

MASS CULTURE AND HIGH CULTURE BETWEEN THE WARS

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The 1920s summon up images of the brilliant triumph of modernism in the arts: Picasso painting in Paris and Kandinsky in Weimar; Stravinsky composing in Paris and Schoenberg in Vienna; the functionalist buildings of Gropius and Le Corbusier. Closer inspection shows that the vigorous new generation of the 1920s was only working out the results of the great prewar shift in high cultural values.¹ The primary achievement of these artists in the interwar years was to bring the avant-garde of prewar Europe into the mainstream of high culture. The more significant and profound changes were taking place in mass culture. It was the mass dissemination of commercialized popular entertainment that most radically transformed the culture of Europeans between the wars.

¹See Chapter 1, pp. 38–41.

MASS CULTURE: THE AGE OF RADIO AND MOVIES

Two new forms of communication in the 1920s enabled the famous and the powerful to address millions of persons at once for the first time: radio and motion pictures. In one bound, Europeans left behind an era when a person could speak to groups only if they were within physical earshot. Even the massive propaganda efforts during the war had been largely limited to the printed word, to the artistry of posters, or to the voices of speakers physically present. Not until the end of the war were the possibilities of movie newsreels being realized; radio was still at the stage of occasional broadcasts by amateurs.

The Technological Basis for Mass Media

Public radio broadcasting was made possible by a quickening stream of nineteenth-century inventions in communications. The first major step had been the telegraph, which permitted virtually instantaneous transmission of coded messages wherever lines had been strung. With the opening of a line from England to Australia in 1872, the telegraph net was almost worldwide. At the same time, the early telephone permitted voice transmission along lines. Rapid communications acquired real flexibility, however, only with liberation from transmission wires. In 1901, an Italian engineer, Guglielmo Marconi, managed to send messages by "wireless" radio waves from England to Canada. Subsequent improvements, especially the development of the vacuum tube in the United States after 1906, made it possible to transmit the human voice, instead of just coded messages, reliably by wireless.

So far, these transmissions had linked individuals. The major breakthrough of the 1920s was the assembly of a mass audience for instantaneous communication. The first radio broadcasts were one-time transmissions, such as the concert by soprano Nellie Melba from London on June 16, 1920, or the report of the United States presidential election results from Pittsburgh, which scooped the press in November 1920. During 1921 and 1922, permanent broadcasting facilities were established in the United States, Europe, and Japan, and receiving sets began to be mass produced. The Age of Radio was at hand. When the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation) was reorganized as a public corporation in 1926, there were 2,178,259 radio receivers in the United Kingdom. At the end of the 1930s, there were 9 million—nearly three out of every four British households. By 1938 Germany had more than 9 million receivers; France, more than 4 million sets; Russia, 4.5 million sets (for a much larger population); and Czechoslovakia, Sweden, and the Netherlands each had more than 1 million sets.²

²Asa Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom* (Oxford, 1961–70), vol. 1, p. 12; vol. 2, p. 6; vol. 3, p. 737. Italy and Belgium followed with slightly less than 1 million receivers in 1938.

An imposing radio set now jostled with the piano and the potted *Aspidistra* plant for a conspicuous place in every middle-class living room, and the European consumer boasted of the number of tubes in his set in the same vein as he boasted of the cylinders of his car. Radio sets began to spread to working-class homes as well. In the 1930s, the cheapest German set, which the propaganda-conscious Nazi regime encouraged its people to buy, cost thirty-five marks, or about one week's average wage.³ After furniture and a bicycle, a radio was the next major purchase for many a settled working-class family in Europe.

The technical basis for motion pictures had been developed in the 1890s as an adjunct to vaudeville and music hall entertainment. The early short action and trick reels soon gave way to multireel films with a story line. *The Great Train Robbery* (1903), one of the first films with a plot, lasted a full eight minutes and enjoyed tremendous success. The Italian-made *Quo Vadis* (1912) ran for two hours, and the way was open for the cinema to draw on the theatrical tradition as a conscious art form. But motion pictures did not become the nearly universal public entertainment until after the war. By the end of the 1930s, 40 percent of all British adults went to the movies once a week; 25 percent went twice a week. British attendance in 1937 was running at a rate of 20 million persons a week in a country of 50 million. It reached a peak of 31 million a week in 1946 before giving ground to television.⁴ Figures were much the same on the Continent.

The Creation of Mass Audiences

Radio and motion pictures created simultaneous mass audiences on a national and even international scale for the first time. One would have to go back to the invention of movable type to find a threshold of equivalent importance in the transmission of culture. The mass audience in itself was not a total novelty, strictly speaking, thanks to the spread of literacy and cheap printing in the nineteenth century. Alfred Harmsworth, later Lord Northcliffe, had begun a commercial revolution in the newspaper industry in the 1890s by selling his papers at or below cost and shifting his revenues from sales to income from advertisements. He found that businesses were willing to pay large sums to buy display advertisements designed to appeal to a mass readership. His *Evening News* and *Daily Mail* were the first half-penny papers in London and the first in Europe to reach the unprecedented circulation figure of 500,000.

The spread of newspapers beyond the elite was a gradual process, however. Only after 1910 did more than half the adult British population read one of the Sunday papers, which generally emphasized reports

³Richard Grunberger, *The Twelve-Year Reich* (New York, 1971), p. 401.

⁴Noreen Branson and Margot Heinemann, *Britain in the Nineteen Thirties* (New York, 1971), p. 251; and Raymond Williams, *Communications*, 2nd ed. (London, 1966), p. 29.

of crimes, sports, and sensational fiction. More than half read a daily paper only after 1920.³ Continental newspapers between the wars reached, if anything, a more traditionally elite audience. Prestigious dailies like the Paris *Le Temps* preferred to draw revenue from secret government funds than from large display advertising. By contrast, radio and the movies very rapidly became majority pastimes. Moreover, radio and the movies, unlike the printed word, could provide a mass audience with the immediate impact of experience. Early audiences shrank back as the speeding locomotive approached the bound heroine in *The Perils of Pauline* with the same involuntary reaction shown by later audiences as they gripped their seats during the roller coaster ride in the first of the "three-dimensional" (3-D) films of the 1950s.

The Political Uses of Radio and Movies

Political figures turned to the radio early, and it was quickly apparent that some of them were much more effective at the microphone than

³Williams, pp. 23–24, 32.



"All Germany listens to the Führer on the people's radio receiver." Governments quickly learned the power of radio, and the Nazi regime subsidized the production of inexpensive sets like this one, capable of receiving only German stations.

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others. The learned discourses carefully drafted by nineteenth-century parliamentarians had far less impact over a radio than they had in a room full of other parliamentarians, or read the next day in the *Journal des débats*. At the radio microphone, two very different styles proved to be successful. The friendly, simple chat was perfected by the stolid British Conservative leader Stanley Baldwin, who managed to project old-fashioned rural common sense as if speaking "with his feet on your fender" (fireside). Baldwin was more effective on the radio than the greater public orators of the time like Lloyd George, whose rhetoric seemed strained without the face and hands in view. The other style that worked on radio was the impassioned harangue that hammered away on a few simple slogans, as perfected by Mussolini and Hitler. Although Hitler did not neglect dramatic personal appearances, where he materialized quickly in an airplane or a high-powered Mercedes, he was so convinced of the importance of radio that he delivered no less than fifty radio speeches during his first year in power. His propaganda minister, Josef Goebbels, also a master of the fevered radio harangue, lent state support to the production of inexpensive radios and organized group listening in youth camps, factories, and barracks. As a result, Germany seems to have had the densest radio coverage in Europe: 16 million out of 23 million households were equipped with radios by 1942. Britain came in second place. Because Italy had far fewer radios, it was a less fruitful terrain for Mussolini, but he used radio effectively and organized group listening. Among the high points of political radio between the wars were Mussolini's broadcast announcements on October 2, 1935, that he had decided to invade Ethiopia and on May 9, 1936, proclaiming victory. Mussolini's broadcasts were punctuated over the radio by the braying of hundreds of thousands of people who were below his balcony:

Officers! Non-commissioned officers! Soldiers of all the armed forces of the state in Africa and Italy! Blackshirts of the Revolution! Italians in the Fatherland and in the world! Listen!

With the decisions that in a few moments you will learn . . . a great event is accomplished: Today, 9 May, of the fourteenth year of the Fascist era, the fate of Ethiopia is sealed. . . .

The Italian people has created the empire with its blood. It will fecundate it with its work and defend it against anyone with its arms.

Will you be worthy of it? (Crowd: "Yes!")⁶

Radio thus reduced the effectiveness of traditional oratory and increased the effectiveness of both personality and ritual in European politics.

Politicians also quickly realized the propaganda potential of movies. The fascist regimes carefully controlled the content of newsreels, although newsreels in all countries were characterized by the stentorian

⁶Laura Fermi, *Mussolini* (Chicago, 1961), p. 327.

voice, the simplified sentiment, the short take, and the emphasis on individual exploits (whether in sports or war) and on "human interest." Hitler engaged a young woman filmmaker, Leni Riefenstahl, to film the Nazi party rally at Nuremberg in 1934 and the 1936 Olympics. In the film of the party rally, *The Triumph of the Will* (1934), aerial views of Nuremberg through steeply banked cumulus clouds then close in on stunning shots of tight ranks of marchers and ceremonial ritual; it remains a stirring and troubling visual experience.

Control of the Mass Media

The central political problem was who should control the mass media. Radio broadcasting required some kind of international regulation, if only to prevent several broadcasters from interrupting one another on the same frequency. Beyond that essential technical coordination, three basic forms of control developed. The United States, Latin America, and Japan left broadcasting entirely in the hands of companies whose revenue came from advertisements. No European state, liberal or collectivist, accepted sole commercial sponsorship. In the 1920s most Continental states, including France and Weimar Germany as well as Fascist Italy and Communist Russia, placed radio broadcasting under some form of direct government control. A third form of control was represented by the BBC, a public monopoly run by its own board and financed by an annual license fee paid by each radio owner. The first general director of the BBC, the strong-minded Scotsman John Reith, firmly established the dual tradition of intellectual uplift and political neutrality that made the BBC the most independent of all noncommercial radio systems. Although the BBC was sometimes accused of blandness, it successfully avoided the major pitfalls of the other systems: the crass commercialism of the American pattern, and the abuses of government propaganda in the Continental pattern. The way each nation controlled radio was doubly important, for the even more pervasive medium of television settled naturally into the same patterns after 1945.⁷

Except for the subsidized party-oriented films of the Nazi and fascist regimes and the Soviet Union's tight control over all films, motion pictures were an almost entirely commercial proposition. Indeed, most films shown in Europe between the wars were not only commercial products; they were American. Although French and Italian filmmakers had led the way before 1914 in producing long features, their momentum had been halted during the war because the nitrocellulose used for film was needed for explosives. This pause allowed United States

⁷No European radio system conformed absolutely to one pattern of control. French national radio accepted advertising until 1935, and even after that French listeners could hear commercial radio from Luxemburg and Monaco. The British government authorized an independent (commercial) television network in 1955, and France did so in 1982.

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filmmakers to dominate the industry with their silent films in the 1920s. The coming of "talkies" at the end of the decade tended to limit the audiences to single-language groups and give Continental filmmakers a new impetus in the 1930s. The British government, however, felt obliged to impose quotas of home-produced films on British movie houses when American films had absorbed 90 percent of the market.

Newspapers were commercially controlled in most of Europe, outside the party press of Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, and the Soviet Union.⁸ Newspapers were also changing in character and falling into the hands of large press empires. European dailies continued the commercial revolution begun in England by Lord Northcliffe in the 1890s. Between the wars, major dailies like the *Daily Express* and the *Petit Parisien* reached circulation figures of around 2 million through the formula of extensive advertising and low price per copy.

The Role of Advertising

Radio, the movies, and the popular press made it possible to inundate whole populations with skillful and aggressive commercial salesmanship to a degree hardly imagined before 1914. Advertising was an ancient medium, and it had grown rapidly with the development of large newspaper displays after the 1890s. Between the wars, however, it grew so dramatically in size and in kind as to dwarf what had gone before.

Most great daily newspapers between the wars drew from one-half to three-quarters of their revenues from advertising.⁹ To entice the advertisers, publishers had to keep circulation high by pandering to popular tastes for sports, crime reporting, and sentimental fiction as well as simplified, chauvinist news coverage. In each major city, two or three large sensationalist dailies, usually owned by one of the large press empires, dominated the advertising market and forced smaller papers out of business. Sometimes a serious newspaper like the *London Times* (circulation, 225,000) survived by promising advertisers access to the most educated and influential minority. On the Continent, where the commercial evolution was less advanced, some dailies like the Paris *Le Temps* preserved an old-fashioned seriousness without display advertising by receiving secret subsidies from its own and foreign governments hoping to obtain favorable news coverage. Radio gave advertising a whole new dimension. Professional advertising agencies learned to apply psychology to taste-shaping. Total advertising expenditure grew prodigiously. In England, it expanded from about £26 million per year before the war to £96 million in 1938; this was close to 2 percent of the

⁸Party newspapers, especially on the left, competed with the blander commercial dailies in the liberal states. Large "nonpolitical" commercial dailies survived in Germany and Italy. Only the Soviet Union had a party press monopoly.

⁹Williams, p. 27.

national income,¹⁰ far more than was spent on either scientific research or the fine arts. At its best, advertising drew on good modern design and helped elevate the taste of popular culture. At its worst, European advertising encouraged frivolous buying by those who could not afford it; and in the case of untested medicines, it could be positively dangerous.

THE NEW LEISURE

Popular mass culture went hand in hand with the leisure to enjoy it. When the nineteenth century ended, leisure time was still for the most part the preserve of the wealthy. Second- and third-generation business families had only recently emerged from the abstemious habits and long working hours needed to accumulate capital at the beginnings of industrialization. By the 1890s, many factory workers were working only a ten-hour day, although rural workers still stumbled from sleep to toil and back to sleep according to the rhythms of the sun, just as most factory workers had done in the early stages of the Industrial Revolution. A few workers, such as miners in France, enjoyed eight-hour work days even before 1914. At the end of the First World War, the eight-hour day became quite general for office and factory workers in northern and western Europe. In 1936 the French government set the work week at forty hours. For the first time in the history of work, men and women wage earners had as many waking hours for their own amusement as they spent on the job.

Early legislation limiting working hours had usually been intended to preserve the health and productivity of the worker. After the war, a new conception of leisure as a positive human right made itself widely felt. The healthy fulfillment of each citizen's individual qualities in leisure-time recreation became to be a concern of governments.

Along with the forty-hour work week, the French government provided in 1936 for two weeks' vacation with pay for all employees of firms larger than family shops. In August 1936, then, millions of ordinary Frenchmen found themselves blinking their eyes unaccustomed to mid-day sunshine, with two weeks free to be used as they wished, without having to be sick or injured to receive time off. Many French workers could not afford to go anywhere at that time, but the way was open for the human tide of campers, cyclists, hikers, and tourists who now inundate the beaches and mountains of Europe.

Organized Recreation

Totalitarian regimes were not satisfied merely to leave their citizens the rich delight of free time. Every moment must be filled with useful—and

¹⁰Ralph Harris and Arthur Selden, *Advertising and the Public* (London, 1962), pp. 39–42. The proportion of national income spent on advertising was slightly higher in the United States than in Britain, and slightly lower on the Continent.

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nonpolitical—activity. “Their leisure hours were a danger-spot for the whole nation,”¹¹ wrote an Italian Fascist spokesman of his fellow citizens in 1925. In that year, the Fascist regime swallowed up every autonomous leisure-time organization, from mandolin societies to football clubs, into a vast national recreation agency: the *Operaio Nazionale Dopolavoro*.

The *Dopolavoro* (afterwork) was charged with organizing the supposed willfully individualistic Italian workers in mass recreational activities that would make them docile citizens and good soldiers. Zealous officials published statistics showing how many million Italians had been marched to museums, parks, beaches, operas, and sports matches each year, to the point where a scornful refugee, Gaetano Salvemini, predicted that

the number of kisses exchanged under the auspices of the *Dopolavoro* . . . will soon be counted, and the staggering total will be attributed to the genius of Mussolini.¹²

¹¹Quoted in Gaetano Salvemini, *Under the Axe of Fascism* (New York, 1936), p. 334.

¹²*Ibid.*

“Strength Through Joy,” the Nazi recreation agency, gave wide publicity to the special vacations it provided for a few chosen workers, such as this cruise to Madeira in 1935.



In soberer fact, only about 2 million out of 12 million Italian workers could be persuaded or coerced into joining *Dopolavoro* activities, and rural and village workers were inevitably less accessible to a distant bureaucracy. In many areas of southern Italy, however, the *Dopolavoro* was the first agency to step between the villagers and their virtually feudal superiors. Fascist recreation was one of the first steps toward a fuller mobilization of Italian citizens into modern mass culture.

After 1933 Hitler copied the *Dopolavoro* in his *Kraft durch Freude* (strength through joy) movement. Although workers' cruises to Madeira and Norway were widely publicized, only about one worker out of twenty actually enjoyed such a privilege. But the regime did invest great sums in promoting and organizing sports and mass recreation in ways designed to spread enthusiasm, inculcate discipline, and induce workers to forget that real wages were lower than in 1929.

The Soviet state also assumed responsibility for leisure-time activities. The *Komsomol* (Young Communist League) organized summer camps and promoted sports, and the regime turned the villas and hunting lodges of the aristocracy into vacation centers. In practice, however, the enormous strains of rapid land collectivization and factory development after 1929 left little surplus of either resources or free time for widespread leisure and recreation.

Sports

Professional sports was the leisure-time activity that most Europeans enjoyed between the wars. Games like association football (soccer) had been transformed from spontaneous play into systematic contests in the nineteenth century, with formal rules and a network of permanent teams (The Football Association in England, 1854). Lower-class professional players began to supplant middle- and upper-class amateurs in public sports contests. Association football spread to the Continent and to Latin America before the First World War, in conscious imitation of the British: the football team in Milano even used the English name of its own town in its team title, A. C. Milan. The game became a mass spectator sport in the twentieth century, and the establishment of World Cup contests in 1930 sharpened the nationalist fervor that surrounded it.

The 1920s and 1930s were the great era of stadium-building both in Europe and in the United States. Whereas the first modern stadiums, such as the one built in Athens in 1896, had held 50,000 to 60,000 spectators, the great football stadiums built after 1918 held crowds approaching the size of the armies at Waterloo. The Lenin Stadium in Moscow held 103,000; Wembley Stadium in north London, 126,000. The great stadium built in Berlin for the 1936 Olympics held 140,000, and the *Sportpalast* built the following year in Nuremberg held 225,000. The biggest stadium in the world was the Strahav Stadium in Prague

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(1934), designed for gymnastics and track meets, which could hold 240,000 spectators.

The enormous sums bet on association football were some measure of the public's infatuation with the game. It is estimated that the total wagered in the football pools in England in the 1934/35 season was about £20 million (nearly \$100 million at current exchange rates), and that the figure doubled in 1936; extra postmen had to be put on duty in working-class neighborhoods every Monday and Tuesday, when the wagers for the following weekend's matches were sent in.¹³ The amount bet on horse racing was still bigger. These mass-attended sports far outweighed in popularity the more traditional upper-class amateur sports of Rugby football, tennis, and cricket.

Bicycle racing was always more fanatically popular on the Continent than in England. Following the bicycle craze of the 1890s when the machine was new, a number of celebrated long-distance bicycle races absorbed vast advertising money and popular enthusiasm between the wars. The Tour de France, a bicycle race that attracted Belgian and Italian cyclists as well as French, went on for ten days or so. The Berlin bicycle race tied up the city for six days.

Travel

With leisure, travel also became more accessible to masses of people. Great technical breakthroughs revolutionized the pace of travel. Most important was the conquest of air. Once the basic techniques of flight had been mastered, progress was very rapid. The Wright brothers had kept a heavier-than-air machine aloft for three minutes across the dunes at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, in 1903. Just six years later the Frenchman Louis Blériot flew across the English Channel in thirty-seven minutes. Military use of aircraft during the war enormously increased both speed and distance, so that at the war's end Europe and the world were ready for civilian air travel.

In 1919 the British flyers John Alcock and Arthur Brown first flew the Atlantic nonstop,¹⁴ and in the same year the first regular international airmail service was begun, linking Paris and London. Passenger service followed almost at once. By 1934 an Englishman could reach Australia in four days by air, a trip that took weeks by ship. The only comparable acceleration in travel had been the application of steam to travel in the 1830 to 1870 period.¹⁵ Air travel was even more liberating, however, for

¹³Robert Graves and Alan Hodge, *The Long Week-End: A Social History of Great Britain, 1918-39* (London, 1940), pp. 383-84.

¹⁴The significance of Lindbergh's exploit of 1927, surrounded by much more publicity, was that he made the flight alone.

¹⁵The opening of the United States transcontinental railroad in 1869 cut travel time across the United States from four weeks by horse to four days, a thirty-fold reduction in time. Propeller-driven airliners cut train time in the 1940s only about ten-fold.

air passengers (and bombers) could reach any point on earth across both geographical and political frontiers without the need for a continuous path or waterway.

Only the wealthy or adventurous traveled by air between the wars, of course. But the average traveler could now supplement the train with buses and private cars. Many traveled by bicycle. Hiking, too, became very widespread among European youth in the 1930s. Germany, with its long tradition of scouting and hiking in the prewar *Wandervogel* movement, was the center of knapsack traveling among the young. This was combined with the cult of outdoor toughness that the Nazi regime liked to contrast with liberal, bourgeois flabbiness. Every year several young Germans fell to their deaths on the sheer north wall of the Eigerwand in Switzerland, trying to prove themselves and their ideology against the mountain. The knapsacking cult was not limited to Germany. The youth hostels movement spread in France and elsewhere in the 1930s. Even some Frenchmen equated tramping youth with an antiliberal toughening: "The France of camping out will vanquish the France of the *apéritif* and the Party Congress," wrote the right-wing novelist Drieu La Rochelle in 1937.¹⁶

However they traveled and under whatever ideological sign, ordinary Europeans had much more chance of moving about than their parents and grandparents. The business of catering to leisure had been completely transformed. Lavish nineteenth-century resorts like the mountain springs of Marienbad, Bad Godesberg, and Vichy, where the wealthy gathered to "take the waters," were being jostled by more plebeian holiday camps. Crowds built up on beaches like the one at Brighton, where the prince regent had first popularized sea bathing in the 1820s. The giant liners that took first-class passengers across the Atlantic in the comfort of a luxury hotel now passed *Kraft durch Freude* ships on their way to Madeira and *Dopolavoro* cruises to Majorca. The ease with which news, styles, and people traveled around the earth had much to do with spreading an international popular culture after 1918.

THE EFFECTS OF MASS CULTURE AND LEISURE

The cumulative effects of mass leisure and a newly self-confident and economically powerful popular culture are still a subject of debate. One major effect clearly was to increase the homogeneity of national populations, a process that had begun in the nineteenth century. The popular press and radio transmitted the tastes and spoken accents of Paris or Berlin or London or Rome to the remotest villages of the Auvergne or Bavaria or Northumberland or Calabria. Deep-rooted local culture began to be replaced by a national culture; in turn, national ways of life were influenced more and more by an international consumer culture.

¹⁶*L'Emancipation nationale*, August 20, 1937.

The heroine of Thomas Hardy's novel *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891) had felt as though moving from one valley to another was the equivalent of changing countries; the time was not too distant when only the elderly would retain traces of local accents and customs.

The process of homogeneity was hastened by cheaper, more uniform manufactured clothing. Europeans of the 1920s were perhaps the last generation whose class status and even employment could be told at a glance by dress. Rayon, the first widely used synthetic fabric, was already becoming a commonplace during the 1920s.¹⁷ Rayon blurred the ancient line between those who could afford silk and those who could not.

Some observers felt that more homogeneous populations were a sign of fruitful egalitarianism. If the visible marks of class—the blue smock, the cloth cap, the different accent—were diminished, might not the old “two nations” about which Disraeli had warned in the 1840s at last be merging into that single body of citizens about which democrats had dreamed since the French Revolution?

Some of the techniques used to mobilize the classes and local minorities into a common citizenry, however, aroused worries about manipulation. Youth groups, organized recreation, and the pageantry of parades and rallies were only the most spectacular examples of the ways by which totalitarian governments attempted to mold citizens. The techniques of mass political manipulation were also developed in liberal states. An early example was the Budget League in England in 1909, a group established to arouse public opinion in favor of Lloyd George's Liberal party budget reforms. It was a pioneer in the use of press releases, mass meetings, and publicity in British politics.¹⁸ Organized opinionmaking during the war vastly increased each government's experience in manipulating its citizenry. It seems likely that the vast machinery of persuasion set up by advertisers and promoters in the popular culture also worked to mold a citizenry that was prepared to march to a single command. That command might not come from a government; it might come from a sponsor commanding the public to buy a new product, or it might come from a deep popular emotion, such as anti-Semitism. Many Europeans focused concern about their manipulability on an evil conveniently labeled “Americanization,” for much of the content of popular entertainment—jazz, escapist movies—came from the United States, and the techniques of advertising and publicity seemed more highly developed there.¹⁹

A more homogeneous citizenry meant the disappearance of an older, more localized, orally transmitted popular culture. To some cultivated

¹⁷The word *rayon* was first used in 1924. First commercial production began in 1891, but remained small until the First World War. British production grew twenty-five fold between 1913 and 1929.

¹⁸Cameron Hazelhurst, “Asquith as Prime Minister,” *English Historical Review*, vol. 85, no. 336 (July 1970).

¹⁹See, for example, Georges Duhamel, *America the Menace* (Boston, 1931).

Europeans, that culture seemed vastly superior to the commercial mass culture, with its appeal to the lowest common denominator and its artificially stimulated wants and curiosities. Richard Hoggart, a British intellectual of working-class origin, has reflected with some bitterness on the disappearance of the values of his grandparents' generation between the wars:

The world of club-singing is being gradually replaced by that of typical radio dance-music and crooning, television cabaret and commercial-radio variety. The uniform national type which the popular papers help to produce is writ even larger in the uniform international type which the film studios of Hollywood present. The old forms of class culture are in danger of being replaced by a poorer kind of classless, or by what I was led earlier to describe as "graceless," culture, and this is to be regretted.²⁰

Other European intellectuals were more worried about mass culture's inroads on elite values than on the old customs. There had always been "popular culture," of course, as long as there had been ballads, folk dances, and tales handed down outside schools and the literary world. Highly educated Europeans had generally ignored it, for it made few converts outside its own class. What was frightening to these intellectuals was the material power and dynamism of the new mass culture and its ability to wean away with facile pleasures the elite young who were supposed to carry on the arts and sciences. Who would learn Greek and mathematics, and who would advance physics if middle-class European students joined the masses at the movies? The young Jean-Paul Sartre and his mother slipped off to the movies despite his scholarly grandfather's displeasure.

We blindly entered a century without tradition, a century that was to contrast strongly with the others by its bad manners, and the new art (the cinema), the art of the common man, foreshadowed our barbarism. Born in a den of thieves, officially classified as a travelling show, it had popular ways that shocked serious people. It was an amusement for women and children.²¹

The Spanish philosophy professor José Ortega y Gasset provided one of the most widely read warnings against mass culture in *The Revolt of the Masses* (1930). Already predisposed by the pessimism of the Spanish Generation of 1898 to reflect on Spain's decadence and decline, Ortega was convinced that European civilization, that fragile creation of exceptional men, would be trampled by "mass men," self-satisfied enjoyers of life, unwilling either to master civilized creativity themselves or to submit to those who were civilized. Although he was a self-professed "democrat" and an opponent of both fascism and Bolshevism, Ortega spoke for many who intimated that they would accept strong measures to preserve elite culture from the brute force of mass commercial culture.

²⁰Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy* (London, 1957), p. 280.

²¹Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Words* (New York, 1966), p. 118.

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Oswald Spengler put some of the same concerns into a more specifically German context in a best-seller of 1919, *The Decline of the West*. Spengler's book is best remembered for its view of the inevitable rise and fall of cultures. In keeping with a tradition of German nationalist writing, Spengler feared that "Culture" (deep-rooted German traditions as distinct from those of Western Europe) was being overwhelmed by "Civilization" (the more cosmopolitan, commercialized mass culture that Spengler identified with liberal Western Europe). Spengler foresaw an emerging "World City," a faceless, cosmopolitan anthill within which the national Cultures (including the virile, spiritual values of Germanness) would be submerged and lost. One can recognize a form of attack on mass culture here, distorted by the passions of Germany's defeat in 1918 and by the nationalist assertion of the distinctness and superiority of German traditions. Down the road that Spengler took was an intellectual acceptance of dictatorship if dictatorship was necessary to save German values from cosmopolitan mass values.

There were several problems with this point of view. One was that ordinary Europeans, left to their own choices, enthusiastically embraced the new popular culture. Radio, movies, and the popular styles flourished mightily. The other problem was that the high culture itself was abandoning tradition with alacrity and embarking in the 1920s on a period of rich and raucous experiment.

HIGH CULTURE BETWEEN THE WARS

On the surface, 1920s culture has a reputation for glitter, brash vitality, and novelty. Indeed, there was a wide variety of artistic and literary events whose main common ingredient was a strenuous effort to be new: the first performance in Berlin in 1925 of the opera *Wozzeck*, Alban Berg's powerful union of serial music and expressionist drama; the triumph of the opening night of Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill's jazz play *The Threepenny Opera* (Berlin, 1928); Darius Milhaud's Negro ballet *La Création du Monde* (Paris, 1923), with sets by the cubist painter Fernand Léger; the extraordinary assemblage of talent, including Walter Gropius and Paul Klee, teaching and designing at the Bauhaus in Weimar.

The high culture of the 1920s did not innovate, however, in basic aesthetic terms. The artistic leaders in that decade simply continued to work out the implications of the great aesthetic revolution of the turn of the century. More importantly, they brought the isolated experiments of the pre-1914 avant-garde into the mainstream of acceptance. In Peter Gay's terms, the prewar "outsiders" had become "insiders."²²

How did the prewar avant-garde culture become acceptable, even fashionable, in the 1920s? First, the horrors of global war had made the

²²Peter Gay, *Weimar Culture: The Outsider as Insider* (New York, 1968).

language of primitivism, subjective irrationality, and violence seem far more appropriate to an interpretation of the world. Second, the revolutionary impulse at the war's end heightened impatience with the *status quo*, in the arts as elsewhere. "There is a new spirit," said the young Swiss architect and city planner Le Corbusier in 1923. We need a "revision of values: if there is no revolution in architecture, there will be social revolution."²⁰ Third, young people, caught up in a generation conflict at the end of the war, had a strong sense of their mission to reject and reshape the values of their elders, who had put them in the trenches. Finally, the prosperity of the 1920s revived as enemies and targets "all those who long for a return to philistinism and the glorious time when it was only necessary to make money and accompany a decent digestion with a pious upward glance."²¹

The twentieth century has preserved a basic aesthetic unity. An explanation for that is apparent when one contemplates the long lives of the great pre-1914 pioneers: the *Fauve* painter Henri Matisse lived productively until 1954; Picasso until 1973; the musical pioneer Igor Stravinsky lived until 1972, actively composing almost to the end. Among the founders of functionalist architecture, Le Corbusier lived until 1965; Walter Gropius and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe until 1969. No wonder their successors seemed to be mostly derivative, the lesser practitioners of arts invented by more formidable predecessors. No wonder that most of the artistic idioms of the 1920s still seem modern sixty years later.

Experimental Aesthetic Values

A few experimental painters had already renounced before 1914 the aesthetic assignment of the Renaissance—to portray nature and human nature—and were establishing new aesthetic values. Most postwar painters took up these values, which indeed were still being worked out far into the twentieth century. As Paul Klee, one of the more articulate of painters, put it in lectures at the Bauhaus in 1923, artists no longer attached "such intense importance to natural form . . . but more value to the powers that do the forming." Klee imagined a dialogue with one of those tiresome laymen who "always looks for his favorite subject" in a picture:

Layman: "But that isn't a bit like uncle." The artist, if his nerve is disciplined, thinks to himself: "To Hell with uncle. I must get on with my building. This new brick is a little too heavy and to my mind puts too much weight on the left. I must add a good-sized counterweight to the right to restore the equilibrium."²²

²⁰C. E. Jeanneret-Gris (Le Corbusier), *Towards a New Architecture* (London, 1931), p. 89.

²¹Harry Kessler, *In the Twenties, The Diaries of Harry Kessler* (New York, 1971), p. 267.

²²Paul Klee, *On Modern Art* (London, 1948), p. 19.

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²³Ibid.,

The artist "must distort," insisted Klee, "for therein is nature reborn."²⁶

In his emphasis on "building" a painting and on "composition," Klee continued, like many interwar painters, the prewar cubists' fascination with form and structure. The Dutch painter Piet Mondrian was less playful than Klee in his shapes and balances; his explorations of pure form, simplified and reduced to basic elements, were severe and elegant.

Purified, simplified form for its own sake was a new aesthetic basis for other arts as well. The musical avant-garde had partially broken with key and harmony before 1914. Then, in 1924, the Viennese composer Arnold Schoenberg published a piano suite in which he perfected an altogether different musical idiom: the twelve-tone or serial system, in which the composer arranged twelve tones in a series that then became the building block of the composition, in place of a conventional scale. Together with his pupils Alban Berg and Anton Webern, Schoenberg took music into whole new realms, although few of their contemporaries could follow these innovators with pleasure.

Many architects completed the prewar rejection of ornament in favor of a severe architecture subordinated to functional needs and the aesthetics of simple mass and balance. Le Corbusier turned for guidance to the engineer, whose only aesthetic was thought to be the natural harmony derived from smooth, simple utility. "The Engineer's aesthetic and Architecture are two things that march together and follow one from the other."²⁷ After praising the functional elegance of grain silos, automobiles, airplanes, and other machines, Le Corbusier insisted that "a house is a machine for living in."²⁸ He designed mass-produced houses of reinforced concrete with long horizontal windows and flexible interior spaces to express the functional simplicity with which people should live. Cities, he said, should be towers among gardens and playing fields, with living, playing, and transportation carried on at different levels.²⁹

A machine aesthetic permeated a number of artistic fields in the 1920s. Arthur Honegger's railroad composition, *Pacific 231* (1924), is only the most celebrated of a number of efforts to enrich the musical vocabulary with industrial sounds, most of which are simply dated curiosities today. Some painters, like the Frenchman Fernand Léger, applied cubism to the exploration of industrial shapes. More important than these superficial influences on mere subject matter was the discovery of a fundamental kinship between the simple elegance of a machine and artistic expression. Members of the Bauhaus community tried to bring good design to everyday objects like furniture and household utensils. They

²⁶*Ibid.*, p. 29.

²⁷Le Corbusier, p. 1.

²⁸*Ibid.*, p. 15.

²⁹*Ibid.*, p. 57.

wanted to unite aesthetics and material considerations into a "social art" whose combination of beauty and efficiency would restore wholeness to everyday life.

Functionalism, good social organization, and delight in purified form, then, were aesthetic values carried forward in the 1920s from the prewar avant-garde. Another major taproot of modernism was the expression of feeling, heightened if necessary by distortion, emphatic techniques, harsh flat colors, and morbid subject matter. The *Fauves* had replaced modeling with flat, bright color for shock effect as early as 1905 in Paris; the German expressionists applied their neo-Gothic morbidity, distortion, and heightened emotion to all the arts before 1914.³⁰ The expression of heightened feeling and emotion by artistic distortion was still a major characteristic of modernism in the 1920s.

The theater and the new art of motion pictures lent themselves particularly well to expressionist purposes. Films were ideally suited to a powerful evocation of horror and mystery through calculated distortion, as was proved by the masterpiece of German expressionist filmmaking, *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1919). A high point of expressionist drama was Alban Berg's opera *Wozzeck*—a melodramatic tale of a soldier driven to murder his mistress by a mysterious inner terror heightened by the taunts of others about her unfaithfulness.

New Concerns

Whether clarity of form or power of expression was their main purpose, the modern artistic movements of the 1920s shared a number of new concerns. All the intellectual leaders rejected "art," in the sense of traditional or learned techniques invested with exaggerated awe by a social elite. The modern arts were intensely personal acts of self-expression, and those who cared to respond did so on their own emotional terms. With few exceptions, the modern artists "did" rather than "talked." They were better at denouncing dead tradition and the philistines than at explaining what they wanted to do. Their creations would have to speak for themselves.

All the interwar art forms plunged yet deeper into the subjectivity that had appeared before the war. War and revolution heightened Europeans' fascination with the human unconscious, sometimes in very direct ways. We have already seen how his work with shellshocked soldiers in 1917 had awakened André Breton's curiosity about expressions of deep unconscious feelings in the arts.³¹ His surrealist movement (1924) tried automatic writing, in which the author was supposed to produce whatever words were suggested by some mysterious inner prompting. It glorified the "divine madness" of those reaches of the unconscious that the arts had hitherto ignored. Later, surrealist painters, such as the

³⁰See Chapter 1, pp. 38–40.

³¹See Chapter 4, p. 23.

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Scene from *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, a striking example of expressionist filmmaking in Germany.

Belgian René Magritte and the Spaniard Salvador Dali, placed highly realistic details in grotesque imaginary landscapes, in playful yet disturbing explorations of the depths of the human psyche.

In addition to Breton's surrealist writing, other new literary techniques reflected the growing interest in the unconscious. Marcel Proust probed the workings of memory and of social status in the multivolume novel *A la recherche du temps perdu* (*Remembrance of Things Past*). Although his first volume had gone unnoticed in 1913, the next volume won a major French literary prize in 1921. And there was the "stream of consciousness" technique, by which the reader is brought directly into the mind of a character with all his disconnected ramblings, free association of banalities and profundities, and suggestive, half-understood allusions. The most masterful of the "stream of consciousness" writers was the Irish exile James Joyce, whose *Ulysses* was published in 1922.

Sigmund Freud, perhaps the single most influential thinker in interwar intellectual life, made Europeans aware of the unconscious. Freud had established his two principal points before the war: that our conscious reasoning is to some extent rationalization of unconscious desires and conflicts; and that sexuality is the main formative element in human personality, even in infancy. Freud continued to refine his work after the war, adding the famous three-fold analysis of the personality: the id, or unconscious; the ego, or drive for self-preservation; and the superego, or Freudian equivalent of conscience. Freud also undertook after the war an interpretation of human history and society. In *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1929) he argued that some form of sexual repression was a necessary concomitant of group living and cultural development. The overall thrust of Freud's writing was somewhat pessimistic and deter-

minist, strongly suggesting that every individual's personality elements were at war with one another and with the surrounding culture. The best one could hope for was a certain mitigation of the pain by psychoanalytically assisted "adjustment."

Freud's scientific influence spread after the war because of wartime experiences with the treatment of battlefield emotional disorders. Outside Freud's Vienna, important centers of psychoanalysis grew up in Berlin, London, and New York. His influence among ordinary people, however, was of a different kind, for his name became associated with a prurient exploitation of youthful postwar hedonism. The notions that sexual repression was harmful and that salvation came through free sexual expression were closer to Freud's heretical student Wilhelm Reich than to the master himself. Freud did not know whether to be angry or amused when the Hollywood producer Sam Goldwyn offered him \$100,000 in 1925 to serve as consultant for a series of films on the variants of love.³²

Human sexuality was treated far more explicitly and centrally in the arts after the war than before. Even the late-nineteenth-century naturalistic French novelist, Emile Zola, whose sexual frankness had resulted in censorship and lawsuits, had described lust and sexual violence as merely unpleasant and discrete aspects of human ugliness. For some interwar writers, sexuality was not only more pervasive but more sanctified; it was an expression of humanity's most fundamental energies and passions. The British novelist D. H. Lawrence frankly reveled in the pagan enjoyment of instinct. His novels contrasted the effete, repressed upper classes with vigorous primitives who "thought with their blood."

The vitality of primitive creative instincts was accepted without argument by most interwar artists. The whole point of self-expression in the arts was to bypass the thin-blooded conformism of learned art and the academies. Just as Picasso and Matisse had found inspiration in primitive African masks in 1905 and the German expressionist Ludwig Kirchner in statues from the Pacific in 1904, the interwar artists continued to look for sources of primitive vigor and certainty, whether in their own unconscious, in the work of children, or in the arts of the happily "uncivilized" peoples of the world. Study of primitive art in ethnographic museums or through travel had become an essential part of a painter's experience; Kandinsky referred to the "shattering impression that the ethnographic museum made on me."³³

The search for primitive roots was especially pronounced among the Russian exiles who contributed so much to Western European intellectual life after 1917. The composer Stravinsky turned away from the lush

³²Ernest Jones, *The Life and Work of Sigmund Freud*, ed. and abridged, Lionel Trilling and Stephen Marcus (London, 1961), p. 566.

³³Quoted in Frank Whitford, *Expressionism* (London, 1970), p. 180.



Pablo Picasso, *Igor Stravinsky*, 1920.

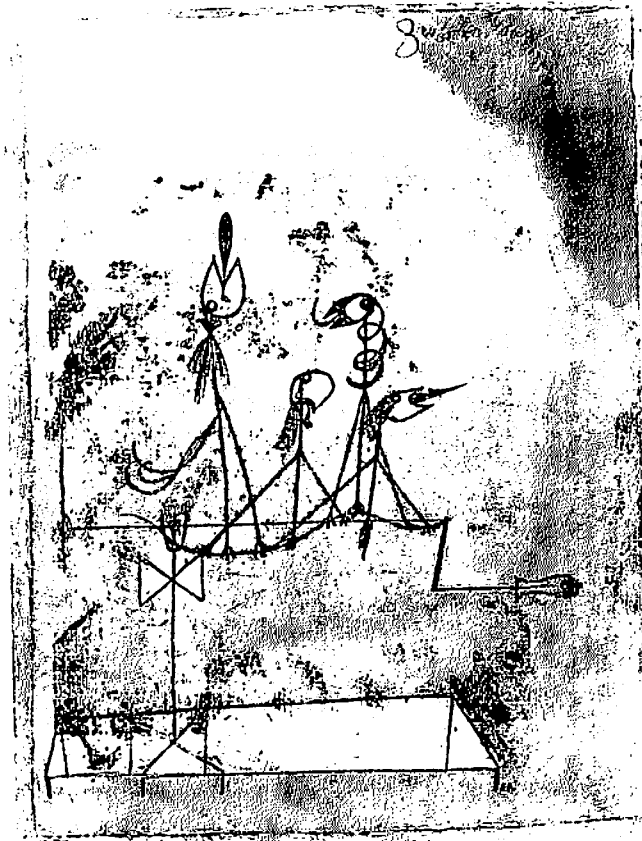
romanticism of his first compositions toward simplicity, clarity, and ritual. His *Weddings* (*Les noces*, 1923) recalled folk rituals in music of great strength and hypnotic repetition; in subsequent revisions he made his orchestration leaner and purer as if in a continuing effort to return to the simplest verity. The painter Marc Chagall created his own fanciful world of the people of his native village in the Jewish Pale of Russia.

On any scale—imagination, individuality, or vigor—the postwar years rank among the most brilliantly expressive. To understand cultural climates with some realism, however, we need to know more about their settings.

THE SETTINGS OF INTERWAR CULTURE

Sophisticated cultural expressions were restricted, for the most part, to large cities. Two European centers stood out for the brilliance of their cultural life: Paris and (until 1933) Weimar Germany. Paris had attracted an international artist community since the 1890s, when it had been the freest republican capital in the world and the center of intense experimentation in the visual arts: Picasso had come from Spain, Van Gogh from Holland, Sergei Diaghilev from Russia, among others. Paris, then, was a natural setting for the flowering of avant-garde art. After 1918, Americans joined the European artists, and the introduction of jazz, together with the new spare literary style of American expatriate writers like Hemingway, marked the first time that the United States had been a contributor to rather than a borrower of European cultural expression.

Germany was different. Its cultural flowering followed a revolution, so that the triumph of new forms of expression was accompanied by the entry of the prewar "outsiders" into positions of influence and authority.



Paul Klee, *Twittering Machine*, water color, pen and ink, 16¼" x 12", 1922. The Museum of Modern Art, the Museum Collections.

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They found jobs and patrons under the Weimar Republic. The architect Gropius and the painters Klee and Kandinsky, among others, taught at the state-subsidized Bauhaus; Alban Berg found a wealthy patron, Alma Mahler Werfel, to pay for producing his opera *Wozzeck*. The prewar experimenters thus found a stage and a voice. But the revolution that brought the Weimar Republic into being ultimately failed, and the old conformities were soon powerful again. The experience of having once been "outsiders" and the tenuousness of their victory gave German artists a stridency and combativeness that fit well with the political and economic uncertainties of the time.

Social Status of Artists

As in the late nineteenth century, most artists and intellectuals were bourgeois. And as in the late nineteenth century, they were rebels against their own upbringing. Nothing had diminished their scorn for middle-class values and their rage at authority and stupidity. Some of their artistic expressions took the form of playful mockery. Klee's *Twittering Machine* (1922) revealed delight in pure form as well as in ridiculing the sanctimoniousness of "serious art." The French composers who called themselves "The Six" drew on the musical games and foolery of their master, Erik Satie. The predominant tone, however, especially in Berlin, was an insecure, angry scorn. Count Harry Kessler wondered why his friend George Grosz devoted "his art exclusively to the depiction of the repulsiveness of bourgeois philistinism." Kessler decided that Grosz was a wounded idealist whose sensitivity had been turned "outrageously brutal" by his "fanatical hatred" for everything in modern German life that was authoritarian, crassly materialist, and self-satisfied.³⁴

There were signs of change in the class position of artists after the war. A few working-class painters and writers achieved major successes in the arts, which now required less training: D. H. Lawrence, from a coal mining family of the English Midlands, is a major example.

The Search for a Mass Audience

Artists reached out for popular audiences after the First World War. Few artists accepted the notion of the arts as ornament for royal or ecclesiastical patrons, or even as delectation for a narrow circle of sophisticated initiates, in the manner of some late-nineteenth-century aesthetes. To attract a wider audience some interwar artists drew enthusiastically on popular culture, not only on disappearing folk culture as in Chagall's paintings or Stravinsky's compositions, but on the new mass culture. Kurt Weill, at first a struggling composer of difficult chamber music,

³⁴Kessler, p. 64.

eventually found his metier in composing jazz rhythms and spare, angular, bittersweet music for Bertolt Brecht's antibourgeois satires *The Threepenny Opera*, and *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny* (1930). Francis Poulenc, best-known of the French "Six," also worked jazz into much of his lean antiromantic composition of the 1920s. And, of course, film was rapidly seized on for artistic experimentation.

The more radical among postwar artists regarded the arts as a medium for transforming society. Even before the war, the first expressionists had established a group studio in the poorest neighborhood of Dresden rather than set up the customary individual studios in middle-class neighborhoods or in the country: "As youth, we carry the future with us, and want to establish the freedom of life and movement in opposition to the entrenched older forces."³⁵ George Grosz, a savagely antibourgeois artist, told a friend in 1919 that he wanted to become "the German Hogarth, deliberately realistic and didactic; to preach, improve, and reform. . . . He loathes painting and the pointlessness of painting as practiced so far."³⁶ The Bauhaus in Germany was a high point of using the arts as instruments for transforming society. Its classes, according to Walter Gropius, "would enable the coming generation to achieve the reunion of all forms of creative work and become the architects of a new civilization."³⁷

The theater lent itself especially well to the efforts of postwar artists to affect a vast popular audience. Berlin, with its rich dramatic tradition and its state-supported theaters, was a center of stage experimentation designed to involve a wider audience in the theatrical experience. The director Max Reinhardt transformed the plays of Aeschylus and Shakespeare into stunning displays using revolving stages and spectacular lighting. Reinhardt abolished the curtain and the old naturalistic sets in order to bring the audience more intimately into the spectacle. More political was Leopold Jessner, a Social Democratic director designated by the new Weimar regime to run the Berlin State Theater. His 1919 production of Schiller's *William Tell* presented the tyrant Gessler as a German general with rouged cheeks and covered with medals; Tell himself was depicted as a thinly disguised defender of the German revolution of 1918. Most radical of all was Erwin Piscator, who began his Berlin career as a director by presenting plays to workers on picket lines during the 1918 and 1919 strikes. Piscator expected to find a large proletarian audience for experimental drama with a strong political message heightened by techniques like newsreels and slides interspersed with the play and fast-moving short scenes on a stage free of naturalistic sets. According to his widow, Piscator meant to present "plays of active protest, a deliberate J'Accuse; a reportage and montage; a warning;

³⁵*Die Brücke Manifesto*, 1905.

³⁶Kessler, p. 64.

³⁷Quoted in Gay, p. 99.

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history marching on; political satire, morality plays and court trials, purposefully shocking."³⁸ Piscator had Walter Gropius design a flexible theater-in-the-round for his concept of total theater, but he never managed to raise the money to build it.

The possibility of creating a new humanity through cultural revolution seemed greatest in Russia. Leon Trotsky predicted in 1923 that under communism

man will become immeasurably stronger, wiser, and subtler; his body will become more harmonized, his movements more rhythmic, his voice more musical. The forms of life will become dynamically dramatic. The average human type will rise to the heights of an Aristotle, a Goethe, or a Marx. And above this range new peaks will rise.³⁹

Trotsky and Lenin, both men of broad cultivation, opposed the attempts of some Bolsheviks to sweep away everything except proletarian culture. Although a number of intellectuals chose exile, those that remained were forbidden only overt opposition. Many of them were stimulated to rich creativity in the relatively open atmosphere of the 1920s. Sergei Eisenstein developed stunning camera techniques in his epic films of the Bolshevik Revolution. Vladimir Tatlin developed a "constructivist" architecture that rejected surface ornament in favor of functional buildings, garden cities, and monuments derived from the industrial forms he thought appropriate to a socialist society. The poet Vladimir Mayakovsky declaimed rough-hewn verses that exalted the revolution.

Fall in and prepare to march!
No time now to talk or trifle.
Silence, you orators!
The word is with you,
Comrade Rifle!
We have lived long enough by laws
Of which Adam and Eve made the draft.
Stable history's poor old horse!
Left!
Left!
Left!⁴⁰

The Russian theater experienced a golden age like that of Weimar Berlin. While Konstantin Stanislavsky continued to train his actors at the Moscow Art Theater in the method of close psychological identification with their parts, his pupil Vsevolod Meyerhold carried out an "October revolution of the theater" with stylized sets and actors trained in mechanical gestures. He arranged seats freely in his theater and issued tickets at random to soldiers and workers. As late as 1929, Meyerhold

³⁸Quoted in Otto Friedrich, *Before the Deluge: A Portrait of Berlin in the 1920s* (New York, 1972), p. 255.

³⁹Leon Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution* (New York, 1957), p. 256.

⁴⁰Vladimir Mayakovsky, "Left March," trans. C. M. Bowra, in C. M. Bowra, ed., *Second Book of Russian Verse* (London, 1948), p. 131.

was allowed to produce a play as critical of the Soviet bureaucracy as Mayakovsky's *The Bedbug* (1928).

Whether in Paris, Berlin, or Moscow, the postwar artists' and intellectuals' desire to assemble a mass audience and transform it was doomed to frustration. The artists would do everything to spread their message except renounce individual self-expression in favor of the stale, conformist aesthetics that mass taste still preferred. There is a pathetic note in Klee's concession in his 1923 Bauhaus lectures. All that was lacking in the community begun at the Bauhaus, Klee said, was an audience: "We seek a people."⁴

The Academic and Scholarly Worlds

The modern arts not only found no mass audience between the wars; they had little effect on the academic and learned worlds. Higher education was relatively unchanged by the postwar revolutionary urges, at least outside the Soviet Union. Education beyond elementary school was still directed to a small elite carefully selected on the basis of excellence in classical education. In France, the superb *lycées* (public high schools) required fees until 1930; the prestigious British "public schools" were in fact costly private institutions, while the inferior public secondary schools required fees of all but a few winners of scholarships. Even among those who could afford the fees, admission was limited to those who had excelled in written and oral examinations on classical subjects. Admission was by merit, of course, but lower-class children were deprived of the home environment needed for scholarly excellence in the classics. The day of widespread, free secondary education was far in the future, one of the basic social changes of the post-1945 reconstruction.

Beyond the elite secondary schools, the universities were an even more confined world of specialists. In the French *lycée* system, more than half the students—already a small elite—were expected to fail the rigorous *baccalauréat* examinations that gave entry to universities and professional schools. The struggle to replace Latin and Greek with modern languages and philosophy was already underway at the universities, but technical education was still considered inferior in European school systems. It was outside class, and partly in protest against their narrow classical education, that secondary school and university students associated themselves with the new art forms. No wonder the modern artists looked for popular audiences and appropriated elements of popular culture. They scorned the academic world, which more than returned that scorn.

As knowledge increased, the learned world fragmented more and more into specialization. That community of craftsmen sought by the Bauhaus was far removed from the reality of learned specialists in the sciences and scholarly professions.

⁴Klee, p. 55.

The prewar revolution in physics begun by Rutherford, Bohr, Planck, and Einstein was carried further between the wars. The indeterminacy theory (1926–27) of the German physicist Werner Heisenberg completed the overthrow of classical physics. Heisenberg's predecessors had shown that atomic structure was based on force fields or electric charges rather than on particles of matter, but they had tended to argue, by analogy with the Newtonian solar system, that subatomic elements were organized within the atom somewhat like planets around a sun. Heisenberg found that the location of any particular electron could be predicted only within a range of probabilities, and was, hence, indeterminate.

Only a handful of Europeans were capable of really understanding these theories. Indeed the difficulty that readers—and writers—of textbooks encounter in trying to make sense of the subtle mathematical language of modern physics is a reminder of the increasingly closed compartments into which knowledge became divided in the twentieth century. No single physical scientist between the wars had as much impact on public attitudes as Charles Darwin, for instance, had had in the late nineteenth century. Albert Einstein was clearly the nearest parallel after 1918, but Einstein had more notoriety than genuine cultural influence.

Einstein's special theory of relativity (1905) had suggested that gravity has an effect on light waves in space; since the speed of light is constant, that effect could be true only if space and time were relative to each observer's place in a universe of flux. When a solar eclipse in 1919 enabled British astronomers to verify that light waves were indeed affected by gravitational fields, headlines proclaimed that the "relativity" of time and space had been proven. Einstein's name became a household word, much to the bemusement of that modest, self-deprecating scientist. "Relativism" came to lend a supposed scientific support to subjectivism in other areas of culture between the wars. Popularizers of science like Sir Arthur Eddington, whose *Nature of the Physical Universe* (1930) was widely read, suggested that physics no longer conflicted with spiritual beliefs.

As for the scientists themselves, the area of Heisenbergian uncertainty within the application of hypotheses to experimental cases in atomic physics did not lessen their sense that each successive hypothesis came nearer to explaining every aspect of the universe in terms of scientific knowledge. The early twentieth-century revolution in physics quietly prepared the way for the next generation's revolutions in the study of crystals, solid state physics, high-energy particles, and the living cell.

The other fields of scholarly knowledge were no more clearly understood outside a narrow circle of specialists. The gap between popular Freudianism and psychoanalysis has already been noted. Major advances made in other areas of study had little popular impact. Sociology had been established as an academic discipline only at the end of the

nineteenth century. It was profoundly influenced by the German Max Weber, who wanted to supplement (but not replace) Marx's emphasis on economic causation in social development with other kinds of social force—the growth of bureaucracy, religion, and what he called “charismatic leadership.” The assumptions and field techniques of the young science of anthropology were decisively influenced by Bronislaw Malinowski, a Polish scholar working in England.

Philosophy developed in divergent directions in England and on the Continent. English philosophy, under the influence of the Viennese Ludwig Wittgenstein, moved toward a rejection of speculation on metaphysical issues in favor of the careful logical analysis of concrete statements. On the Continent, the German philosophers Martin Heidegger and Edmund Husserl developed a difficult philosophy of direct experience in which problems of anxiety, human responsibility, and the nature of existence were the center of concern. It is difficult to suggest the range of scholarly vitality of interwar Europe because of the growing isolation of each specialty.

These very different worlds—the artistic, the academic, and the scholarly—went their ways between the wars, with mass culture affecting them only in the case of a few notorious individuals. The artistic world in particular found notoriety enough with its scandalous novelties, but not the new popular base that many artists had hoped to find. Hence the feverish experimentation of the 1920s was highly vulnerable to its enemies.

Opposition to the Experimental Arts

The experimental arts did not fail to arouse savage antagonism. They were connected, especially in Germany, with the revolution of 1918 and the installation of “democrats, Jews, and other outsiders”⁴² in cultural and academic realms heretofore reserved for an older elite. Worse still, the new arts and sciences positively gloried in trampling on established values. Many of the more celebrated opening nights, particularly in Berlin, were occasions for fistfights between the supporters of the new arts and nationalist, traditionalist action squads. There were two irreconcilable conceptions of the cultural life: on the one hand, the sacred duty of self-expression to the limits of one's creativity; on the other hand, the arts as a heritage of values that must be transmitted to the otherwise unruly young.

One of the roots of fascism was the panic among many traditionalist Europeans at what they feared was a tidal wave of degeneracy and decadence in the arts and sciences. When the Hungarian officers destroyed Béla Kun's Budapest Soviet in August 1919, one of their first

⁴²The phrase is Gustav Meyer's, a Jewish historian who failed to get a post as professor in Germany until the republic was established. See Gay, p. 88.

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acts was to close down the offices of Freud's most active disciple, Sandor Ferenczi. The Nazis in Germany specialized in breaking up artistic performances that seemed to threaten the German state or the racial purity of traditional *Kultur*. The objects of their displeasure ranged from the film based on Remarque's novel *All Quiet on the Western Front* to expressionist plays to psychoanalysis. In 1929, the Nazi pseudophilosopher Alfred Rosenberg founded the Militant League for German Culture. In and out of power, the Nazis won supporters by promising "to substitute a 'German' art and an eternal art" for the cosmopolitan "modern art" that tried to "reduce art to the level of fashions in dress, with the motto 'Every year something fresh'—Impressionism, Futurism, Cubism, perhaps also Dadaism." That was the crowd-pleasing mockery used effectively by a one-time art student, Adolf Hitler. As he dedicated the House of German Art in Munich on July 18, 1937, containing an exhibition of "decadent" art presented for public ridicule, Hitler made these further remarks:

As in politics, so in German art-life: we are determined to make a clean sweep of phrases. Ability is the necessary qualification if an artist wishes his work to be exhibited here. . . . The influence of Jews was paramount and through their control of the press they were able to intimidate those who desired to champion "the normal sound intelligence and instinct of men." . . . From the pictures sent in for exhibition it is clear that there really are men who on principle feel meadows to be blue, the heavens green, clouds sulphur yellow—or as they perhaps prefer to say, "experience" them thus. I need not ask whether they really do see or feel things in this way, but in the name of the German people I have only to prevent these pitiable unfortunates who clearly suffer from defects of vision from attempting with violence to persuade contemporaries by their chatter that these faults of observation are indeed realities, or from presenting them as "Art." . . . The artist does not create for the artist; he creates for the people and we will see to it that henceforth the people will be called in to judge its art. . . . The people regarded this art as the outcome of an impudent or unashamed arrogance or of a simply shocking lack of skill . . . which might have been produced by untalented children of from eight to ten years old . . . this art-stammer . . . which might have been made by a man of the Stone Age."

Nazi Germany was not the only society in which the arts were subordinated to the inculcation of "useful" social values in the 1930s. As Stalin consolidated his grip on the Soviet Union in the late 1920s, the heady artistic experimentation of the early years of the decade became suspect as an excess of bourgeois individualism. Stanislavsky was removed as director of the Moscow Art Theater in 1928, and Anatole Lunacharsky was dismissed as Commissar of Education in 1929. Mayakovsky, tormented by personal troubles as well as disillusioned by the regime, committed suicide in 1930. Eisenstein was ordered to change

"Quoted in George L. Mosse, *Nazi Culture* (New York, 1966), pp. 11–15.

his film *The General Line* in the same year. Meyerhold disappeared in the purges of the late 1930s. All writers were required to join the National Union of Writers in 1934. At the same time, the party congress approved the doctrine that all art should express "socialist realism," a numbing conformity to nineteenth-century pictorial style that would be devoted to the propaganda services of the regime.

No one has explained why both Hitler and Stalin tried to impose commonplace nineteenth-century art styles on their subjects in what professed to be revolutionary regimes. But it is clear that the burst of artistic and scientific energies of the 1920s had not won the popular support that might have saved them from persecution in the 1930s.

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