce had installed his state apartments in 1929) with a new road to Ostia and the sea (via del Mare). Third, a monumental development to the north (housing, sports arenas, new roads and bridges) should form a gateway to the modern city; this became the Foro Mussolini. Fourth, the southern approaches along the via del Mare would need a great feature, which turned out to be the exhibition city of EUR. Fifth, the working class should be moved out of the centre into new districts on the west, east and south.<sup>9</sup> Though the demolition envisaged was little more than in earlier plans, this amounted to a dramatic reshaping of the urban landscape.

Mussolini was keenly interested in monumental interventions in the city centre.<sup>10</sup> In a speech in 1925, inaugurating the Roman Governatorato, he declared, somewhat wildly:

'In five years Rome must be seen to be marvellous to all the people of the world: vast, ordered, powerful, as it was in the first Augustan Empire. You must continue to liberate the trunk of the great oak from everything which still smothers it. Open up spaces around the Augusteo [Mausoleum of Augustus], the Theatre of Marcellus, the Campidoglio, the Pantheon. Everything which has grown up in the centuries of decadence must be swept away. In five years, from piazza Colonna, across a great area, should be visible the mass of the Pantheon.'<sup>11</sup>

In the event, the first three of these great demolition jobs had been achieved by 1943.

1 Text by V. Emanuele Bravetta, music by Giuseppe Blanc, 1925; the music carries a dedication to 'Benito Mussolini, standard-bearer of Rome'. Reprinted in A. V. Savona and M. L. Straniero, *Canti dell'Italia Fascista (1919–1945)* (Rome, 1979).

2 Mussolini, speech proclaiming the Empire, 10 May 1936, reproduced as a lapidary inscription in the *Mostra Augustea della Romanità, 1937–38*.

3 As the decade progressed, a distinction was made between 'internationalism' (Jewish, Bolshevik, un-Italian) and 'universality' (based on Rome's claim to primacy); see Giorgio Pini, 'Difesa della Razza', in Paolo Orano, *Inchiasta sulla razza* (Rome, 1939), 190.

4 This was not resolved until the Lateran Pacts of 1929, when the Papacy accepted the Italian state with its capital in Rome. Mussolini allowed the Church a central role in education, much to the disgust of some of the most ardent Fascists.

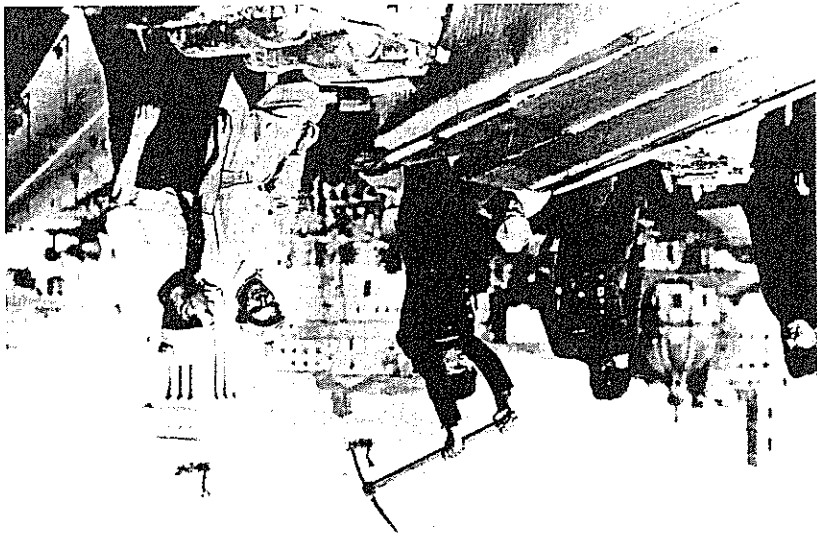
5 Some fifteen churches were destroyed, and a large number of historic buildings were dismantled and rebuilt elsewhere. See Spiro Kostoff, *The Third Rome: Traffic and Glory* (Berkeley, 1973).

6 In 1925, Mussolini established the Governatorato of Rome with great new powers. Governors were mostly drawn from old Roman aristocracy, but Giuseppe Bottai was also Governor for a period.

7 Margherita Sarfatti, *Segni, colori e luci* (Bologna, 1925), 238.

8 Giorgio Ciucci, *Gli Architetti e il Fascismo* (Turin, 1989), 81.

9 In 1929, the GUR (Group of Roman Urbanists) designed garden cities for workers and for new business quarters, leaving the centre free to 'glow in all its beauty, while the new city should proclaim the national rebirth'. Ciucci (as note 8), 97–98.



10 Mussolini starts demolition work for via dell'Impero, 1928-32

3, 302.)

(Cited in Kostoff, as note

of Augustus one by one,

comparing Mussolini's

achievements with those

of Augustus (1977) was more explicit,

(Rome, 1941; written

*Roma, Augusto e Mussolini*

*Frangiamini del Impero di*

*Mussolini*; E. Balbo,

purpose of Augustus and

stresses the similarity of

*di Agui* (Rome, 1937).

14 *Italia d'Augusto e l'Italia*

Giuseppe Bortol,

London, 1900), 26-31.

13 Alex Scobie, *Hitler's*

*State Architecture*

(Penguin, 1990), 26-31.

note 8), 85-86.

Monte Sacro and the

Garbatella. Cited (as

housing projects, at

suburban workers'

style to dignify two

12 Giovanni had

adapted the *barocchetto*

forward face of the raised podium.

The architect Vittorio Ballio Morpurgo was given

'pompous and inexpressive palaces' which Del Debbio

had resisted. The buildings were decorated with

inscriptions, reliefs and mosaics linking Imperial

Roman achievements with Fascist ones. One of the

largest squares in Rome, the piazzale Augusto Imperatore

represents an enormous effort of archaeology;

demolition and new construction. It fails to make the

desired propaganda impact, largely because Morpurgo's

buildings deaden rather than fire the imagination.

More successful was the *Mostra Augusta della*

*Romantica*, opened on 23 September 1937 (in the same

Palazzo delle Esposizioni where the youthful

exuberance of the young Modernists had celebrated the

tenth anniversary of the March on Rome in the *Mostra*

*della Rivoluzione Fascista* of 1932). It ran for a year,

being visited in May 1938 by Hitler and his retinue.

11 The idea of blurring

through a space between

plazza Colonna (the

business centre of the

city) and the Pantheon

was taken up by a

number of planners but

fortunately abandoned.

The liberation of the

Theatre of Marcellus

from the houses which

surrounded and engulfed

it (1926-28) formed part

of the general clearance

of churches, houses and

palaces required to make

way for the proposed via

del Corso, which would

connect piazza Venezia

to Piazza del Campidoglio and the sea. D.

Manacorda and R.

Tamassia, *Il piano del*

*Roma* (Rome, 1985),

171-81.

Demolishing buildings to expose antique ruins ran counter to the tradition known as the *barocchetto*, based on detailed study of Roman building traditions, to which many of the most influential academic architects were committed. For example, Gustavo Giovannoni (for many years head of the School of Architecture) was bold enough to protest at the plan (1934) to carve a slice through the Borgo (the Renaissance quarter between the Vatican and the Tiber) to make the via della Conciliazione.<sup>12</sup> But this broad avenue lined with obelisks was a typical example of urbanism celebrating political achievements: too important to be allowed to fail. Its completion allowed Mussolini to claim for his regime the reflected authority of the Church, and to stamp the relationship with his own authority.

In any investigation of Fascist interventions in Rome, it is important to realize that the debate between young and old, traditionalists and Modernists, 'ins' and 'outs', remained open until the last years of the 1930s. Nevertheless, there was a drift towards Neoclassical and imperial imagery. The key dates are 1936, with the capture of Addis Ababa and the declaration of the new Italian Empire, and 1937-38, when Mussolini's visit to Germany and Hitler's visit to Italy sealed the Axis alliance.<sup>13</sup>

Mussolini, the new Augustus

Long before the declaration of Empire on 9 May 1936, Mussolini had begun his programme to celebrate Rome's first Emperor, and to bring every site associated with him to the surface of the city.<sup>14</sup> In 1926, the archaeologist G. Q. Giglioli began work on the Mausoleum of Augustus (known as the Augusteo), a huge circular ruin in a rather rundown area near the river. The latest use found for this building had been in 1907 when, equipped with a steel roof, it became the Auditorium (the largest assembly hall in the city). In June 1927, Enrico del Debbio and a group from the Federazione Fascista dell'Urbe proposed a plan for the site; despite the clearing of 1,000 square metres of land, the stated aim, in line with Del Debbio's *barocchetto* interests, was to create picturesque vistas through old buildings and not to build 'pompous and inexpressive new palaces'.<sup>15</sup> The 1931 Plan swept away these subtleties and framed the Augusteo with a huge rectangular piazza lined with new buildings. On 22 October 1934, Mussolini made a speech outlining the project and, seizing a pickaxe, cried 'And now let

the pickaxe speak! The image (in film, photograph and painting) of Mussolini energetically wielding a pickaxe proved an effective means of projecting the demolition of the old Rome as a 'revolutionary' Fascist act. The iconography of the pickaxe and the pneumatic drill became almost as strong as that of the dagger and machine gun in monumental art of the period.

As the project developed, new ingredients were added: a Latin inscription recording part of the restatement of Augustus (the *Res gestae*), copied from the Temple of Augustus in Ankara, and, most important, the reconstruction of the Ara Pacis,<sup>16</sup> at Mussolini's urgent behest, on a site between the Augusteo and the river (p. 122). This was completed in 1938, and a glazed protective building designed to present it to the public. A copy of the *Res gestae* was attached to the forward face of the raised podium.

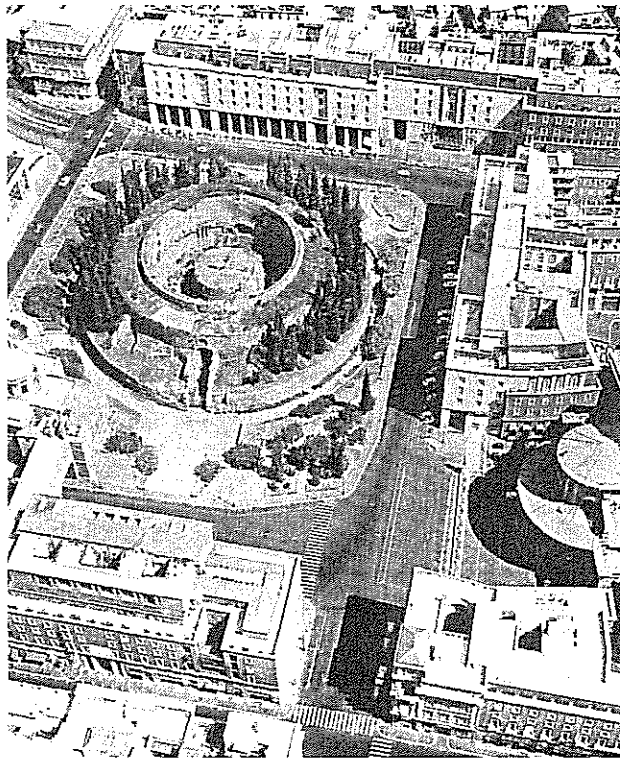
The architect Vittorio Ballio Morpurgo was given 'pompous and inexpressive palaces' which Del Debbio had resisted. The buildings were decorated with inscriptions, reliefs and mosaics linking Imperial Roman achievements with Fascist ones. One of the largest squares in Rome, the piazzale Augusto Imperatore represents an enormous effort of archaeology; demolition and new construction. It fails to make the desired propaganda impact, largely because Morpurgo's buildings deaden rather than fire the imagination.

More successful was the *Mostra Augusta della Romantica*, opened on 23 September 1937 (in the same Palazzo delle Esposizioni where the youthful exuberance of the young Modernists had celebrated the tenth anniversary of the March on Rome in the *Mostra della Rivoluzione Fascista* of 1932). It ran for a year, being visited in May 1938 by Hitler and his retinue.

# ROME

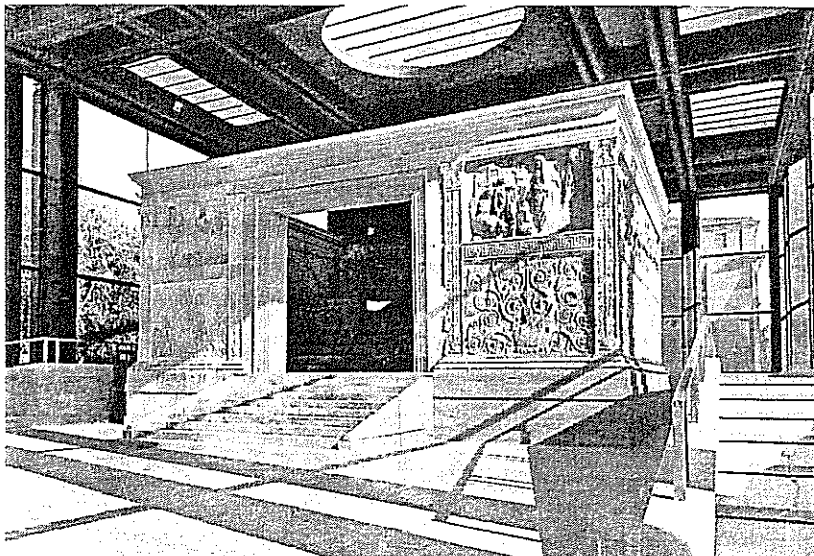
15 Spiro Kostoff, 'The Emperor and the Duce: the planning of the Piazzale Augusto Imperatore in Rome', in H. Millon and L. Nochlin, eds., *Art and Architecture in the Service of Politics* (Cambridge, Mass., 1978), 279.

Piazza di Augusto Imperatore after clearance and rebuilding in 1934-38



16 The original altar was set up on this site in 9 BC to commemorate Augustus' victories in Spain and Gaul. A series of beautiful reliefs depict members of Augustus's family and allegorical figures (including a seated personification of Rome). Some of these reliefs turned up in different collections all over Europe, and in 1903 these were related to remains under Palazzo Peretti-Ottoboni on this site.

The restored *Ara Pacis* in its pavilion by Morpurgo



The theme of imperial renewal was emblazoned over the portico in the words of Il Duce: 'Italians, let the glories of the past be superseded by the glories of the future!'<sup>17</sup>

Two hundred fragments of sculpture and two thousand plaster casts, made from original pieces scattered all over Europe, were used to reconstruct the Rome of Julius Caesar and Augustus. The second large room in the exhibition was entitled the Sala dell'Impero and included a full-size reconstruction of the pronaos of the temple of Augustus at Ankara, with copies and explanations of the *Res gestae*. Room XXVI was entitled 'The immortality of the idea of Rome. The rebirth of Empire in Fascist Italy'. The catalogue insists: 'With

Fascism, by the will of Il Duce, every ideal, every institution, every Roman building, has once more come to be celebrated, in the new Italy; and, after the epic undertaking of the soldiers on African soil, on the ruins of a barbaric empire is reborn the Roman Empire.'<sup>18</sup>

Inscriptions from Mussolini, Dante and ancient Roman authors lined the hall, alongside images of recent Fascist rallies and new constructions. Three triumphal arches illustrated the supposed continuity of the Roman ideal: the Arch of Constantine (celebrating victory over Maxentius and the beginnings of official Christianity), the Arch of Bolzano (a war memorial designed by Marcello Piacentini, celebrating the victory over Austria) and another Fascist monument, the Arch of the Fileni in Cyrenaica, designed by F. di Fausto, recording Il Duce's visit to Libya and the inauguration of the Libyan coast road (Strada Litoranea). The regime's new towns (Littoria, Sabaudia and others) were illustrated as 'truly Roman works of Fascism', followed by illustrations of the Foro Mussolini ('a truly classical centre of physical instruction').<sup>19</sup> As a permanent reminder, marble relief maps of the growth of ancient Rome from its humble origins to world Empire, and of its modern Fascist resurgence, were affixed to the wall of the Basilica of Maxentius (they're still there). The collection of sculptures and casts became the core of the Museo della Civiltà Romana, which still exists in EUR.

The via dell'Impero (now via dei Fori Imperiali) presented the most awkward consequences of Mussolini's cultural policy.<sup>20</sup> To make a wide, level avenue (700 metres long and 30 metres wide) linking the Colosseum and the Arch of Constantine with the piazza Venezia, involved not only covering over large tracts of the recently excavated Imperial Fora, but also levelling a hill (Collina della Velia) to open up a view of the Colosseum. Mussolini was clear about his motives: 'Rome now has in the centre a street truly designed for its great military parades, which until now have been restricted to the periphery or the countryside.'<sup>21</sup>

It was originally named via dei Monti; Mussolini impulsively renamed it via dell'Impero on the night of 27-28 October 1932, anticipating the declaration of Empire by three and a half years. Inaugurated on 28 October 1932 with a parade of 17,000 wounded Blackshirt veterans, the via dell'Impero was a platform from which to view the ruins of Imperial Rome, but also a brutal act of destruction of those same ruins. More importantly, it constituted a significant act of delusion: an attempt magically to attract the powers of ancient Rome to the fledgling Fascist Empire.

will be up against each other: on the one hand a static world, in love with formalism and rhetoric, which

defines itself as defender of *Romanitas*, of the supreme laws of the spirit and of the Italian tradition, and on the other hand the world of life and progress which will

draw health from the raw and eternal purity of simple things and which will try to express the ideal of Italian modernity by means of the proportions and rhythms of

today without recourse to the dimensions of the dinosaurs, the rhetoric of the Spanish baroque or the

formulae of Vitruvius.<sup>26</sup> Significantly, after studying the brief and the site in detail, Pagano subsequently refused to enter the

competition himself, arguing that it was impossible for modern architects to compete with the Imperial Fora,

the Basilica of Maxentius and the Colosseum.<sup>27</sup> Several modern architects did submit designs,

however, and this competition did indeed turn out to be a watershed in the struggle to find a monumental style

for the regime. Over a hundred groups submitted designs, and 71 were selected for a major exhibition on

23 September 1934. Pagano was unimpressed: 'an isolated nucleus of modern life . . . cannot possibly be

. . . realized without undermining the archaeological integrity of the area.'<sup>28</sup> Piacentini, however, writing in

his journal *Architettura*, declared that at last Italian architecture had found its 'character' (one combining

tradition and innovation), thanks to the unifying spirit of Fascism.<sup>29</sup>

The jury reported to Mussolini in December, and it seems that he himself played a role in the final

decision.<sup>30</sup> The result was a compromise, listing fourteen projects by both modern and traditional

architects. Among the younger architects there was a team including Terragni, Lingeri, Sironi and Nizzoli,

and there were projects by Giuseppe Samona, Luigi Moretti, Adalberto Libera, Mario de Renzi and La

Padua, Ridolfi and Rossi. Among the academic architects were Del Debbio, Foschini and Morpurgo.

The next step was to have been the construction of the symbolic and actual heart of the regime, on the via

dell'Impero, facing the Basilica of Maxentius. The Palazzo del Littorio was to incorporate the headquarters

of the Fascist party, a suite for Mussolini, a permanent Museum of Fascism (based on the *Mostra della Rivoluzione*

*Fascista* and including a shrine to the Fascist martyrs), and a podium for speeches (*arengario*) facing onto the

new via dell'Impero. Some designs also found a place for the reconstructed Ara Pacis.<sup>32</sup> The effect would

have been to move the spiritual centre of Fascism from piazza Venezia to a midpoint on the via dell'Impero.

When the architectural competition was announced in December 1933, it seemed as if Mussolini meant to

balance the heavily retrospective context of the via dell'Impero with a bold, new building in a modern style.

Only twelve months before, describing the facade of the *Mostra della Rivoluzione Fascista* (p. 39), the exhibition

organizer had declared: 'There was a need in Rome of such a gesture of salutary violence . . . And thus the

Duce called it "superb and typically Fascist", then adding that the permanent seat for the future Museum of the

Fascist Revolution that will rise on the via dell'Impero should be "a modern monumental construction".<sup>33</sup>

Mussolini was still prepared to defend the Modernists in May 1934, when they were attacked in

the Chamber of Deputies by a chorus of ageing and mostly ignorant *gerarchi*,<sup>34</sup> led on by Roberto Farinacci.

In a tumultuous debate, disparaging references were made to the two recent competitions won by modern

architects (Florence railway station and the new town of Sabaudia)<sup>35</sup> but both these projects were dear to

Mussolini, representing his modernizing drive to put Italy back on its feet. He made a point of inviting the

architects concerned to the Palazzo Venezia and mentioned this fact in a press release (10 June). This was taken by both P. M. Bardi (of the Quadrante

group) and Giuseppe Pagano (of *Casabella*) as a sign that modern architecture would be accepted as the official Fascist style.

The jury for the Palazzo del Littorio competition was chaired by Achille Starace, secretary general of the

Fascist party, with Piacentini as secretary and rapporteur. There were two other architects (both

reactionary classicists), two archaeologists, the Governor of Rome and other political figures. Pagano

welcomed the initiative at first, writing in *Casabella* in January 1934:

It will be a great struggle. Once again two worlds

18 Speech by Professor

Chilio Quinto Ciglioli, in Roberto Vighi, *Mostra*

*Argenta della Romanità* (Rome, 1937), vii, 19

Ibid., 363.

19 Ibid., 365.

20 Began in 1928, it was

inaugurated by Mussolini

in 1932. The road was

meant to continue south

towards San Giovanni

Manacorda and Tammassa

but was never completed.

(as note 12), 181-94.

21 Ibid., 181.

22 For example,

Giorgio Ponté's unpermitted

designs. S. Danesi and L.

Farneri, *Il razionalismo e*

*l'architettura in Italia*

(Venice, 1976), 156.

23 Dino Alfieri,

*La Rivoluzione Fascista*,

January 1933, cited in

Richard Edlin, *Modernism*

*in Italian Architecture, 1890-1940* (Cambridge,

Mass., and London,

1990-1940).

24 Literally 'hierarchs',

these were Mussolini's

most trusted colleagues,

almost all of whom had

shared his experience of

the trenches and street

warfare. Those hostile to

Modernism were

Farinacci, Cini and

Terragni; see F. Brunetti,

*Architettura e Fascismo*

(Florence, 1993), 257.

25 Edlin (as note 24),

429-30. In this regard

exchange, the most

reactionary party activists

attacked not only the

Rationalists but also the

modernizing academic

architects, helping to

prevent the working

alliance between

Piacentini and the young

Rationalists.

26 G. Pagano, 'Per il

palazzo del Littorio,

l'opione di

'Casabella',

no. 73 (January 1934),

27 G. Pagano, 'Palazzo

del Littorio, ato primo,

scena prima, *Casabella*,

no. 79 (July 1934),

28 G. Pagano, 'Il

palazzo del Littorio,

concorso per il palazzo

del Littorio, *Casabella*,

no. 82 (October 1934),

29 M. Piacentini, 'Il

concorso nazionale per il

palazzo del Littorio in

la

Mostra della

*Rivoluzione Fascista* of 1932, using the

Fascist tower and pulpit motifs (*Torre del Littorio* in the

form of a fasces; projecting *arengario*). The facade was

deployed in a huge curve around this central dominant

feature. His *Sacratio dei Martiri* would have reproduced

exactly the *Sacratio* in the *Mostra*. A number of the

competing groups offered two solutions to the

problem, an uncompromisingly modern one and one

more symbolic and monumental in character. One

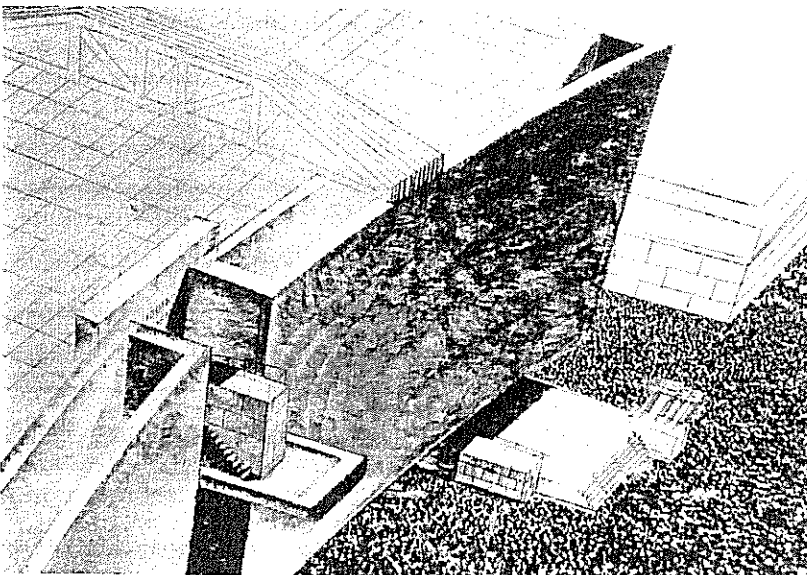
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32 'Concorso per il Palazzo del Littorio e della Mostra della Rivoluzione Fascista in Roma, Relazione', 1934, (printed version of the typescript report submitted with the competition project).

33 The prime authorship in the two projects by this group has been contested. Relying on the memoirs of Terragni's associate Luigi Zuccoli, Giorgio Ciucci accepts that Terragni put more effort into Project B, while Project A was worked up by Luigi Vietri. Ciucci (as note 8), 147.

34 Ibid.  
35 Ibid, 148. See also M. Tafuri, 'The Subject and the Mask. An Introduction to Terragni', *Lotus International* (September 1978), 5-31.

A. Carminati, P. Ligeri, M. Nizzoli, E. Saliva, M. Sironi, L. Vietti, G. Terragni, Project A for first Palazzo de Littorio competition, Rome 1934



Milanese group (including Terragni)<sup>31</sup> entered a 'Project B' which in its uncompromising modernity matched that of the Quadrante group including the Milanese architects Banfi, Belgiojoso, Danusso, Figini, Peressutti, Pollini and Rogers (BBPR). In their report, this latter group wrote: 'The acceptance by Il Duce of the best realizations of the regime – Sabaudia and Florence railway station – has closed the latest debates on the relationship between Fascism and modern architecture. It is the last nail in the coffin of all those stylistic pyrotechnics, resulting either from well-intentioned backwardness or from opportunism.'<sup>32</sup>

Of great interest was the Terragni group's 'Project A'.<sup>33</sup> In their report, they wrote: 'We have not forgotten that a great historic era of architecture was before us in "superb archaeological parade". The discourse of the wall from Imperial Rome might have made us compromise, had not our certainty of being sincere in dignified construction, independent of servile imitations, promoted in us a faith to find a spiritual continuity with that which venerable marbles and ponderous carcasses of temples and basilicas express so eloquently.'<sup>34</sup>

The Terragni group's approach to the problem of the Roman ruins and the demands of Modernism was to take the Roman theme of the wall, and an 'antique' material (red porphyry), and transcend structure and material in a modern idiom (p. 142). The façade to the via dell'Impero was treated as a curved sounding board, 80 metres long and pierced in the middle to create an *arengario*. But the properties of wall and material were reversed. Instead of providing a massive support, the wall was suspended from two gigantic reinforced concrete trusses, leaving the ground floor largely clear apart from four 'reinforced granite' piers. The stone

blocks of the façade were held in tension by bands of steel which fanned out from the ends of the supporting trusses along the lines of isostatic tension. The report illustrates experimental tests using a 'Fenolite' model under tension and seen by polarized light. The visual effect is rather like a complex spider's web of lines of force, as if reflecting the waves of energy from the leader's oratory. Ciucci's comment is revealing:

'The abstraction is total, and the myth which the building can transmit (the power accumulated in Mussolini, the transparency of the Fascist idea, the order reconstructed by Fascism) exists in the way artifice refers to real values: the lines of isostatic force, transparent walls, golden section rectangles are devices which take on these values only when they communicate with myth.'<sup>35</sup>

The growing rift between Pagano and the Quadrante group was sharpened by this competition. Pagano's call for a 'moral' architecture of coherent, anti-rhetorical social purpose was apparently undermined by the more extreme Modernists, whose work could easily look just as obsequious and unworldly as that of the compromised Neoclassicists.

It was decided that a second competition should be held, to which these winning groups alone should be invited. But by the time this was held, the brief had changed completely.<sup>36</sup> It was decided to move the building to a less central site, next to the Pyramid of Cestius on the Aventine, where it would have framed the southern approach to the city. By now, Mussolini must have decided that his state apartments must remain in piazza Venezia, the site of so many glorious speeches. The building was now simply to be the party headquarters, and the party secretary was left to select the architects, with help from a committee (including two traditional architects, Giovannoni and Muzio and Pietro Aschieri, who had a foot in both camps).

A decision was announced, in October 1937, in favour of Del Debbio, Foschini and Morpurgo. Of six other schemes deemed worthy of praise, only Moretti and Ridolfi were among the moderns, and both had adapted their style to make a massive, monumental effect. Terragni's group and that of Libera, De Renzi and Vaccaro (who had teamed up) were not mentioned. In three years, the consensus had moved dramatically away from Modernism. After some revision, the Del Debbio project was eventually built on the Foro Mussolini site on the northern outskirts, where its ponderous monumentality forms a poignant contrast with the graceful earlier work by the same architect. In the second competition, all the projects include a *torre*



42 Giuseppe Pagano, *Cantella* (December 1933).

43 By 1936 Del Debbio had designed, in addition to the Academy of Physical Education and the Stadio dei Marmi, the Stadio dei Cipressi and the first variant of the Olympic stadium which replaced it, the Casa della Balilla Madre, the southern youth hostel, designs for the Duca d'Aosta bridge, a building of storerooms, a Heliotherapeutic Colony, variants of the Museum of Fascism and the Colossus, the Music Academy and a theatre for classical dance, an open air theatre.

44 At first this was referred to as the 'Casa Balilla sperimentale'; see Ricci's report to Mussolini, 22 May 1935 (Santucci and Greco,

p. 12). This title appears on Moretti's drawings now conserved in the Archivio Centrale di Stato and dated March 1935. Moretti, then fresh out of architecture school, had played a role in drafting the Rationalist RAMI manifesto of 1931.

45 The Arengo Nazionale would have held 400,000 people, on the parade ground and in the stands. Moretti's drawings study the seating arrangements in terms of a tension between the laws of acoustics, which would have provided a heart-shaped plan, and the requirements of regimented men on parade. The result was a stand with raised 'wings' to amplify and direct the sound.

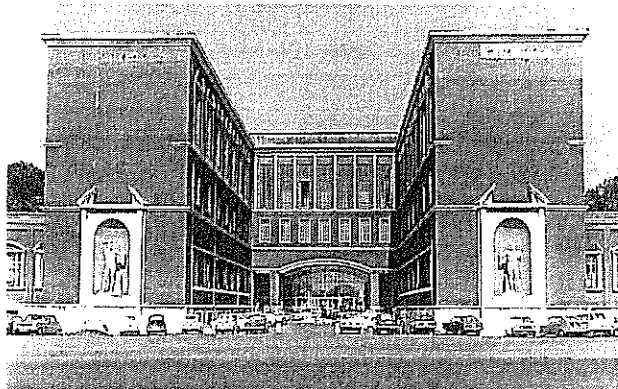
46 A 'Programma dell'Esposizione Universale e Mondiale di Roma XX Annuale' was drawn up and promoted by Giuseppe Bottai; see *E'42: Utopia e Scenario del Regime* (Rome, 1987), 1:19.

Enrico del Debbio,  
Accademia  
fascista di  
Educazione fisica,  
1926-32

the Blackshirts had camped out here during the March on Rome. The Opera Nazionale Balilla (ONB) had been set up in 1926 to organize the leisure time of boys and girls from the age of six to fourteen, and the Foro Mussolini was conceived as a headquarters and training ground for the whole movement.<sup>40</sup>

One of Mussolini's close followers, Renato Ricci, had been placed in charge of the ONB, despite his youth (he was still only thirty-five when the Foro Mussolini was inaugurated in 1932). Ricci came from Carrara, and his passion for marble statues led to a profusion of life-size or over-life-size statues throughout the complex.<sup>41</sup> In particular, the Stadio dei Marmi (seating 20,000 people) was lined with 60 statues, 4 metres high, donated by different cities in Italy (p. 147). A monolithic obelisk, designed by Costantini and inscribed with the legend MUSSOLINI DUX, marked the entrance to the site. Regular newspaper articles and film bulletins charted the progress of this stone, the largest single piece of marble ever quarried in Carrara, to the reinforced concrete scaffolding ramp where, amid much excitement, it was dragged into the vertical and finally set free. Similarly, when Paniconi and Pediconi designed a fountain with a large marble sphere representing the Universe, the monolith was tracked all the way to the site in the popular press. These were not simply wonders of engineering and transportation, but evocations of the achievements of the Roman Empire and the Popes, who had resided obelisks around the city.

Ricci was an enlightened patron of architecture, at the head of an organization which built schools and sporting establishments all over Italy: 'If you see the letters ONB lording it over a building, you can cheerfully assume that building to be the most modern in town, the most up-to-date, the one which, at least in international terms, would be seen to represent a real step on the road to progress. And in fact, in 80 per cent of the cases, you would be right.'<sup>42</sup>



Del Debbio was chosen to design the overall scheme and its key structures. He seems to have played a key role in selecting this beautiful site, as opposed to one near the University City. It was to contain a Royal Fascist Academy of Physical and Youth Education (to train PE instructors for schools all over Italy), a Musical Academy and a range of sporting facilities, including two stadia, banks of tennis courts, rugby and football pitches, swimming pools and a fencing academy. In addition, lodgings for visiting athletes and a large space for a camp site had to be found. Del Debbio brought to his buildings traces of his *barocchetto* style: red rendered walls, set off by rather Mannerist tabernacle windows and niches enclosing statues in white marble. Del Debbio insisted on keeping his buildings as low as possible, to recreate the classical effect of an organic unity with nature. Both stadia were to be hollowed out of the ground. In the Stadio dei Marmi only the ring of statues breaks ground level, while the first design of the Stadio dei Cipressi uses the natural slope of the ground to create additional seating on one side only.

When the first phase was inaugurated by Mussolini in 1932, with a gymnastic display, the Foro Mussolini presented itself as a centre for youthful sporting endeavour.<sup>43</sup> In the next four years, however, its character began to change substantially; this change was partly a cause and partly an effect of a change in the artistic leadership of the project. Luigi Moretti, a young Roman architect, had been given the task of designing the fencing academy at the western end of the site.<sup>44</sup> He changed the southern approach completely, challenging the modest, vernacular quality of Del Debbio's Foresteria Sud with the majestic, marble faced mass of the new building. Moretti's interpretation of the demands of monumental architecture was to plan his buildings in a very modern way, using the latest structural methods to create incredible interior spaces flooded with hidden sources of light, while presenting to the outside world a smooth, closed exterior. The so-called Palestra del Duce (Mussolini's private gymnasium, located above the covered swimming pool) glistens with translucent marble polished to a mirror-like surface and minutely detailed (pp. 127, 146). In his redesign of the piazzale Imperiale, an avenue lined with mosaics and a guard of honour of marble plinths which leads the visitor into the site from the obelisk to the fountain of the marble sphere, Moretti injected an element of elegant monumentality.

More dramatic still was the scheme for a statue 100 metres tall (including plinth), representing Mussolini as

Luigi Moretti,  
fencing hall,  
Foro Mussolini,  
1934-36

The attempt to hold the Olympic Games in Rome in 1944 was closely linked to the even more ambitious project to hold an 'Olympics of Civilization' in a new city, EUR, to the south of Rome. The origins of the idea date back to November 1935.<sup>46</sup> Even before the site, on

### EUR

until after the War.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1940 and left unfinished into the Foro Mussolini. The building was redesignated new site, knowing that his large palace would fit badly been completed. Del Debbio himself objected to the del Littorio here, in 1937, the final twist in the saga had

Luigi Moretti,  
Mussolini's  
gymnasium,  
Foro Mussolini,  
1936-37

When the decision was taken to build the Palazzo pylons and eagles was arranged for Hitler's visit. a hurried redecoration of the 'Olympic Stadium' with from 1937 to 1943, came to nothing, although in 1938 Most of the ambitious plans for the Foro Mussolini, bureaucratic state control for enthusiastic leadership. imagination as the Balilla Youth had done, substituting and its secretary, Starace. The GIL never captured the Italiano del Littorio), under the direction of the party sacked and the ONB replaced by the GIL (Giovventù

In 1937, after a long power struggle, Ricci was much more than the education of Fascist youth. friendship. This whole project was coming to signify the Fascist martyrs - and a house of Italian-German 'Cella Commemorativa' - a little chapel dedicated to addition to the Arseno Nazionale, Moretti also added a

Araldo Bellini,  
head of the  
bronze statue of  
Fascism, 1934

covering an area twice as large as the original. In commissioned to provide an even more ambitious plan,

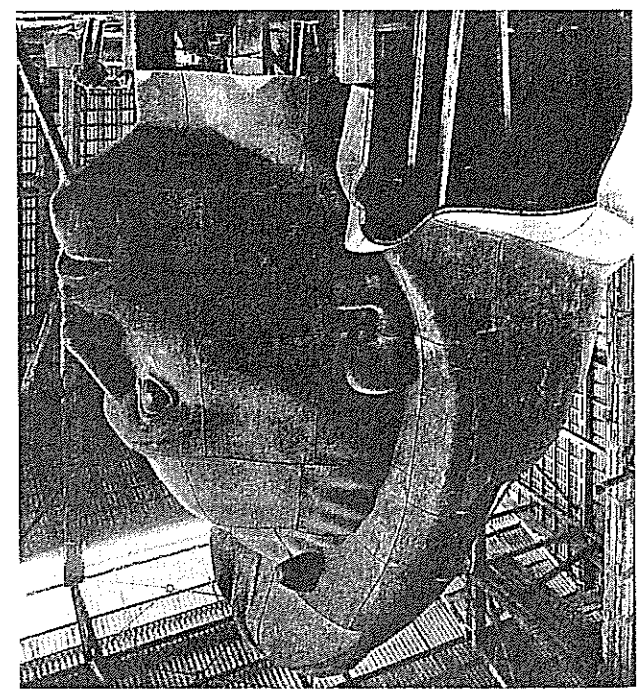
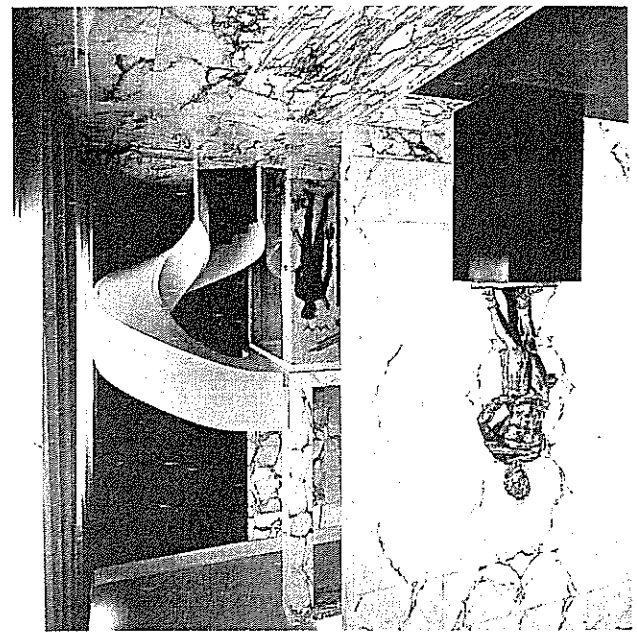
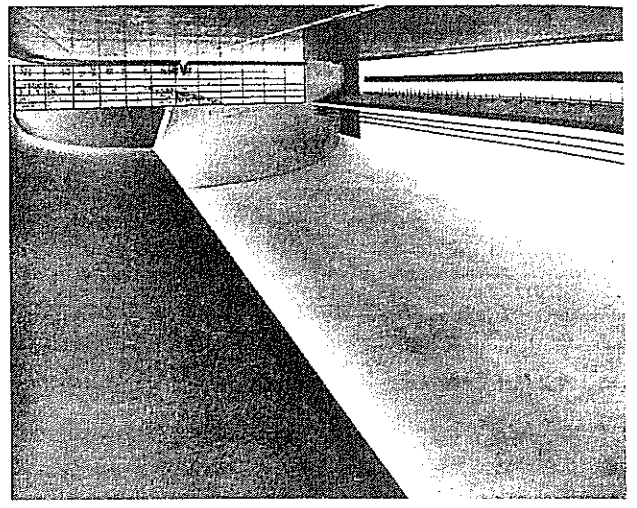
1944 Olympics in Rome, and Moretti was of people.<sup>45</sup>

In 1936 the decision was taken to bid to stage the single speaker's voice audible to the maximum number principles, so that the stands would help to make a purposes. It was designed by Moretti on acoustic

Nazionale), which was to be used for purely political the hill to dominate a vast new parade ground (Arseno the Palazzo del Littorio, the colossus was moved down of Fascism. When it was decided to include the latter in Monte Mario and incorporated the permanent Museum and Pediconi, the statue would have occupied a ridge of In the version developed by Del Debbio with Paniconi photographed alongside the foot and head in his studio.

Bellini began work on this monster in 1934, and was high as the lantern of St Peter's? The sculptor Araldo which would have registered on the skyline of Rome as a new Colossus of Rhodes or Hercules of Nemea,

<sup>47</sup> Picchiaro was a member of GUR and one of those responsible for Sabaudia.





a plateau above the Magliana plain, was selected, a project for a *Mostra della Civiltà Italica* had been proposed by BBPR and found considerable support. In December 1936, Vittorio Cini was placed in charge of the project.

In January 1937, Pagano, Piacentini, Piccinato,<sup>47</sup> Rossi and Vietti were commissioned to produce a plan for a new city which would host a Universal Exhibition. Buildings built for the exhibition would then remain as museums, ministries, business centres and housing. The project brought together the GUR group's earlier plan to decentralize Rome and Piacentini's master plan to provide a monumental feature on the southern approaches from Ostia. At first, the group worked together in a spirit of great optimism and innovation – or at least so Pagano reported in *Casabella* in June 1937. Some of the early drawings show a modern city with glass-fronted office blocks and a thoroughly modern approach to circulation, comparable with the most advanced planning in Europe. As time passed, however, Piacentini managed to take an increasingly tight hold on the project, until the others were finally dismissed in 1940. Cini evolved a clear distinction between the permanent buildings, designed to display a durable monumentality (and classicism) which would not go out of fashion in fifty or a hundred years, and the temporary exhibition buildings, where the young architects could experiment with a more modern style.<sup>48</sup> The final version of the model was rigorously symmetrical, aligned along an axis culminating in a great reinforced concrete arch designed by Libera.

As competitions were announced for the major buildings, it became clear that the young architects were going to have to adapt their style if they were to get the work. A violent polemic in the press, aimed at 'liquidating once and for all the subverters of Italian architecture, contaminated by intrigue by the word from Moscow',<sup>49</sup> softened up the public. Even when architects like Moretti, Quaroni, Libera, La Padula,

Figini and Pollini or Pediconi and Paniconi won competitions, they thought it prudent to adapt to the new climate; if they didn't, their designs were changed by Piacentini and his technical office. Moretti, for example, designed a theatre for the piazza Imperiale which grew more and more austere Neoclassical as the design developed.

All this was too much for Pagano. In a violent outburst, in the course of which he damns most of the recent official architecture of the regime (the 'massacre of the quarter of the Mausoleum of Augustus, the immoral gutting of piazza S. Pietro'), he finally turned on Piacentini:

'But the most abundant wrongdoing is that of Marcello Piacentini, who, with a critical stance based on ancient Rome and with infantile library references is managing to "monumentalize" the future exhibition of Rome . . . In the hands of this artificial Vitruvius, architectural criticism has resolved itself into such a mindless exaltation of the grossest formalisms that one fears for the death of good Italian traditions. Good taste, moderation, harmony, clarity, simplicity and honesty have had to commit Hara Kiri on the altar of the most grotesque exhibitionism.'<sup>50</sup>

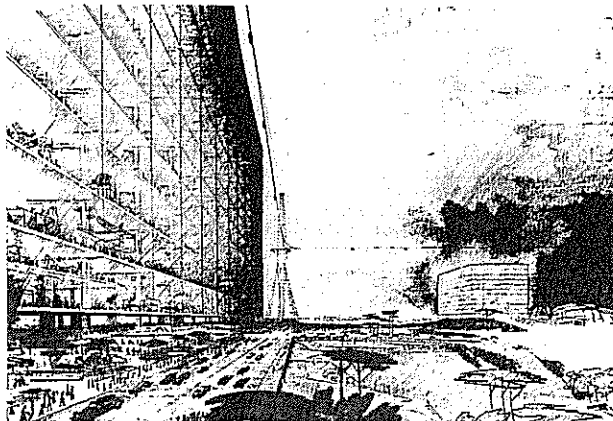
In the end, EUR is by no means without interest. Marble columns (often gigantic monoliths) and endlessly repeated arches characterize the surfaces of the buildings, but the scale and sense of harmonious spatial development are still striking. When the debacle of the War put an end to all plans for a Universal Exhibition in 1942, the site was left littered with cut marble and unused columns. Libera's Palazzo dei Ricevimenti e Congressi and the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana were more or less complete, along with half a dozen other buildings. There is enough here to imagine what an architecture of Roman gravity and modern imagination might have looked like.

48 Report of June 1937, in *E'42* (as note 48), 1:45.

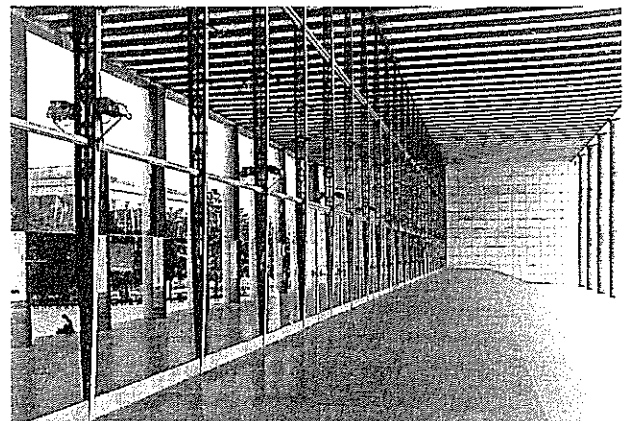
49 'Vampa', writing in *Perseo*, 1 July 1937; in *E'42* (as note 48), 1:49.

50 Giuseppe Pagano, 'Potremo salvarci dalle false tradizioni e dalle ossessioni monumentali?', *Corruzione-Casabella*, no. 157 (January 1941).

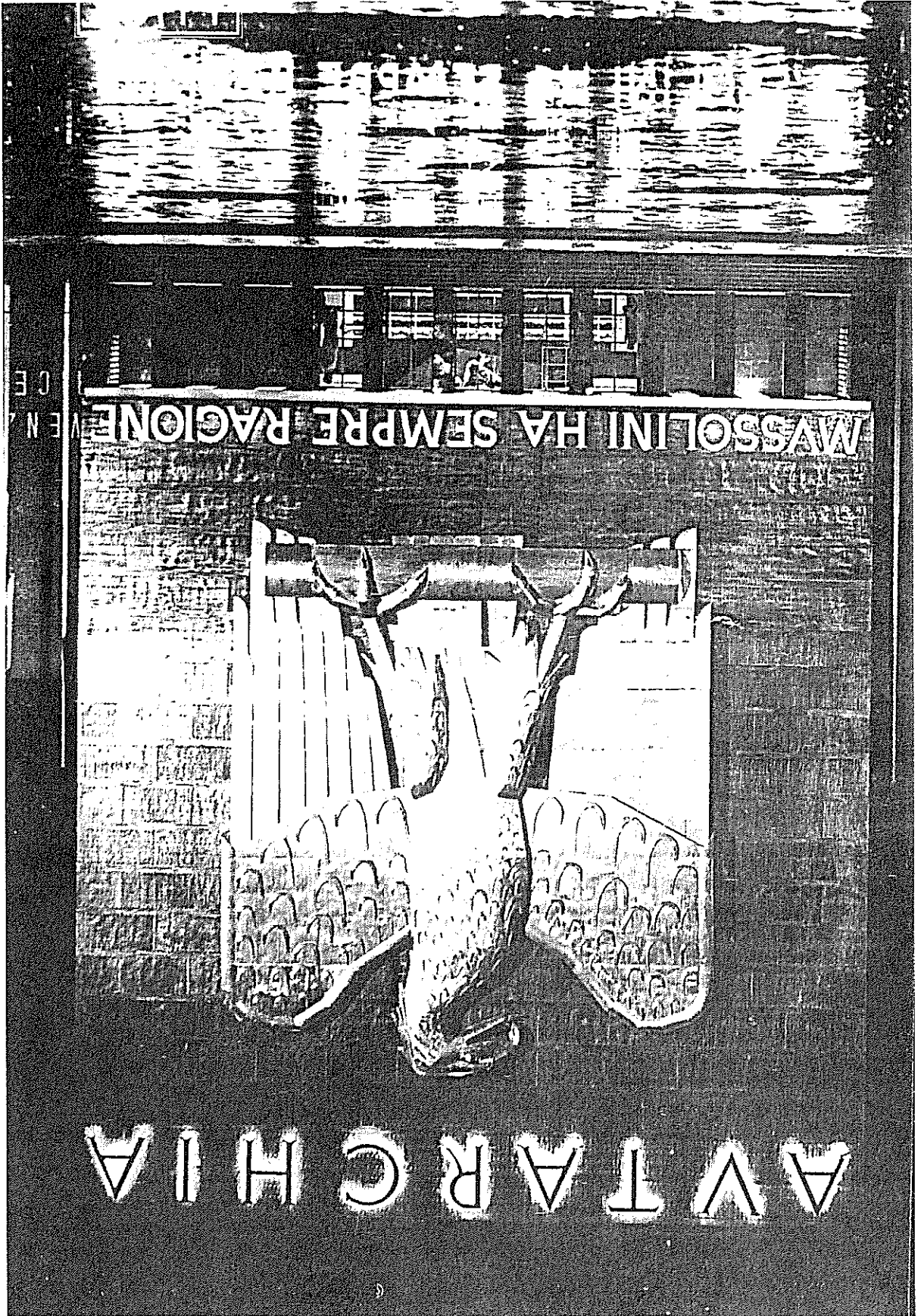
EUR planning office, perspective of intermediary project, December 1937



Adalberto Libera, Palazzo dei Ricevimenti e Congressi, EUR, modern detailing and granite columns



Mussolini is always right: facade of the *Autarchia* exhibition, Rome



## NATIONAL SOCIALISM AND MODERNISM

Architecture *Iain Boyd Whyte*

The cultural history of Berlin in the 1930s still has to be written. The dozens of books and anthologies on the 'Golden Twenties' invariably end on a note of high pathos in January 1933. Peter Gay's *Weimar Culture*, for example, concludes: 'A few months later, Adolf Hitler was Chancellor of Germany, and the men of Weimar scattered, taking the spirit of Weimar with them, into the Aesopianism of internal emigration, into death in the extermination camps, into suicide.'<sup>1</sup> No hints of continuity or of enforced compromise were allowed to bridge the divide between the liberal and progressive culture of the Weimar years and the oppressive regime that followed. In Walter Laqueur's terse formulation: 'The Nazi era, needless to say, was the antithesis to everything Weimar stood for.'<sup>2</sup> The cultural history of Berlin has tended to stop on 30 January 1933, to be resumed in May 1945.

This does not mean, of course, that there is a lack of information about daily life or cultural production in the capital city during the 1930s and the war years. There are many distinguished memoirs and works of fiction describing Hitler's Berlin, and a large number of scholarly texts and exhibitions dealing with the relationship between National Socialism and specific areas of the visual arts and architecture, literature, theatre, cinema and music. These researches offer source material in great abundance. What is missing, however, is the synthesizing account that would illuminate the diverse relationships of dependence and interdependence, of location, political ideology, and artistic volition in 1930s Berlin. It is surprising – yet at the same time explicable, given the fraught nature of the material – that no general overview has been written of cultural life in Berlin in one of the most morbidly fascinating decades in its history.

In 1932 Wilhelm Hausenstein wrote of Berlin: 'It is as if it were grounded on nothing, but a nothing that is *the* nothing – a nothingness elevated into an essence . . . Think of Vienna, Paris, of the old cities in southern and western Germany, whose very essence and nature is their rootedness. Berlin has no provenance, as it were, no rootedness or history.'<sup>3</sup> Precisely this lack of roots or inertia, the dynamism and lust for novelty that has always marked the character of Berlin, made it the perfect laboratory for modernity during the 1920s, where the most recent developments in every

conceivable aspect of human activity could be tested to destruction. Berlin in the 1920s was the Modernist city par excellence, the most American of the European capitals, the city that pointed the way forward, precisely away from the rootedness that marked Paris or Vienna. As the French painter and writer Amédée Ozenfant forecast in 1931, following a weekend in Berlin: 'Paul Morand describes Berlin as a failed New York. Who knows if in twenty years time New York will be seen as a failed Berlin! Say what you like: Berlin is European. Paris is still the ideal capital, but we have to advance.'<sup>4</sup>

The principal question that a cultural history of Berlin in the 1930s will have to address is the degree to which this progressive culture was totally eradicated over the decade, and what accommodations were made between Fascism and Modernism. In brief, was Nazi Berlin a Modernist city in the 1930s?

## The Berlin Master Plan

Hitler was no great admirer of Berlin: nor was the city over-enamoured of Hitler and his party. In the elections of 5 March 1933, under 35 per cent of Berliners voted for the National Socialists. Seen from the sandy shores of Schleswig-Holstein or from the depths of the Thuringian Forest, Berlin meant asphalt, petrol fumes, morphine, sexual licence, and every possible form of decadence, depravity and delinquency. From the early days of the united Germany in the 1870s, Berlin was targeted by right-wing nationalists as an alien intrusion in the new state, an open sore in the body politic. A very typical view of the city can be found in Julius Langbehn's *Rembrandt als Erzieher* (Rembrandt as Educator), the gospel of the right-wing cultural pessimists, first published in 1890 and an influential voice right through the 1920s and 1930s. Like Ozenfant later, Langbehn saw close similarities between Berlin and New York, but he saw them in a strictly negative light. Both cities were identified as temples to greed and Mammon, unfruitful soil for traditional, 'organic' values: 'Until now, even this small drop of organic spirit has been missing in Berlin, as in North America, in the realm of the spirit and the arts.'<sup>5</sup> While he damned late nineteenth-century architecture as

1 Peter Gay, *Weimar Culture: The Insider as Outsider* (London, 1968), 144.

2 Walter Laqueur, *Weimar: A Cultural History 1918–33* (London, 1974), 270.

3 Wilhelm Hausenstein, *Ein Stadt auf nichts gebaut* (Berlin, 1984), 10; originally in the chapter 'Berlin' in *Europäische Hauptstädte* (Erlenbach, 1932).

4 Amédée Ozenfant, 'Weekend Berlin', *Der Querschnitt*, no. 5 (1931), 297; quoted in Rolf-Peter Baacke, ed., *Berlin im 'Querschnitt'* (Berlin, 1990), 45.

5 Julius Langbehn, *Rembrandt als Erzieher* (1890; 66th ed., Leipzig, 1925), 265.

prosaic and unpoetical, the author of *Kembrandt als Erzieher* saw architecture itself as the great hope for the salvation of all the arts: 'Whoever understands the importance of a inner, spiritual sense of the architecture will also know that this is the only way by which the German People and German art will achieve once again a great, solid, unified character.'<sup>6</sup>

As the last two quotations suggest, the 'Kembrandtdeutscher' and similar conservative thinkers were confronted by two conflicting positions. On the one hand, architecture – the supremely urbane art – was seen as the great regenerative force that would improve the condition not only of the other visual arts but of German society in general. On the other hand, however, the capital city was deeply distrustful as a cosmopolitan, Americanized, materialistic pile of bricks and stucco, quite devoid of the inner calm and monumental simplicity that characterized, they felt, the German soul.

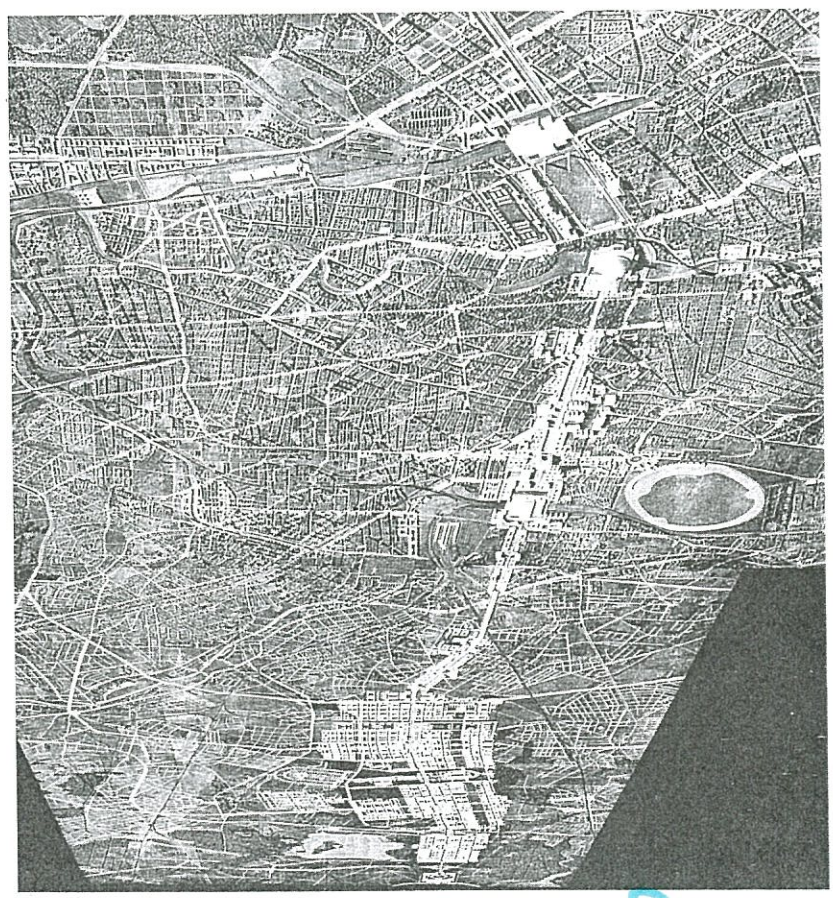
The most extreme response to this problem was the suggestion that a new capital should be built on a virgin site, untainted by questionable Berlin mores. In 1919 Ludwig Finckh, an author of texts on race and genealogy that subsequently found favour with the National Socialists, insisted: 'We must draw a line between Berlin and ourselves, and leave it to its quartels and its fate . . . The new nation must have a new capital . . . Somewhere in the heart of Germany, in a forest, on a heath, the new buildings should rise, in which a better national leadership will dwell. The spirit of the nation must renew itself.'<sup>7</sup>

Practically, however, precluded this option, even after the Nazi seizure of power in 1933. The only alternative was to reshape Berlin in a form more congenial to the new regime; a task entrusted in January 1937 not to the established planning authorities, but to a new office, the Generalbauinspektion (GBI), directed by a young and inexperienced architect, Albert Speer.

Working on the basis of guidelines and formal motifs devised by Hitler himself – the giant axis, the domed hall and the triumphal arch – Speer's vision for Berlin was both megalomaniac in its scale and very simple in its basic strategy. Two axes were to be established, running north-south and east-west. These would cross just to the south of a giant new square flanked by the existing Reichstag, a vast domed hall, the Führer's palace, and the Armed Forces High Command. At their extremities, the axes were planned to link with the outer autobahn ring, with a further four inner ring roads to provide concentric circulation.

August. Coudjawa regenerative.

The central section of the North-South Axis was conceived as a vast parade route, designed to house the principal public buildings, ministries, and commercial offices of the new Reich on a boulevard 5 kilometres long and 120 metres wide. Although large-scale demolition and site clearance was undertaken, little was actually built, and the North-South Axis remains a paper monument to the megalomania of the Hitler's Reich. In contrast, however, the East-West Axis, running along Unter den Linden, through the Brandenburg Gate and the Tiergarten and out into the western suburbs took on a more tangible form, still perceptible today. Ahead of Hitler's fifth birthday (1939), the nineteenth-century Siegessäule (Victory Column) was moved in 1938 from its original site in front of the Reichstag to a new site on the East-West axis. In the original scheme, the winged figure of Victory atop the column, celebrating the Prussian triumphs over Denmark (1864), Austria (1866) and France (1870-71), was to look westward, up the hill, to the Mussoliniplatz (now Theodor-Huus-Platz), where her gaze would have been met by another giant figure, *Preparedness*, by the sculptor Arno Breker, set upon a columnar plinth designed by Speer. Although Breker made various versions of this work, including an 11 metre high plaster cast, and although Speer's columns



Model of North-South Axis, as planned in 1938-39, seen from the north  
 6 *Ibid.*, 104.  
 7 Ludwig Finckh, 'The Spirit of Berlin' (1919), in Anton Kaes, Martin Jay and Edward Dimsenbergh, eds., *The Weimar Republic* (Berkeley, 1994), 415.

were actually cut in a quarry near Stuttgart, the war intervened and nothing was built.

A similar fate overtook the University City, planned for an extension of the East-West axis near the Havelsee and Spandau, of which only fragments were built; after 1945 these were buried under one of Berlin's hills of bomb rubble, the Teufelsberg. The 1936 Olympic Stadium survives in the western suburbs as the only major element on either of the two major axes to be completed.

8 Anna Teut, *Architektur im Dritten Reich 1933-45* (Frankfurt, 1967), 10.

9 Ludwig Sterneaux, 'Berlin hat die nackten Fassaden satt', *Der Montag*, supplement, 16 June 1930.

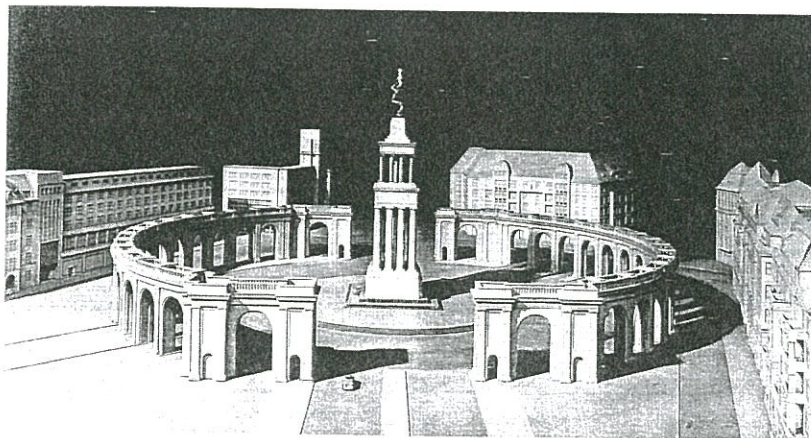
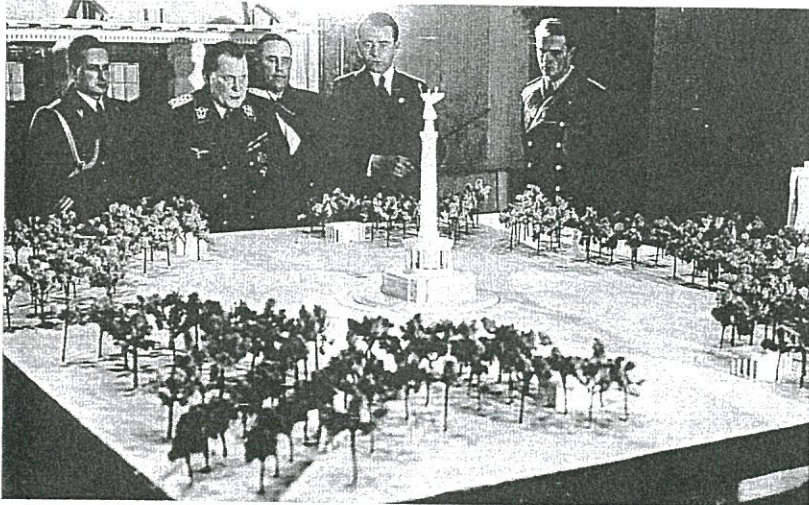
Goering and Speer (2nd from r.) with model of Victory Column as moved, 1938

Albert Speer, model of Mussoliniplatz with monument, 1939-40

### Rationalization and the Sublime

*N. Proj. Munte. project*

There is a general consensus that *Neues Bauen* – the white architecture of the 1920s, the architecture of the Bauhaus and of the great housing estates in Berlin and Frankfurt – had faltered around 1930, long before the National Socialist takeover in 1933. As Anna Teut noted in her pioneering book on Nazi architecture: 'Well before National Socialism was in a position to pass its guillotine sentence, *Neue Sachlichkeit* [the New Sobriety] as an official expression was dead, even if it survived as a small, vigorous branch.'<sup>8</sup>



The mass housing programmes in the cities, which had been the backbone of the Modernist architectural programme, were victims of the world economic crisis, and were formally abandoned by the Brüning government that watched helplessly as unemployment in Germany rose from 4,380,000 in December 1930 to 5,615,000 a year later: a tenth of the total population. In architecture as in every other aspect of German social and political life, the apparent certainties of the mid-1920s had ceased to be certainties, and the Modernist perspectives were already narrowing. Sensing a fundamental shift in taste, the popular press joined with the National Socialist ideologues to celebrate the passing of *Neues Bauen*. A typical headline from the summer of 1930, by the respected critic Ludwig Sterneaux, for example, insisted that 'Berlin is sick of naked façades!'<sup>9</sup>

Yet the 'small, vigorous branch' was by no means dead, and the support of the Modernist *Razionalismo* by the Fascist regime in Italy led to hopes that in Germany, too, political revolution could be identified with artistic modernism. The eminent art historian Wilhelm Pinder argued to the Kampfbund, for example, that the modern movement was essentially German; while in the summer of 1933 the National Socialist League of German Students condemned reactionary attitudes in the arts and proclaimed their support for the Expressionist art of Barlach, Heckel, Nolde and Schmidt-Rottluff.

These early hopes in the Modernist camp were fuelled by the ambiguous messages given out by the new regime in the months immediately following the Nazi accession to power in January 1933, and are represented in the exhibition by submissions for the 1934 Reichsbank competition, by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Walter Gropius and Hans Poelzig (pp. 288-89). The competition for the new Reichsbank headquarters was launched in February 1933, directly after the Nazi takeover, by the pro-Modernist ministerial director Martin Kiessling, who invited designers from all points in the architectural spectrum, from Mies at the Modernist end to Heinrich Tessenow and Wilhelm Kreis at the traditionalist end. Besides the quality of the entrants, the Reichsbank competition is noteworthy on several counts. It was the last great competition for a major public building in Berlin between 1933 and 1945. Thereafter, major commissions were awarded exclusively to members of the National Socialist inner circle. The brief is also interesting in that, with an unhappy prescience, it stipulated air-raid shelters in the basement.

In spite of conservative attempts to fix the jury, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe's winning scheme was resolutely Modernist in character. Unhappy with this outcome, Adolf Hitler personally intervened, divided the prize money among six of the entrants and awarded the commission to the chief architect of the Reichsbank, Heinrich Wolff, who produced a dull piece of conventional classicism, eminently suited to the buildings' subsequent use as the East German Ministry of Economics.

The end of open architectural competitions coincided with the rise of the Reichskulturkammer (Reich Chamber of Culture), the party organization responsible for all the arts. As Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels explained in November 1933: 'In future only those who are members of a Chamber are allowed to be productive in our cultural life. Membership is open only to those who fulfil the entrance condition. In this way all unwanted and damaging elements have been excluded.'<sup>10</sup> This intention became statute in the Architects' Law of October 1934, which specified that the title of architect could be used only by members of the Reichskammer der Bildenden Künste, the section responsible for architecture and the visual arts. Both the public nature of the profession and the experience of several years of unemployment during the recession of the early 1930s made the architects particularly vulnerable to this political pressure, and by 1935 the 15,000 architects represented the single largest group in the parent organization, the Reichskulturkammer.

In this climate of fear, the slightest suspicion of liberal sentiment exposed the architect to the risk of exclusion from the profession. Even before the National Socialists assumed control, the right-wing press delighted in denouncing the avant-garde as 'cultural bolsheviks'. Hans Poelzig, for example, an entrant in the Reichsbank competition, had been attacked in the *Deutsche Tageszeitung* in December 1932 as 'the exponent of an artistic, culturally and ideologically radical left tendency, whose actions declared sympathy for bolshevism'.<sup>11</sup> Faced with an intensification of such attacks and the prospect of exclusion from the profession, many architects were all too eager to proclaim their support for the new leadership and to distance themselves as far as possible from any hint of cultural bolshevism, generously defined by the party ideologue Alfred Rosenberg as 'everything that National Socialism rejects'.<sup>12</sup>

Among the signatories of the pro-Nazi 'Aufruf der Kulturschaffenden' (Proclamation of the Creative

Histor. H.A.W.

Artists), published in the newspaper *Völkischer Beobachter* on 18 August 1934, for example, were the Expressionist artists Ernst Barlach and Erich Heckel and the Modernist architects Emil Fahrenkamp and Mies van der Rohe, the last director of the Bauhaus.<sup>13</sup> With absolute power over the architectural profession focused at the centre, one would expect the emergence of a coherent design philosophy. That this was not the case reflects both the personality of Hitler himself and the structure of the National Socialist state. The enormous difficulties experienced by historians in their attempts to establish coherent patterns in the National Socialist ideology are a reflection of the Nazi state itself, which, as William Carr has noted, 'was no monolith but a mosaic of conflicting authorities bearing more resemblance to a feudal state, where great vassals were engaged in a ruthless power struggle to capture the person of the king who in his turn maintained his authority by playing one great lord off against another'.<sup>14</sup> In this context, conventional oppositions such as Modernist and traditionalist make little sense, as both tendencies were constantly present in the party ideology as essential counterweights in the balancing act performed by Hitler. As recent research has indicated, some of the leading figures in the party, such as Robert Ley, Fritz Todt and Albert Speer, were essentially modern in their thinking and in their policies, while others, such as Heinrich Himmler, Walther Darré or Alfred Rosenberg, had a mystical attachment to the German soil and to the whole apparatus of Blood and Soil. The technocrats had visions of a Modernist National Socialist state, almost American in its commitment to technology and industrial rationalization, while the anti-Modernists dreamed of rebuilding German greatness through the labours and ethics of the German peasant. In his necessarily ambiguous position in the centre, Hitler gave some encouragement to both groups but identified solely with neither. As in every other area of state policy, this nurtured ambivalence can be found in the Modernist/traditionalist debate as it affected architecture. In 1936, for example, Hitler's government warned against *Maschinenfeindlichkeit* (hostility to the machine) and advocated the rationalization of industrial production 'in order to utilize all the insights of economic progress in order to increase living standards'.<sup>15</sup> In a similar spirit, the quasi-official propaganda text on the new state architecture, Gerd Troost's *Das Bauen im Dritten Reich*, proclaimed: 'Out of the very essence of technology, the power of a regulative world view [*Weltanschauung*] can develop

10 Joseph Goebbels, *Germany, November 1933*, quoted in Peter Adams, *The Art of the Third Reich* (London, 1992), 53.  
 11 Robert Scholz, 'Der "Fall" Poelzig, Deutsche Tageszeitung, 22 December 1932. Quoted in Teut (note 3), 21.  
 12 On Mies's relations with the National Socialist government, see Elaine S. Hochman, *Architects of Fortune: Mies van der Rohe and the Third Reich* (New York, 1989).  
 13 William Carr, *Nazi Policy against the Jews*, in Richard Bessel, ed., *Life in the Third Reich* (Oxford, 1987), 69.  
 14 William Carr, *Nazi Policy against the Jews*, in Richard Bessel, ed., *Life in the Third Reich* (Oxford, 1987), 69.

15 Walter Haffner, 'Die gegenwärtigen Probleme der Rationalisierung in Deutschland', in *Sozialwissenschaft* 47 (1938), 1162.

analogous forms. Buildings are created that express measure and wonder, working through clear, economical lines to symbolize precise, exact work carried out within. With their freely exposed concrete, steel and glass they make a striking impression. How light, inventive and ambitious these technical buildings are! Here the artistic will to form has triumphed over matter.<sup>16</sup>

Utterly contrasting ambitions, however, can be found in the speech on architecture delivered by Hitler at the party congress in 1937, in which he affirmed his intention to construct the greatest buildings ever seen in German history and insisted that 'only the great cultural documents of humanity made of granite and marble' offer stability and certainty in a world of change and transition.

In purely constructional terms, the lightweight structures praised by Gerdy Troost and Hitler's massive blocks of granite are poles apart. In terms of emotional response, however, monumental architecture and the power of industry and technology are linked by the aesthetics of the sublime, in that both offer images that overwhelm our perceptual or imaginative powers, making the scope of rational comprehension all the more exciting and vivid. In a telling passage in his memoirs, Speer pointed to the nature of Hitler's aesthetic sensibility, recalling that on walks in the Bavarian Alps,

Hitler 'frequently admire[d] a beautiful view, but as a rule he was more affected by the awesomeness of the abysses than by the harmony of a landscape'.<sup>17</sup>

This preference for the vast, the fearsome and the potentially destructive points to the aesthetics of the sublime, a supposition confirmed by the conclusion of Hitler's 1937 party speech: 'These colossal works will, at the same time, represent the most sublime justification for the political might of the German nation. This state should not be a power without culture nor a strength without beauty. For the arming of a nation is only morally justified when it is the shield and sword of a higher mission. We do not aspire, therefore, to the naked force of a Ghengis Khan, but rather to a realm of power in the formation of a stronger, protected community as the bearer and guardian of a higher culture.'<sup>18</sup>

The aerial shots of the Nuremberg Rally Grounds in Leni Riefenstahl's film *Triumph of the Will* exactly capture the potent nexus of the mechanical and lithic sublime: the all-powerful machine confronting the massive stone edifice and countless ranks of the faithful.<sup>19</sup>

Even though 1937 is generally considered a turning point, when diversity in the visual arts was finally extinguished by the party, and firm distinctions drawn between official and 'degenerate' art, the flexible situation in architecture carried on as before. Particularly astonishing is Ludwig Hilberseimer's utterly Modernist proposal for the University City initiative, which offers a series of elegant slab blocks set in the green, in the best tradition of *Neues Bauen* and 1920s urban planning theory. The proposed site for the University City was set on an extension of Speer's East-West axis: and, as Wolfgang Schäche notes in his essay in this volume, the competition was conceived as a warm-up exercise for the great tasks ahead on the North-South Axis. Unsurprisingly, the more monumental schemes of architects like Gutschow and Distel (p. 286) won the day.

But the Modernists were by no means without work during the National Socialist years – particularly, but not exclusively, in the realm of high-technology industry. As Werner Durth's researches have revealed, Hans Dustmann – a former head of Walter Gropius's design office – became Reichsarchitekt of the Hitler Youth, responsible for a national chain of youth centres and sports facilities. Another Gropius associate, Ernst Neufert – who had been site architect for the Bauhaus building in Dessau – was in charge of standardization within Albert Speer's GBI, and produced norms for the German construction industry that survived long into

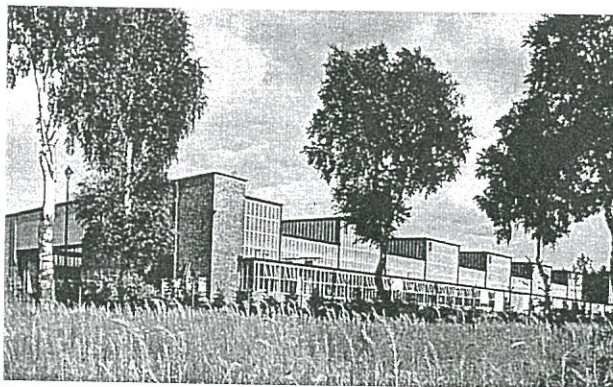
16 Gerdy Troost, *Das Bauen im neuen Reich* (3rd ed., Bayreuth, 1941), 73. The author, an architect, was the widow of Paul Ludwig Troost.

17 *Ibid.*, 47.

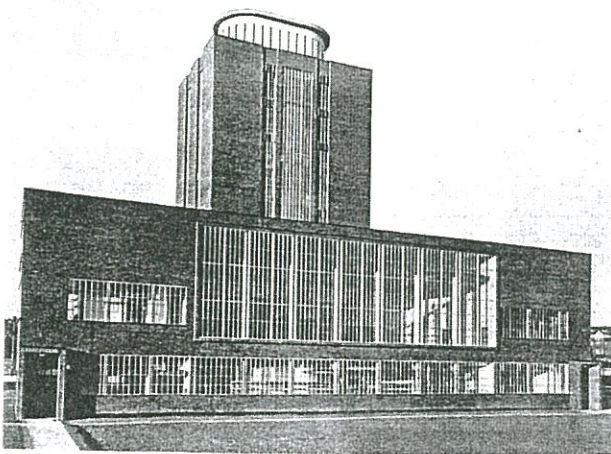
18 Adolf Hitler, 'Die Bauten des Dritten Reiches: Aus der Kulturrede des Führers auf dem Reichsparteitag 1937', quoted in Teut (as note 8), 190.

19 On the Nazi sublime see Iain Boyd Whyte, 'The Sublime', in Keith Hartley, ed., *exh. cat. The Romantic Spirit in German Art 1790–1990*, (Stuttgart, 1994), p.145.

Herbert Rimpl,  
Heinkel aircraft  
factory,  
Oranienburg



Emil Fahrenkamp,  
'Chimneyless  
Power Station'



the postwar era. Yet a third Groupius associate, Herbert Rimpf, led a team that designed the ultra-modern Heinkel aircraft factory in Oranienburg, to the north of Berlin, employing former assistants of Ernst May, the city architect of Frankfurt in the 1920s who had been responsible for the great housing schemes in that city.<sup>20</sup>

Significantly, Rimpf's office also designed traditional housing, with rustic shutters and high-pitched roofs, for the Heinkel factory workers. Consistent with the structures of the state and party hierarchies, the technological utopia of the machine – of light and fire-power – was set side-by-side with the redemptive utopia of the cottage and the family hearth.

The North-South Axis, too, combined the ultra-modern with the ultra-historicist. The dominant language, of course, was the monumental classicism that in various guises found favour in Europe and North America in the 1930s as the architecture of authority. Set against the eternal values proposed by the gigantic architecture on the axis, however, is the Modernist insistence on mobility and transportation.

The axis is anchored at its northern and southern ends by railway stations, and flanked on the south-east by the Tempelhofer Feld, which was now Tempelhof Airport. In this sense, Speer's general conception might be compared to the archetypal Modernist schemes for the dynamic city of the future, such as Antonio Sant'Elia's *Città Nuova* (1914) or Le Corbusier's Contemporary City for Three Million People (1922).

Clearly, Speer's own staff saw it as a thoroughly modern solution, measured to the demands of the twentieth-century city. As Rudolf Wolters, of one three staff chiefs in the GBI, wrote in 1941: 'The completion of the North-South Street, the commanding axis on which all new representative buildings important to the Reich will be set up . . . will, in addition to its exemplary purpose, result in a fundamental reordering of all technical, sociological, and economic city planning questions.'<sup>21</sup>

The mystical, symbolically framed ideal of party and state was married here with the apparent conviction that the solution was progressive and effective. The briefest glance at the general plan, however, in which the two inner ring roads crossed the main axis at ground level, suggest that the spectacle and parade were much more important than the solution of the city's traffic circulation problems. This is a fundamental difference, of course, between Speer's project for Berlin and the Modernist schemes of Sant'Elia and Le Corbusier, which were much more closely tied to

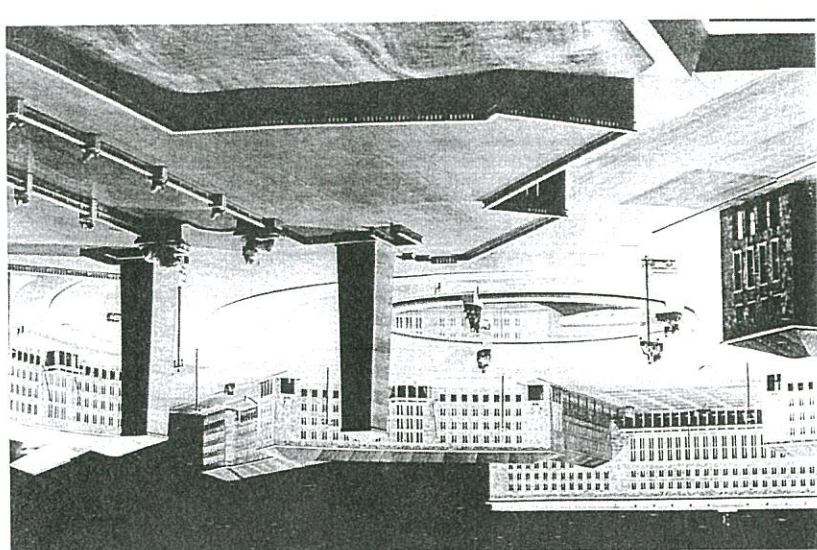
vehicular demands – substituting, perhaps, the democratic tyranny of the motor car for the autocratic tyranny of the parade ground.

The lasting contribution of National Socialism to the architectural history of Berlin was the simple, pared-down functionalist style, which had been evolved for public buildings at the end of the Weimar Republic and survived in the Nazi era as the favoured manner for low-ranking party, military and public buildings. Ernst Sagebiel's Tempelhof Airport is a very typical example of this Rohbau (or 'carcass') functionalism, in which the most modern structural frames were covered with smooth, rather bland facades that were neither classicist nor Modernist but nodded in both directions.

There is a parallel here between such silent, joyless facades, hung down in front of the steel skeleton, and the banners and decorations with which the main avenues in Berlin were bedecked on great public occasions like the 1936 Olympics or the visit of Benito Mussolini in 1937. The facades, like the flags, are impressive in their scale and repetition, but anonymous and inarticulate, masking rather than revealing. They deaden the city rather than articulate it, deprive it of its past and its history, and reduce it to a bland coulisse, with no cultural referents beyond those of the flag and the party.

Look, for example, at Unter den Linden dressed for the Mussolini visit, lined with columns and festooned with banners (p. 281). The result is a strange sense of emptiness, in which, as in Rohbau functionalism, the real fabric is masked, and the mask has nothing to proclaim beyond its own existence. Whereas in the best works of *Neues Bauen* the external form was derived from the articulation of the internal spaces, Rohbau functionalism is compromised and enfeebled by an

Ernst Sagebiel, Tempelhof Airport, square outside Berlin, c. 1937



21 Rudolf Wolters, *Neue Deutsche Baukunst* (Berlin, 1941), 12.

20 See Werner Durth, 'Architektur und Stadtplanung im Dritten Reich', in Michael Prinz and Kai-Inh Voigt, eds., *Nationalsozialismus und Modernisierung* (Darmstadt, 1991), 151. On this theme see also Winfried Niedinger, ed., *Bauhaus-Modernismus Nationalsozialismus* (Munich, 1993).



enforced symmetry, and by doomed attempts to achieve monumentality through repetition.

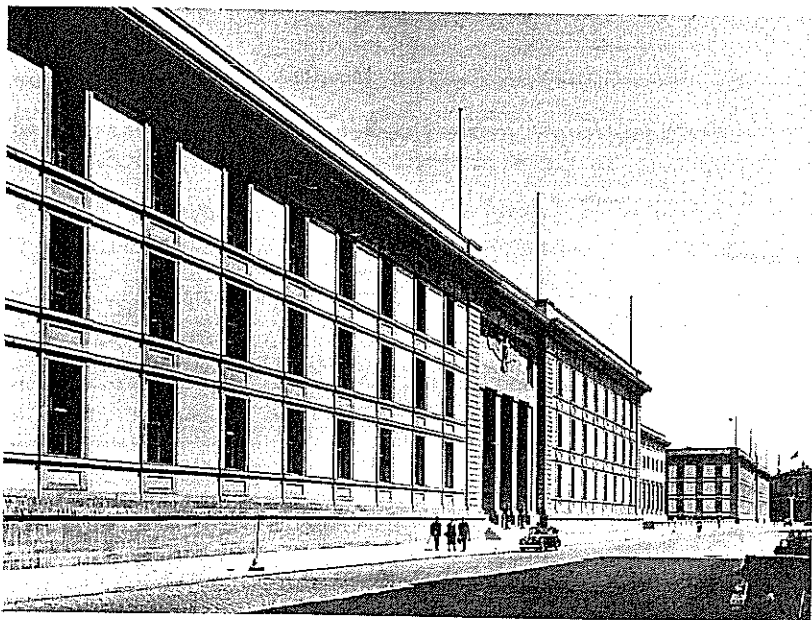
It would be a mistake, however, to look for Modernism in the architectural context merely in matters of style or materials. In his speech at the topping-out ceremony of the New Reich Chancellery, Hitler praised the building, erected to the design of Albert Speer in nine months, not only as an artistic masterpiece but also as a triumph of technology and logistics (pp. 264, 323). Building production in National Socialist Germany was, as already noted, highly rationalized. It differed significantly, however, from its counterparts in the European democracies or North America, in its use of slave labour. What Hitler did not mention in his speech at the Chancellery was that the stone that had appeared almost miraculously in such a short time had been cut in the concentration camp at Flossenbürg in Upper Bavaria (p. 27). Nor would he have mentioned the brick and tile works attached to the concentration camp at Sachsenhausen, just north of Berlin at Oranienburg, site of the Heinkel aircraft factory. The coexistence in the National Socialist realm of a Modernism based on instrumental reason and the animal barbarity of the concentration camps poses profound and still unanswered questions about the nature of the Modernist project.

<sup>22</sup> Quoted in Magdalena Bushart, *Olympische Spiele in Berlin* (Berlin, 1991), 9.

<sup>23</sup> Albert Speer, *Inside the Third Reich* (London, 1970), 80.

<sup>24</sup> See Werner March, *Bauwerk Reichsportfeld* (Berlin, 1936), 24.

Albert Speer, New Reich Chancellery, Berlin, 1938–39



## The Berlin Olympics

Had it not been for the First World War, the Olympic Games would have been held in Berlin in 1916. For this purpose, the Deutsches Stadion (German Stadium) was constructed to the design of Otto March in the Grunewald, the point at which the city meets the woods and lakes that dominate the western edge of the city. After the Olympic Committee agreed in 1930 to hold the 1936 Olympics in Berlin, Otto March's architect son, Werner March, was commissioned to redesign his father's old stadium for the purpose. When Hitler visited the site in October 1933, however, he was unimpressed by the comparative modesty of March's proposal, insisting that the German spirit demanded 'something gigantic'.<sup>22</sup> The Führer's wish was granted, with a complete redesign on the same site resulting in a complex that embraced the main stadium, a swimming pool, a large parade field, assorted smaller enclosures for tennis, hockey, and equestrianism, an open-air theatre, and a large sports institute. The stadium alone was designed to hold 100,000 spectators, who were delivered to the Olympic portals with brisk efficiency by the U-Bahn (underground) and S-Bahn (surface) railways, via stations located at the edges of the Olympic site.

Werner March's first design for the new stadium was strictly functional, with glazed partition walls and an exposed structural frame. As Albert Speer recounted in his memoirs, Hitler was outraged by this naked Modernism, saying that 'he would never set foot in a glass box like that'. Speer himself came up with the solution: 'Overnight I made a sketch showing how the steel skeleton already built could be clad in natural stone and have more massive cornices added. The glass partitions were eliminated, and Hitler was content.'<sup>23</sup>

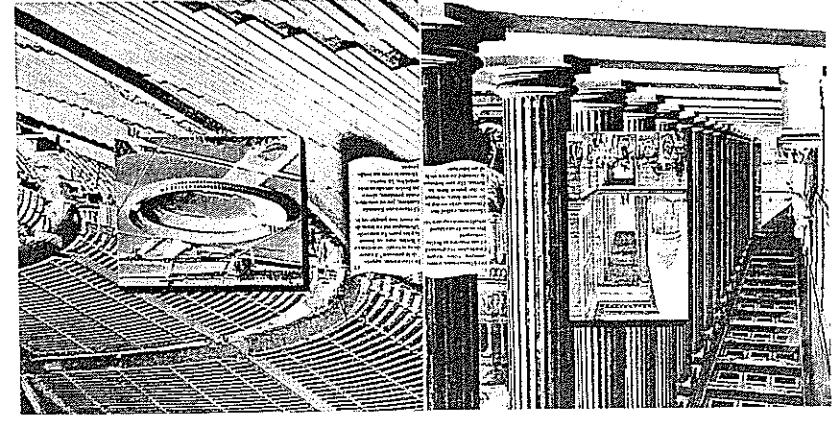
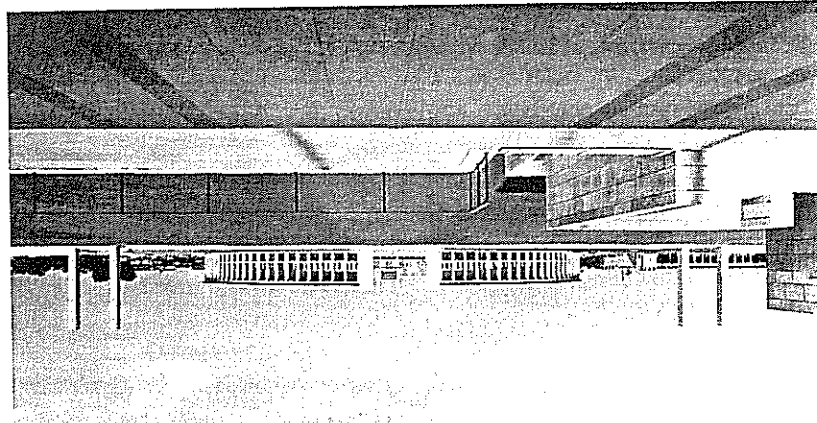
None of this was reported, of course, in the official account of the stadium published under March's own name, in which the rather solitary, widely-spaced columns were compared to the pine trees in the sandy landscape around Berlin, which in turn were claimed as an inspiration for the great classical architects of Prussia: Schlüter, Knobelsdorff and Schinkel.<sup>24</sup> This contrived simile, invoking nature and culture to explain what appears to have been expediency, is characteristic of the Olympic enterprise in Berlin, which appealed to an extraordinary wide spectrum of references in order to send across the nation and around the globe specific messages about the National Socialist regime. In the Olympic arena, art and architecture were put to work squarely in the service of propaganda and power.

The overriding ambition behind the Nazi investment in the Games was the restitution of national pride following the defeat in the First World War and the humiliation of the Treaty of Versailles. The principal architectural device here was the axial configuration of the stadium, the Maifeld, and the Olympic bell-tower set on top of the Langemarck Halle. Through a 25 metre gap in the oval of the stadium, the axis led onto the Maifeld, a vast parade ground designed by Werner March to hold 250,000 troops 'from various formations of the movement: the SA, SS, DAF, Hitler Youth', in order to experience 'the great speech of the Führer from his position at the focal point of the entire complex under the bell tower.<sup>25</sup>

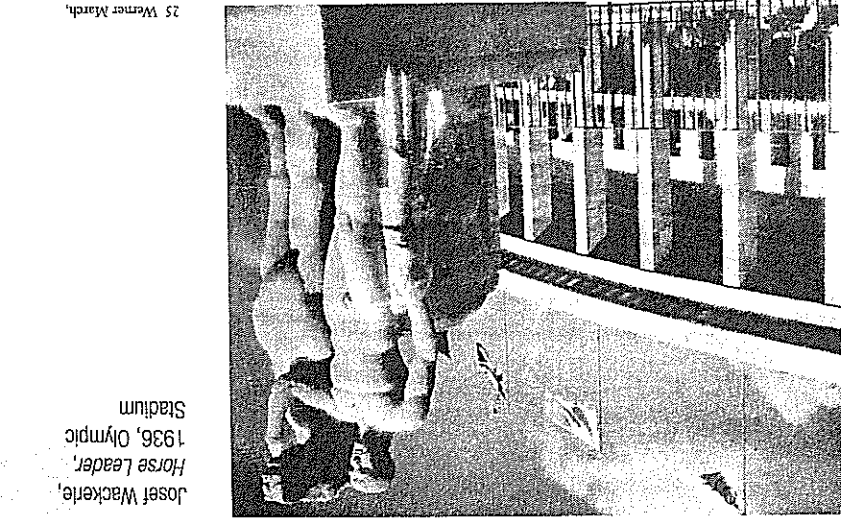
Set on the long axis of the stadium and framed by the twin towers of the Marathon Gate, the 76 metre high bell tower grew out of the Langemarck Halle, a monument to the volunteer army of 1914 and the raw recruits who were slain in their hundreds at Langemarck in December 1914 as they stormed the French machine-guns. The rhetoric of this ensemble, which lined up on one axis the bell-tower inscribed with memorials to the dead, a trough of soil from the cemetery at Langemarck, Hitler's dais, the parade ground and the stadium, made absolutely explicit the connection between sport and militarism. The German army might have been defeated in 1918, but the victories of the German sportsmen and sportswomen in the stadium not only expunged this disgrace, but also heralded military successes in the future.

The essential preconditions for such success are order and self-sacrifice, and these were high on the agenda both in the sculptural decoration of the complex and in the displays of mass gymnastics that accompanied the games. Josef Wackerle's matching pair of *Horse Leaders* – giant figures flanking the Marathon Portal on either side of the axis described above – make manifest the relationship between the resolved leader and the strong yet docile mass of the led. The sportsman as strong, single leader is the theme of several freestanding figures, most notably Josef Thorak's *Boxer*, modelled on the heavyweight champion Max Schmeling. Again, the contrast of strong leader and docile audience comes across in the kitsch of contemporary press photographs, which set the athlete against the bathing beauty (p. 266).

A further recurring pattern in the sculptural scheme is that of figures grouped in pairs – relay runners, discus throwers, comrades in sport – working together for ultimate victory. This leitmotif of the renunciation of individual will and ambition for the sake of the wider



community, the party or the state, was given its most striking expression in the gymnastics displays, in which hundreds of identical figures performed perfect unison. These are illustrated in Leni Riefenstahl's volume of photographs *Schönheit im Olympischen Kampf* (Beauty in the Olympic Contest) under the improbable title 'Free exercises in the Stadium' (p. 279). Most apposite in this context is Walter Benjamin's observation, penned in the Olympic year 1936: 'Mankind, which in Homer's time was an object of contemplation for the Olympian gods, now is one for itself. Its self-alienation has reached such a



Josef Wackerle, *Horse Leader*, 1936, Olympic Stadium

<sup>25</sup> Werner March, quoted in Hilmar Hofmann, *Mythos Olymp: Stimmensetzung und Unterwerfung von Sport und Kultur* (Berlin, 1993), 26.

Herbert Bayer, publicity photograph, 1936  
Werner March, Olympic Stadium, 1936, view from Führer's dais

26 Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', in Benjamin, *Illuminations* (New York, 1969), 242.

27 For details of the various exhibitions organized in Berlin to mark the Olympic Games, see XI. *Olympiade Berlin 1936: Amtlicher Bericht* (Berlin, 1937), 2:1106–28.

28 See Anon., *Germany: The Olympic Year 1936* (Berlin, 1936).

29 On Bayer's career in the Third Reich, see Ute Brüning, 'Bauhäuser zwischen Propaganda und Wirtschaftswerbung', in Winfried Nerdinger, ed., *Bauhaus-Moderne im Nationalsozialismus* (Munich, 1993), 24–47.

degree that it can experience its own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure of the first order. This is the situation of politics which Fascism is rendering aesthetic.<sup>26</sup>

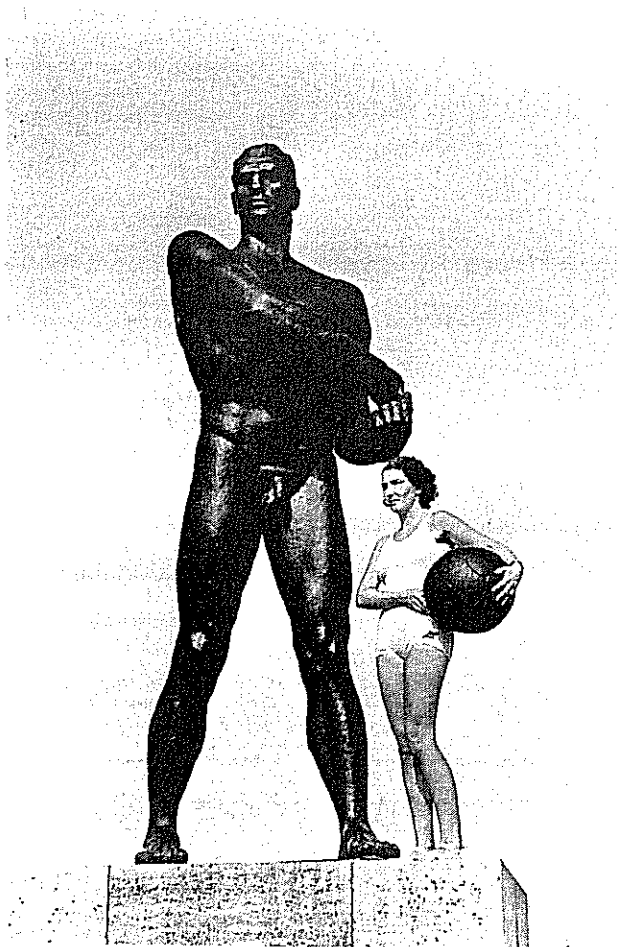
Pseudo-Homeric contemplation was also on offer, of course. Berlin had first been called 'Athens on the Spree' in a panegyric written during the reign of Frederick I of Prussia (1657–1713), and the epithet neatly summarized the prestige ambitions of the Prussian court from the late eighteenth century to the mid-nineteenth. Those buildings most closely associated with this powerful Hellenist tradition were tied to the Games and to the stadium physically by avenues of banners and improbable classical statuary, which turned the East-West Axis into a *via triumphalis* along which the Führer drove each day to the stadium. This invocation of classical authority and virtue was further reinforced by a whole series of events that stressed the Athens-Berlin axis. The opening ceremony of the International Olympic Committee was held in front of the Pergamon Altar; the Olympic torch was received in Berlin at a ceremony on the revamped Lustgarten in front of Schinkel's Altes Museum (see the essay 'Berlin, 1 May 1936' in this volume); there was an official Olympic Art Exhibition with medals for the winners, and two exhibitions of Hellenic art;<sup>27</sup> Handel's

opera *Heracles* was performed at the open-air theatre attached to the Olympic complex; and Aeschylus' *Oresteia* was staged in the city. Cultural enterprises such as these were intended to invest the parvenu National Socialist government with images of dignity, gravity and authority.

At the opposite end of the historicist spectrum, the German state used the Olympic Games to promote itself as modern, progressive, and technologically advanced. This was the theme of the exhibition entitled simply *Deutschland*, whose catalogue contrasted photographs of 'Bolshevik Street Terror' and 'Red Anarchy' with images of new bridges, autobahns, and enraptured workers listening to symphony concerts during their lunch interval – 'A pleasant interlude during factory work'.<sup>28</sup> Modernists were employed to sell the image of a modern Germany, and the exhibition installation was the work of the architect Emil Fahrenkamp and the graphic designer Herbert Bayer, whose double-page photomontage in the exhibition prospectus proposed a Prussian Classicism that embraced both Schinkel's Altes Museum and Werner March's Olympic Stadium (p. 265). Previously a master at the Dessau Bauhaus,<sup>29</sup> Bayer remained very influential in the design of National Socialist propaganda exhibitions until 1937.

Modernist typography was only one of the many techniques used by the government and the German Olympic Committee to promote the Games and manipulate both national and international opinion. Radio reports, film newsreels, and experimental television coverage were all employed to the greatest possible effect. Whereas the sporting triumphs at the classical Greek *agones* were celebrated in Pindaric odes, the victors in Berlin in 1936 were recorded for posterity on film, and in particular in Leni Riefenstahl's two films on the Olympics, *Fest der Völker* (Festival of Nations) and *Fest der Schönheit* (Festival of Beauty). The propagandistic link between Greece in 450 BC and twentieth-century Germany is made explicit in the prologue to *Fest der Völker*, which begins with misty shots of the Acropolis and the temple of Zeus at Olympia. The camera lingers on Myron's sculpture of the discus thrower, and the body in stone is dissolved into the living flesh of the German decathlete Erwin Huber: the Third Reich was the rightful heir to Athens and Sparta.

Yet a dark shadow hovers over this paean to physical beauty. As Thomas Wolfe recorded in his novel *You Can't Go Home Again*: 'The sheer pageantry of the occasion was overwhelming, so much so that he began to feel

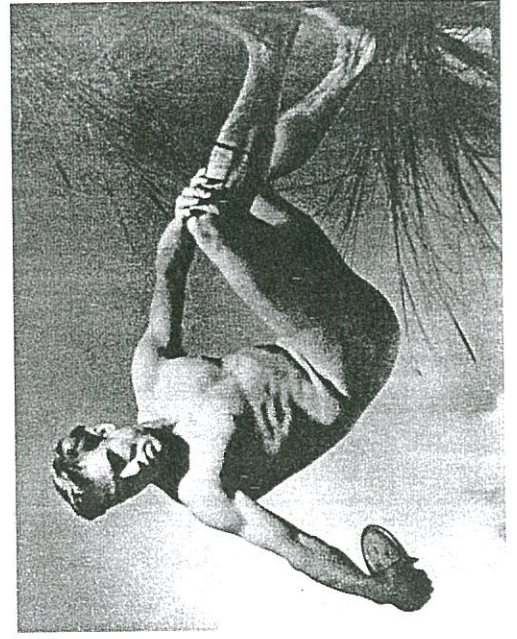


Josef Thorak, *Boxer*, 1936, press photograph

oppressed by it. There seemed to be something ominous in it. One sensed a stupendous concentration of effort, a tremendous drawing together and ordering in the vast collective power of the land. And the thing that made it seem ominous was that it so evidently went beyond what the games themselves demanded. The games were overshadowed . . . they became, day after day, an orderly and overwhelming demonstration in which the whole of Germany had been schooled and disciplined.<sup>30</sup> All of Germany, that is, except for those who for reasons of race, ideological conviction, or sexuality could not be considered *Volksgerassen* – members of the national community. By the time the Olympic Games opened on 1 August 1936, some 26,000 opponents of the regime had been incarcerated in the concentration camps. Millions were to follow. Hitler's words, quoted on the cover of the special Olympic issue of *Die Woche*, gave a chilling forecast of what was to come: 'He who wishes to live must also fight, and he who will not strive in this world of struggle, does not deserve the gift of life.'<sup>31</sup>

## Autobahn

No other Nazi invention was more potent as a generator of myths and fables than the autobahn. The idea of a network of high-speed roads was not, of course, original to the Nazi traffic planners. As early as 1913 a company was formed in Berlin to build a test stretch on the western side of the city, opened in 1921 as the AVUS (Automobilverkehrs- und Übungsstrasse), a dual carriageway running for nearly 10 kilometres



from Witzleben to Nikolassee without surface intersections. Towards the end of the 1920s several private companies were founded with the intention of constructing new roads on the AVUS model, with routes such as Hamburg-Frankfurt-Basel, Munich-Leipzig-Berlin, or Aachen-Cologne-Düsseldorf. These early plans founded on grounds of economic and political orthodoxy: fast roads for the privileged few who could afford fast cars were not regarded as a high priority by the Brüning administration in the context of the world economic crisis of 1930–31. Yet a great deal of detailed research and planning was done at this time by the private companies, covering every aspect of autobahn construction and servicing. On this basis, the new Nazi government was quickly able to implement its vision of a national network of autobahns, with Adolf Hitler digging out the first shovelful of earth on 23 September 1933, less than eight months after his appointment as Chancellor.

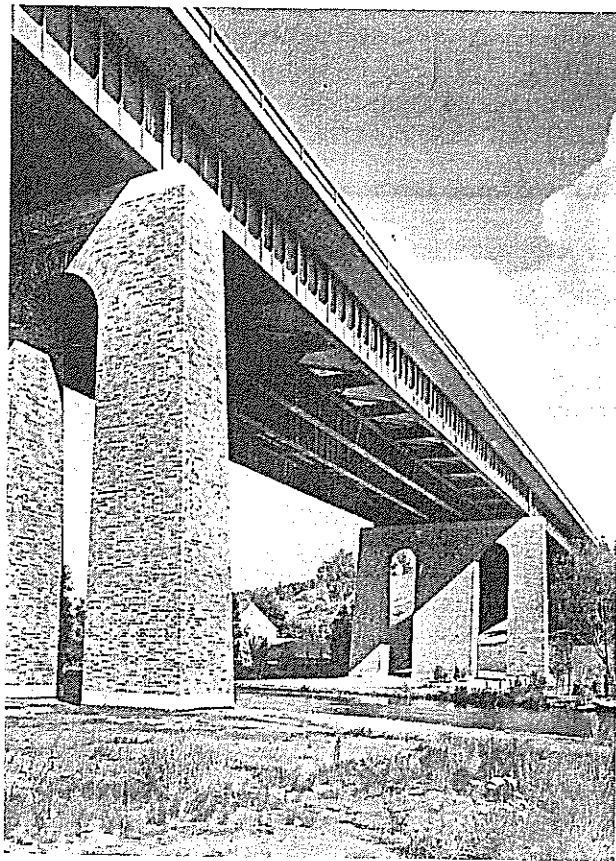
While simple economic profit had motivated the private companies in the late 1920s, the Nazi motives for building the new roads were much more complicated. By linking and binding the far corners of the German Reich to the centre, the new roads gave concrete expression to the new unity of the People proclaimed by the Nazi revolution. As Fritz Todt – appointed Inspector-General of German Highways in June 1933 – insisted: 'The state autobahn, with its double ribbon stretching into the glimmering distance, is a visible sign and simile of a new union of all the German provinces, or a new community of all Germans.'<sup>32</sup> The road building programme symbolized not only physical unity and connection, but also the act of



<sup>32</sup> Fritz Todt, preface to *Die Autobahn* (Munich, 1942).

<sup>30</sup> Thomas Wolfe, *Look Homeward, Angel* (Garden City, NY, 1940), 625.

<sup>31</sup> Adolf Hitler, quoted in *Die Woche*, special issue: 'Olympia 1936'.



Tischer and Tamms, viaduct near Rüdersdorf

working together as a nation on common goals for the common good. Emboldened by this great national programme, the German people would again be able to assert its claims among the nations. At the commencement of the work in September 1933, Hitler described the new roads as 'a milestone for the

Fritz Bayerlein, Mauthäuselstrasse: the German Alpine Road, c. 1936

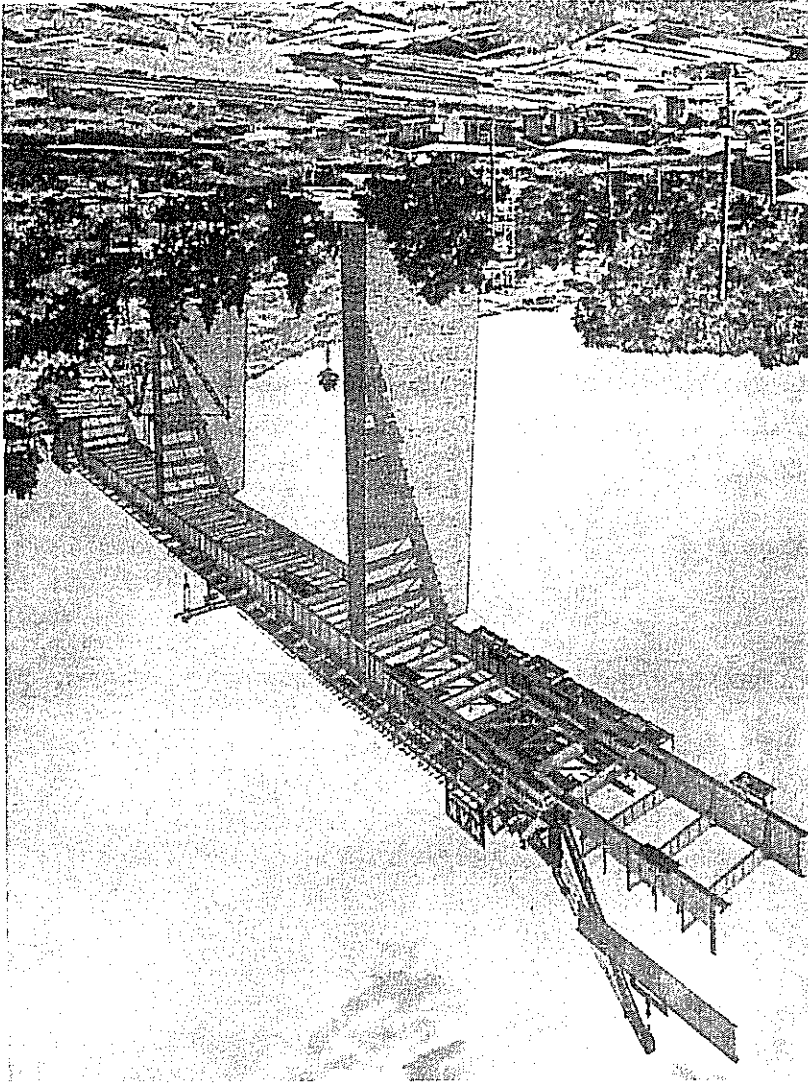


construction of the community of the German People [*Völksgemeinschaft*], a community which, both as nation and as state, will deliver to us what we are rightfully entitled to claim and demand in this world . . . German workers, on with the job!<sup>33</sup>

If the first great narrative, in the propaganda campaign that was mounted with the same intensity as the road-building programme itself, was national unity, the second was work creation. Erna Lendvai-Dircksen's officially promoted book of photographs of the construction work shows sturdy German workers with massive pickaxes resting on their shoulders, welcoming the chance to work: 'After years of unemployment I am once again earning honest bread for seven sons and one daughter.'<sup>34</sup> This was the propaganda line that appeared in every book, article or film on the new road system: the autobahn meant work, economic stability, and an end to the fears of unemployment and inflation that had blighted the Weimar republic. The reality, of course, was less rosy. At its peak in 1936, the entire autobahn enterprise employed no more than 250,000 workers: half on the site, the other half in supply industries. Working conditions were unpleasant in the extreme, and the construction camps were filled with 'undependable' workers with Socialist or Communist backgrounds. Indeed, by 1938 it became necessary to pass labour conscription laws to halt the seepage of labour away from the autobahn programme. During the early war years this conscripted labour was augmented by prisoners of war.

When work stopped on the autobahns in 1942, some 3,870 kilometres had been completed. In practical terms the new roads had little impact, either on the economy or on strategic planning. Although promoted by the Nazi government through such programmes as the People's Car (Volkswagen), which appeared in prototype form in the late summer of 1936, car ownership in Germany was markedly lower than in comparable countries. In 1938, for example, there was one car for every 5 Americans, for every 27 British, and for every 44 Germans. Contrary to myth, the autobahns had limited strategic significance, as the concrete slabs were too thin to support the weight of heavy tanks or armoured vehicles. The war, furthermore, was fought elsewhere. Only after the war, with the economic development of the Federal Republic, did the level of car ownership justify the vast capital expenditure invested in the autobahns in the 1930s.

The lasting success of the programme, therefore, was propagandistic rather than tangible. The civil engineers, bridge-builders and architects who



33 Adolf Hitler, speech of 23 September 1931, quoted in Kainer, Stommer, ed., *Reichstagsreden: Pyramiden des Dritten Reichs* (Munich, 1982), 17.  
 34 Lendvai-Direksen (as note 1), n.p.  
 35 On this connection, see Adam C. Oellers, 'Zur Frage der Konnuität von Neuer Sachlichkeit und nationalsozialistischer Kunst', *Kritische Berichte*, vol. 6, no. 6 (1978), 42-54.  
 36 Friedrich Theodor Fischer, *Liter der Erbkennnt mit Konnuität und andere Texte zur Architektur am Main*, 1967, 155.  
 37 Lendvai-Direksen (as note 1), n.p.  
 Fritz Jacobson, *Bridge in Construction*, near Siebenlehn, Saxony, c. 1935-36

over the Danube, near Leihheim, framed by terrifying imperatives: 'Clear the forest - dynamite the rock - conquer the valley - overcome distance - stretch the road through the German land.'<sup>33</sup> Yet the main thrust of the propaganda was one of reconciliation. As the first two texts in the Lendvai-Direksen book claim: 'We are building the roads of the German Reich. / We are breaking open the eternal earth! Be of good cheer! We are healing fractures and wounds.'<sup>37</sup> Just as the building programme claimed the power to heal social and geographical divisions, so the aesthetic ambitions of the programme would heal the divisions in the battle between Modernist functionalism and conservative traditionalism. A bridge on the Berlin ring autobahn has a steel span supported on asphalt masonry piers, the ultra-modern resting on the ultra-traditional. Does this compromise indicate a Postmodernist sensibility, or simply irresolution in the face of the Modernist challenge?

constructed the autobahns, and the painters, photographers and film-makers who sold the images, combined together to produce an extraordinarily powerful series of messages about the new regime and the Nazi revolution.

Compared at the time with the Great Wall of China, the Pyramids, the Acropolis, and the Gothic cathedrals, the autobahns were marketed not merely as works of technical expertise but as works of art. They were designed to achieve not the shortest but the 'noblest' route between two points. This blurring of criteria can be seen in many aspects of the programme. On one side there is a dominant theme of high technology, of steel, concrete, and minimalist precision; on the other historicist echoes of Roman aqueducts, massive arches of hand-cut masonry, and romantic vistas of the German countryside in its most medievalist, Blood and Soil guise.

At one extreme of the programme were the ultra-Modernist 'Frankfurt Model' filling stations, with flat, boomarang-shaped roofs in the best tradition of 1920s *Neues Bauen*; opposing such futuristic images were the autobahn works depots, which were disguised as farm buildings under high-pitched roofs and vernacular detailing. This division between the celebration of technology and its masking under traditional mores can also be seen in the painterly representation of the new roads and bridges. The drawings of the architects themselves and of painters like Fritz Jacobson stressed the technological triumph of material over nature with a cool, materialist objectivity that links back directly to the *Neue Sachlichkeit* painting of the 1920s.<sup>35</sup> In

contrast, a whole genre of Romantic landscape painting flourished in the 1930s, with sublime images of Alpine peaks that might have been painted by Anton Koch in 1810, were it not for the ribbon of autobahn snaking round the mountainsides. The aesthetics of the sublime, which delighted in Alpine peaks and vistas of infinity, were reinforced by delight in the power of human invention and vigour.

In the mid nineteenth century, the German aesthete Theodor Vischer stressed the positive and constructive aspect of the sublime in the response to nature: 'We feel ourselves elevated because we identify ourselves with the powers of nature, ascribing their vast impact to ourselves, because our fantasy rests on the wings of the storm as we roar into the heights and wander into the depths of infinity. Thus we ourselves expand into a boundless natural power.'<sup>36</sup> This sentiment might well be taken as the motto for Carl Theodor Froben's painting of the autobahn bridge