RE-IMAGINING THE NATION: JOSEP RENAU AND THE POLITICS OF CULTURE IN REPUBLICAN SPAIN, 1931-1939

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Thesis submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in History, 2014

DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I, Carl-Henrik Yngve Bjerstrom, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed:

Date:

ABSTRACT

This thesis analyses the political and artistic development of the Valencian painter, editor, and montage artist Josep Renau (1907-1982) during the years of the Spanish Second Republic (1931-1939). Renau was a pioneering representative of a politically progressive vanguard in 1930s Spain, and his multifaceted work offers a valuable insight into contemporary perceptions concerning the theoretical as well as practical intersections of politics and art. Investigating these intersections, the thesis argues that artistic and political activities were equally formative aspects of Renau's progressive project, which sought to configure a cultural vision for a modern Spain. This project was clearly informed by Renau's affiliation with the Spanish Communist Party and the particular threat posed at the time by fascism. But his project was also strongly coloured by conceptions associated with the artistic avant-garde, conceptions which led Renau to emphasise the importance of radical cultural renewal as a pivotal ambition of anti-fascist politics. The second part of the thesis explores how the civil war opened up new cultural possibilities which might potentially have favoured further practical elaboration of Renau's vision had not the critical military situation facing the Republic also exacerbated its internal tensions. As the social and political revolution triggered by the conflict raised the stakes of cultural politics too, Republican cultural producers had to balance increasingly urgent artistic and political demands. Renau, who occupied the post of General Director of Fine Arts from September 1936 to April 1938 and was thus a prominent figure in the cultural mobilisation process, indicated how such demands could be reconciled. More problematic, however, were the ambivalent attitudes displayed by both artistic and political vanguards towards the grass-roots revolutionary situation allowing unprecedented power to the 'people'. In this regard, Republican cultural strategies would echo the radical principles advocated by Renau while reducing their democratising potential.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AEAR – Asociación de Escritores y Artistas Revolucionarios

AGA – Archivo General de la Administración

AHPCE – Archivo Histórico del Partido Comunista de España

AIA – Alianza de Intelectuales Antifascistas

AIDC – Alianza de Intelectuales para la Defensa de la Cultura

CDMH – Centro Documental de la Memoria Histórica

CEDA – Confederación Española de Derechas Autónomas

CNT – Confederación Nacional del Trabajo

FUE – Federación Universitaria Escolar

GDFA – General Directorate of Fine Arts (Dirección General de Bellas Artes)

ILE – Instituto Libre de Enseñanza

PCE – Partido Comunista de España

PSOE – Partido Socialista Obrero Español

UEAP – Unión de Escritores y Artistas Proletarios

UGT – Unión General de Trabajadores

INTRODUCTION

'I feel nostalgic for the future', said Josep Renau on a visit in the late 1970s to his native Valencia, one of the first since the Spanish Republic's defeat in the civil war of 1936-1939 had condemned him to nearly 40 years of exile.[1] The phrase – to be 'nostalgic for the future' – may be read in several ways. The death of General Francisco Franco in 1975 meant that Spain looked set to emerge from the 36-year-long dictatorship that resulted from the war, and it is likely that, despite his advanced age, Renau was signalling a firm desire to look ahead, to continue to work towards the future that from an early stage in his career had inspired his artistic production. The term nostalgia even suggested that it was in this future he would ultimately feel at 'home'. Renau always saw himself as a representative of an artistic and political vanguard. He never stopped seeking new forms of expression, new ideas, new insights. He probably never stopped hoping for a new world, which he considered a prerequisite for the establishment of true artistic freedom. Yet Renau's 'nostalgia for the future' may also be understood historically. For the words were pronounced upon his return to a city inextricably linked with the foundational influences of his artistic and political vision. It was a vision that experienced its first and greatest defeat under the bombs of Hitler and Mussolini, the dictators who secured General Franco's victory in the civil war, and was then buried, along with all positive acknowledgements of the Second Republic, under multi-layered psychological, social, and institutional censorship devised by the Franco regime.[2] Nostalgia could, in other words, refer to a former time and place when another future – brighter and more audacious – seemed possible. It is the ambition of this thesis to say something about how that future was imagined, and to enrich our understanding of the historical conditions and languages by which it was shaped. Even if Josep Renau's vision can hardly be seen as representative of Republican politics as a whole, it was

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Various authors. *Nostàlgia de futur: Homenatge a Renau* (Valencia: Vetges Tu i Mediterrània, 2009), 7.

2 After the civil war, the Franco regime sought to consolidate itself through the use of various means of direct as well as discursive violence, which ultimately generated as a pervasive atmosphere of fear. There is now large literature on Francoist repression, but for a recent social and cultural overview of the legacy of war during Francoism and after, see Graham, H. *The War and its Shadow: Spain's Civil War in Europe's Long Twentieth Century* (Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press, 2012).

inextricably tied to the Republican experience. Ultimately, it was both nourished and destroyed by the same historical forces that sealed the Republic's fate.

A study focusing specifically on the intersections of art and politics in the work of Josep Renau during the Republican period is justified for a number of reasons. Renau was a prominent critic and polemicist who commented on virtually all artistic trends shaping Spanish cultural life in the 1930s. In many cases, his arguments represented one of two extremes and thus showed with particular clarity what was at stake in Spanish cultural debates. Renau also made significant contributions to national cultural developments by 'importing' to Spain artistic techniques and ideas developed elsewhere in Europe. He thus serves as an ideal starting point for studies investigating how such techniques and ideas were adapted to a specific national context. This is of particular importance when the ideas in question are originally associated with the cultural politics of international communism, which has been characterised as an inflexible monolith that was simply applied to a multitude of situations without much, if any, modification.[3] As we shall see, this was not the case in Spain, where debates about the political value of realism as well as modernism developed within specific national parameters. This meant that key concepts like realism could give rise to nationally formed associations, which must in turn affect the way we map cultural commentators' ideological positions. From this perspective, then, a study of Renau and his influence offers important insight into the lines along which political relations were established within the Republican cultural sphere. But a study of Renau must also, like Renau himself, ask more fundamental questions regarding art's social role and responsibility. This was something of a *leitmotiv* in Renau's artistic development, and here too his contributions to the national debate can be seen as a logical point of departure for a wider analysis of shifting trends in Spanish cultural producers' relation to their social environment during the volatile 1930s.

Renau's overall influence on cultural life in Replican Spain is difficult to ascertain with any exactitude, but his participation in national cultural and political organisations, and, above all, his appointment as General Director of Fine Arts, grant his work an undeniable national dimension. As we shall see, his high position in official cultural politics during the war was not used to exercise strictly prescriptive control over Republican cultural production, but the radical ideas advocated by him found wider

[3] The notion that Renau, for example, led a group of orthodox Stalinists who sought to impose a uniform socialist realist doctrine in Spain appears most clearly in Trapiello, A. *Las armas y las letras: literatura y guerra civil (1936-1939)* (Barcelona: Destino, 2011), 217.

resonance in the particular circumstances that the war engendered, and his leadership reinforced in this sense a development driven by a multitude of actors.[4] On the local level, however – that is, within the progressive cultural scene of Valencia – it is clear that Renau's influence was crucial throughout the Republican period. Here his role was above all that of a cultural entrepreneur, a person who launched a series of initiatives and possessed a great talent for securing his colleagues' support for new projects. Insofar as Renau could continue to work through personal contacts also during the war, these abilities would, of course, have a direct impact on the national level too. In such cases we must further underscore the importance of Renau as part of the reason why the cultural politics of the wartime Republic took the form it did.

Before we examine how the work of Renau has been assessed in the existing literature, it will be useful to furnish a short character portrait, not least because it will help us understand why he was so influential at a local level. First of all, there is little doubt that Renau was a very charismatic, warm, and energetic figure who impressed colleagues and scholars alike. The Valencian art historian Francisco Agramunt has described him as a person of 'enormous vitality' – a compulsive talker, sometimes a bit 'cheeky' in familiar conversation, but nonetheless exhibiting the most 'perfect kindness' and the most 'unpretentious manners' that one could imagine.[5] Such eulogising words may not have resonated with everyone who met him, but many were certainly struck, especially at the early stages of his career, by his immense energy. An interview with the artist published in 1929, just after he had mounted his first solo exhibition to great critical acclaim, described him as a youthful rebel who stuttered, not because of any real speech impediment, but as a result of 'excessive speed', out of sheer 'dynamism'.[6] In addition to his animated spirit, Renau also impressed his contemporaries with his acute intelligence. One of his two younger brothers, Juan, wrote in his 1953 memoirs that he had never come across anyone gifted with such capacity for learning.[7] An almost identical judgement was passed in an 1979 interview by Josep Renau's personal secretary during the civil war years, Antonio Deltoro, who called Renau an exceptional 'natural talent', the like of whom he had not seen since the end of the civil war.[8] Such

4 See Chapter 8.

5 Agramunt Lacruz, F. *La vanguardia artística valenciana de los años treinta: arte y compromiso político en la II República* (Valencia: Generalitat Valenciana, 2006), 184.

6 Miñana, F. ' Biografía de un hombre de veintiún años (Renau Beger, dibujante, baja, 48)' *La Semana* Gráfica, 30 March 1929. Also quoted in Forment, A. *Josep Renau: Historia d'un fotomuntador* (Catarroja: Editorial Afers, 1997), 58.

7 Renau, J. *Pasos y Sombras: Autopsia* (Mexico: Coleccion Aquelarre, 1953), 206, 347.

8 CDMH (Salamanca), Fuentes_Orales-Mexico, no 32.

claims may seem hyperbolic but were not without foundation. Having been taken out of school before the age of 10, Renau became an autodidact of unconventional but wide-ranging erudition.[9] He was never a great or profoundly innovative theorist, but his ability to synthesise acquired knowledge, combined with his explosive energy, made him formidable opponent in intellectual and political debates. His writing, strongly coloured by a style often seen in avant-garde manifestos, moreover showed effective command of rhetorical techniques used to enhance the presentation of his ideas and build dramatic tension. His vivid prose holds the attention of the reader and constituted in itself a great part of his overall ability to engage and inspire his audiences.

Yet the most important among Josep Renau's personality traits was, no doubt, the fact that he combined intellectual and creative talent with an indomitable enthusiasm and confidence. He 'radiated optimism', according to the Valencian painter and sculptor Rafael Pérez Contel, who was a close friend of Renau's throughout the Republican period.[10] This disposition would naturally have boosted Renau's enterprising drive, his readiness to take initiatives, and his ability to gain support for his ideas. It also helps to explain some of his remarkable achievements, not least during the war, when he took on a series of complex tasks – crucial among them protecting Spain’s artistic heritage from war-related damage – with significant success.[11] But Renau's positive outlook was not unproblematic. The more reserved view of Alejandro Renau – the second of the three brothers – regarding his elder sibling indicates that Josep at times allowed his optimism to cloud his judgement on everyday matters and skew his view of immediate reality. There was, according to Alejandro, a 'lack of balance' in his character that sometimes made family life and relations suffer.[12] Even his admiring younger brother Juan points to the price of Josep's extraordinary artistic and political drive when suggesting that he was

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[9] According to Renau's own account, he was taken out of school at the age of eight or nine, as his father wanted him to focus on his artistic training. See Renau's introduction to the facsimile version of *Nueva Cultura*, 'Notas al margen de nueva cultura', which apart from appearing in the first facsimile edition (Vaduz: Topos Verlag, 1977) is available in digitalised format from www.faximil.com and reproduced in its entirety in Brihuega, J. (Ed.) *Josep Renau (1907-1982): Compromís i Cultura* (Valencia: Universitat de Valéncia, 2007), 458-486. As the first facsimile edition is relatively difficult to find, and the digital version missing page numbers, all subsequent references to this text will include page numbers corresponding to the catalogue edited by Brihuega. The reference to Renau's school leaving age can be found on 460f.

[10] Pérez Contel, R. *Artistas en Valencia 1936-1939 (Vol. 1-2)* (Valencia: Conselleria de Cultura, Educacció i Ciència, 1986), 268.

[11] The measures taken to protect the heritage were later copied by other countries in the Second World War, for example. For a detailed overview of this aspect of Renau's work, see Cabañas Bravo in *Josep Renau: Arte y Propaganda en Guerra* (Salamanca: Ministerio de Cultura, 2007).

[12] Bellón, F. *Josep Renau: la abrumadora responsabilidad del arte* (Valencia: Institució Alfons el Magnànim, Diputació de València, 2008), 89f.

prepared to sacrifice everything – career, family, even himself – to realise his ideals.[13] Ultimately, then, Josep Renau was an artist guided by his dreams and, above all, a burning desire to give these dreams a tangible materiality. Indeed, Renau's audacity and strength suggested to his admirers that such achievements may not have been beyond him. 'If life were not so short', Juan wrote regarding his oldest brother, 'he would have turned into reality the whole fantasy of the *Arabian Nights*.'[14] Such words offer an apt and perhaps – from the perspective of the twenty-first century – suitably ambiguous description of a man who dedicated his art to the struggle for a future communist utopia.

Strengths and limitations of existing scholarship

The starting point for scholarly investigations into the work of Renau was his participation in the Spanish contribution to the Venice Biennale in 1976, which provided an overview of the Spanish avant-garde from 1936 up to that year.[15] The interest generated by Renau's involvement led two years later to his first solo exhibition in his native country since he had been forced into exile, thirty-nine years earlier.[16] The death of Franco in 1975 and the gradual dissolution of his dictatorship allowed for renewed critical interest in Renau's work, and even inspired the artist himself to return periodically to Valencia and Madrid, where his talks and lectures attracted great attention from both academics and media. His definitive return to Spain would never become reality, though, even if his private papers and archive were donated to the people of Valencia through the creation of the Josep Renau Foundation in 1978.[17]

While Renau seems to have come into focus in the latter half of the 1970s, historical research on the early Spanish avant-garde more generally began to take shape somewhat earlier, in the late 1960s and early 1970.[18] Among the wealth of literature that emerged over the subsequent decades, works by Jaime Brihuega and Miguel Ángel Gamonal Torres remain foundational to studies of visual arts in the Republican period.[19]

[13] Renau, J. *Pasos y Sombras*, 345.

[14] Ibid.

[15] See the catalogue Bozal, Valeriano (Ed.) *España. Vanguardia artística y realidad social: 1936-1976* (Barcelona: Gustavo Gili, 1976).

[16] There is also a catalogue from this exhibition: *Josep Renau* (Madrid: Ministerio de Cultura, 1978).

[17] Renau died and was buried in East Berlin, the city where he had lived since 1958.

[18] In this regard Jaime Brihuega has highlighted the role of Vicente Aguilera Cerni, one of the major figures in contemporary Spanish art criticism and art history. See Brihuega's introduction to Arturo Angel Madrigal Pascual's *Arte y Compromiso: España, 1917-1936* (Madrid: Fundación de Estudios Libertarios Anselmo Lorenzo, 2002). Another important early study was made by Manuel Tuñón de Lara. See *Medio Siglo de Cultura Española 1885-1936* (Barcelona: Buguera, 1970).

[19] Two foundational books by Brihuega are *Las vanguardias artísticas en España 1909-1936* (Madrid: Itsmo, 1981) and *La vanguardia y la República* (Madrid: Cátedra, 1982). The most relevant work by Gamonal Torres is *Arte y Política en la Guerra Civil Española. El Caso Republicano* (Granada:

The writings of Manuel Aznar Soler have contributed greatly to the history of progressive political engagement among Spanish interwar intellectuals.[20] The works of these historians provide indispensable background material for any study of Renau, and more recent publications have continued to enrich our understanding of the Spanish avant-garde.[21] Yet while the literature as whole has thus grown in both quantitative and qualitative terms, there are still relatively few works that successfully combine biographical empiricism with theoretical analysis.[22] One contribution that this thesis hopes to make is to reduce this lack by offering an investigation where the significance of the empirical detail of a particular case study is illuminated by an integrated theoretical approach.

The literature on Renau specifically took longer to form. Despite his prominent presence in public debates after the Venice Biennale and his 1978 Madrid retrospective, and despite the creation of the Josep Renau Foundation, academic interest following his 'rediscovery' produced only shorter articles, catalogue essays, and preliminary thoughts to inspire further investigation.[23] A book-length biography did not appear until 1997,[24]

Disputacion Provicial de Granada, 1987).

[20] Manuel Aznar has had a very prolific career but a key work remains his *Literatura española y antifascismo (1927-1939)* (Valencia: Generalitat Valenciana, 1987)

[21] See bibliography for a full list of relevant works. Among the titles that are particularly relevant for the visual arts we may highlight: Albaladejo Mayordomo, T. et al. *Las vanguardias* (Madrid: Ediciones Júcar, 1992); Pérez Bazo, J. (Ed.) *La Vanguardia en España: arte y literatura* (Paris: Cric & Ophrys, 1998); Madrigal Pascual, A. A. *Arte y Compromiso: España, 1917-1936* (Madrid: Fundación de Estudios Libertarios Anselmo Lorenzo, 2002); Various authors. *Arte Moderno y Revistas Españolas, 1898-1936 (*Madrid: Ministerio de Cultura, 1997); and Mendelson, J. *Revistas y Guerra, 1936-1939* (Madrid: Ministerio de Cultura, 2007).

[22] Many key works in Spanish cultural history, including aforementioned titles by Brihuega, Gamonal Torres, and Aznar, tend to provide thematic or chronological overviews that encompass a great number of individual figures. Individual case studies are in their majority purely empirical, while theoretical works generally contain little empirical data.

[23] See early essays by Manuel García García, Tomas Llorens and Valeriano Bozal in the catalogue for the 1978 exhibition *Josep Renau*. Generally, scholarly interest in Renau seems to have faded in the 1980s – which, in the view of Brihuega, can be seen as a symptom of the unfashionable status accorded political art during that decade. Another factor may well have been the generally poor reception of the 1978 solo exhibition. See the first chapter of García García M. et al. *Josep Renau: Fotomontador* (Valencia: IVAM, 2006). The only longer academic article on Renau to be published in the 1980s was 'Los fotomontajes de Josep Renau' by artist and critic Carole Naggar (*Photovision* 1, July-August, 1981).

[24] Only three monographs to appeared before the 1990s. The first was Eva-Maria Thiele's short *José Renau* (Dresden: VEG Verlag der kunst, 1975, 31pp), which I have unfortunately not been unable to consult. The second was really a longer poem dedicated the artist and his work (Andrés Estellés, V. *Lletra al pintor valencià Josep Renau*. Valencia: Eliseu Climent, 1978) and the third an exhibition catalogue published in Mexico (Fontcuberta, J. *Josep Renau, fotomontador.* Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1985).

During the 1990s, interest in Renau gradually returned. In 1994, Doro Balaguer published her *Renau. Política y obra* (Valencia: Germania), which posed important questions but was constrained, at least in terms of its potential reach beyond a specialist and/or Valencian readership, by a constant emphasis on her personal relation with the artist and the concerns they shared, particularly with the regards to the cultural world of 1970s and 1980s Valencia. Before this monograph new work had

when Albert Forment published *Josep Renau: Història d'un fotomuntador.*[25] Since then several studies have expanded on previous research by focusing on more specific areas of the artist's career, not least the work undertaken by Renau as General Director of Fine Arts[26] and his contribution to the design of Republican Pavilion at the Paris Expo of 1937.[27] A new biography, Fernando Bellón's voluminous *Josep Renau: la abrumadora responsabilidad del arte*, was published in 2008.[28] After a much publicised return and a recent expansion of historical research, then, there is now a considerable body of literature on the personal and artistic trajectory of Josep Renau.[29] But even so there are still key aspects of his life and work which remain to be satisfactorily analysed. This is true both for empirical detail and also, even more importantly, for the theorisation of his work.

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appeared by José Luis Alcaide, Raúl Durá Grimalt, and Albert Forment, who presented individual papers on the artist at the *Primer Congreso de Historia del Arte Valenciano* in May 1992 (published in *Primer Congreso de Historia del Arte Valenciano, Mayo 1992, Actos.* Valencia: Generalitat Valenciana, 1993). There is also an unpublished thesis on the graphic design of *Nueva Cultura* at the University of Valencia, accepted in 1992: Revert Roldán, J.M. *Disseny gràfic en revistes valencianes: Gràfica i retòrica en Nueva Cultura (1935-1937).*

[25] Forment's book, which offers a thorough analysis of the artistic influences and tendencies that shaped Renau's creative career as a whole, remains the starting points for historians interested Renau's work today. It does not, however, contain any illustrations, and is thus best read together with the *Catálogo Razonado* (2004), also by Forment. This volume contains an analytical categorisation and high-quality colour prints of most of the artist's known works.

[26] The most extensive work in this respect has been undertaken by Miguel Cabañas Bravo. See especially *Josep Renau: Arte y Propaganda en Guerra* (Salamanca: Ministerio de Cultura, 2007). There are also several shorter articles by the same author. See 'Renau y el Pabellón Español de 1937 en Paris, con Picasso y sin Dalí.' in Brihuega, J. (Ed.) *Josep Renau (1907-1982);* 'El recuerdo de Josep Renau y su actuación ante el Guernica' in *Laberintos* no 8-9, 2007; 'Josep Renau, Director General de Bellas Artes' in Cabañas Bravo, M., López-Yarto Elizalde, A., Rincón García, W. (Coords.) *Arte en tiempos de guerra* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 2009); and 'Josep Renau, un joven director general de Bellas Artes para los tiempos de guerra' in Aznar Soler, M. (Ed.) *Valencia, capital cultural de la República: congrés internacional* (Valencia: Universitat de Valencia & Generalidad Valenciana, 2008). For an article on how Renau, in his capacity as General Director of Fine Arts, also contributed to Spanish music, see Bodí, F. 'Renau y el arte de la música' in Brihuega, J. (Ed.) *Josep Renau (1907-1982),* 170-193.

[27] The two main works here are Mendelson, J. *Documenting Spain: Artists, Exhibition Culture, and the Modern Nation, 1929-1939* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005) and Rosón, M. 'Fotomurales del Pabellón Español de 1937. Vanguardia artística y misión política' *GOYA* 319-20 (2007), 281-299.

[28] Mindful of the work already done by Forment and other art historians, Bellón, a journalist rather than an academic, opted virtually to exclude theoretical analysis in favour of new details concerning the artist's private life.

[29] This also includes several recent exhibition catalogues. The 2006 catalogue edited by Jaime Brihuega is particularly impressive and contains interesting theoretical essays that investigate the relevance of Renau to the art world of today. Other publications and catalogues to appear were García García, M. *Josep Renau: Fotomontador* (Valencia: IVAM, 2006), two catalogues simply entitled *Renau* (Valencia: Quaderns de l'Escola, Facultad de Bellas Artes, 1998 and Valencia: Universitat Politécnica de Valencia, 2000, respectively) and an exhibition, referenced above, of new work inspired by the precedent set by Renau, *Nostàlgia de futur: Homenatge a Renau*. Relatively new empirical material concerning Renau's photographic practice has also been presented by José Ramón Cancer Matinero in 'Tras la huella de Renau' *Archivo de Arte Valenciano* (Valencia: Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Carlos, 2006), 153-161.

Empirical investigation has naturally been the focal point of much initial research on Renau. His *oeuvre* as an artist has been systematically mapped out and chronological data carefully established, and taken as a whole it appears as if the biographical literature has left relatively few questions unanswered, at least with regards to his artistic activity. Yet by focusing almost exclusively on art historical aspects, historians have paid too little attention to the critical influences that were linked to Renau's political engagement. In this regard we are still missing a lot of empirical data. Few have addressed questions relating to the operational relations between Renau and the Communist Party, for example. Little is also known with regards to Renau's last year in Spain, when he occupied the role of Director of Graphic Propaganda in the Republican Popular Army.[30] To be sure, these gaps in our knowledge are, to a large extent, consequences of the fact that a lot of documentation has been lost, or moved to unknown locations.[31] But the relative shortcomings in the existing literature, especially in connection with Renau's political dimension, have not only resulted from archival scarcity, but are also products of the specific interpretative frameworks being used to understand Renau's art. To better elucidate the political aspect of his art and clarify its relation with its broader social environment, we need to rethink the focus of our theoretical and contextual analysis.

The fundamental fact that Renau was a politically engaged artist who wanted to use his work to 'educate' and mobilise the working classes has not, of course, escaped anyone. That his adoption of photomontage was politically motivated and followed a pattern established by artistic colleagues within the international left – above all the German avant-garde pioneer John Heartfield (born Helmut Herzfeld) – has also been widely known ever since interest in Renau resurfaced in the 1970s. Yet so far no one has published an extensive piece of work analysing Renau's visual and written work within the social and political context of the Second Republic and, in more general terms, interwar Europe.[32] This despite the fact that there are eminently good reasons to do so,

[30] The dearth of documentation with regards to the latter area is noted by Cabañas Bravo in *Josep Renau*, 218.

[31] Renau himself stated in a manuscript entitled 'Albures y cuitas con el *Guernica* y su madre' – used by Cabañas Bravo but in itself published only in part in *Cimal: Cuadernos de Cultura Artística*, 13, 1982, 20-27 – that he was involved with extensive destruction of documentation before crossing the border into France. See Cabañas Bravo, M. 'Renau y el pabellón español de 1937 en París, con Picasso y sin Dalí' in Brihuega, J. (Ed.) *Josep Renau (1907-1982)*, 167. My own searches in the archives of the Spanish Communist Party, as well as the CDMH in Salamanca produced hardly any material on Renau, and the Renau Foundation's archive, based on the artist's personal papers, contains mostly material relating to his life in exile.

[32] The possible exception to this rule would be Jordana Mendelson's chapter on Renau in *Documenting Spain*, 124-183.

since a socially and politically orientated analysis is necessary to give an adequate description of what it was that ultimately motivated Renau in his work. Relatedly, there is a need for theoretical analyses that focus less on the purely artistic environment giving birth to his work and more on the social environment for which it was destined. What is missing is not, in other words, an analysis that charts the stylistic or technical origins of Renau's art, but rather one that explicates its social function. That this aspect has escaped academic scrutiny is somewhat surprising, not least because Renau himself constantly emphasised how the function of art was the decisive criterion in any evaluation of art's social and cultural value.[33] According to Renau, artworks could not be properly analysed with reference to form and content only, but had to be inscribed in a social context.[34] Indeed, to deduce the political significance of an artwork solely from its form and content was to ignore a dimension that was generative of its historically specific meaning.

Aims and method

What this thesis seeks to do is to adopt an analytical method that has at its focus Renau's own artistic conceptions in order to paint a more exact picture of the relationship between his art and his politics. How exactly did he imagine that art should contribute to the construction of a new society? What techniques – aesthetic and rhetorical – did he use to mobilise the population around specific political goals? Why these techniques and not others? To provide a satisfactory answer to such questions it is not enough to note, without further comment, the overt political content communicated through symbols and slogans, or point to common formal characteristics in works by communist and other left-wing artists across the continent (as if identifying a correspondence between formal language and ideological affiliation in itself serves as an adequate explanation).[35] An analysis must try to say more about what it was in the social and cultural environment that informed these formal choices; that is, what it was in this environment that demanded a response. Only then will we be in a position to understand

[33] See, for example, Renau, J. 'Homenage a John Heartfield' *Photovision*, 1, (July-August, 1981), 11-16. Reproduced in Brihuega, J. (Ed.) *Josep Renau (1907-1982)*, 453-458 (for point made here, see esp. 457). See also Fajardo, J. M. 'Entrevista con Josep Renau: "La publicidad ha creado un idioma universal"' *Mundo Obrero* (28 May 1980), 21; and Hormigón, J. A. 'Un día con Renau' *Trunfo* (14 August 1976), 39.

[34] Ibid. See also Renau's analysis of mural painting: 'Sobre la forma más democrática de la pintura' in *Arte contra las élites* Madrid: Debate, 2002.

[35] This tends to be the extent to which Renau's political commitment is explored in the work of Forment, for example.

how Renau and his colleagues perceived the efficacy of their work, and how that perception related to other ideological commitments.

Such a history can be placed within a number of familiar discursive frames, not least those pertaining to debates concerning the relative merits of overtly political art, or the politics of modernism more generally. There exist relatively few published histories focusing on the socio-political dimension of artistic activities in interwar Spain.[36] This may partly be due to the fact that the ideological ambitions of politicised art movements – Surrealism in the late 1920s and through the 1930s stand as the central example here – were rarely fully appreciated by artists and writers in Spain.[37] Within literature there were thus few who made the link between Surrealism's formal experiments and the French founders' more utopian aspiration to 'change life.'[38] In this respect, however, Renau was from an early stage in his professional career one of the exceptions, at least insofar as he perceived artistic and aesthetic production to contain an important social dimension (and not only, say, a form of individual self-expression and/or private appreciation of Beauty). Yet it must also be stated at the outset that limited ideological awareness did not, by the mid-1930s, preclude an increasing number of artists and writers from using their work to comment on topical social issues. Indeed, the traumatic and disruptive experience of the civil war led, as we shall see, many progressive cultural producers to participate actively in the attempt to create a new Spain.[39] To understand the ambition of Renau and his colleagues, international debates regarding the politics of modernism may still be useful, even if it is necessary to remain alert to national specificities.

Careful contextualisation is particularly important when considering questions of cultural innovation. Artists' political engagement in Republican Spain did not always engender experiments with new art forms. Art historian Miguel Gamonal Torres is one

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[36] The clearest examples are to be found in literature and Anglo-American cultural studies. See, for example, the work of Manuel Aznar Soler, especially *Literatura española y antifascismo (1927-1939)* (Valencia: Generalitat Valenciana, 1987). See also Fuentes, V. *La marcha al pueblo en las letras españolas, 1917-1936* (2nd ed.) (Madrid: Ediciones de la Torre, 2006); and Salaün, S. 'Las vanguardias políticas: la cuestión estética' in Pérez Bazo, J. (Ed.) *La Vanguardia en España*, 209-225. See also Graham, H. and Labanyi, J. (Eds.) *Spanish Cultural Studies* (Oxford: OUP, 1995); Larson, S. and Woods, E. (Eds.) *Visualizing Spanish Modernity* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2005); Mendelson, J. *Documenting Spain* ; and Basilio, M. M. *Visual Propaganda, Exhibitions, and the Spanish Civil War* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013).

[37] Salaün, S. 'Las vanguardias políticas'. Cf. Cano Ballesta, J. *La poesía española entre pureza y revolución (1920-1936)*, 117-168; and Brihuega, J. 'The Language of Avant-Garde Art in Spain: A Collage on the Margin' in Harris, Derek (ed.). *The Spanish avant-garde* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), 84-93.

[38] Salaün, S. 'Las vanguardias políticas', 212f.

[39] See Chapters 6-8 below.

of several scholars to have highlighted the fact that Spanish artists who were positively disposed towards the revolutionary changes brought by the war failed to enact correspondingly radical changes in their aesthetic practice.[40] But we should be careful not to judge the progressive value of Spanish cultural initiatives on the basis of formal criteria only. If we examine these within their social and political context we may still discern a progressive value where existing – even traditional – forms were used before a new audience and from this perspective given a new function. As the Italian Communist leader and thinker Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) pointed out, to disseminate existing knowledge among an ignorant majority, to 'socialise' it and make it part of a new intellectual and moral order extending across the whole of society, was a more important 'philosophical' fact than any discovery of truths that remained the preserve of a minority or elite.[41] Such ideas should clearly be kept in mind when we evaluate the cultural politics pursued by the Second Republic, which essentially sought to advance, before as well as during the war, an ambitious programme for cultural democratisation.

Adequate contextualisation should also help us resist the temptation to dismiss war-time art as simply propaganda. Debates concerning the artistic value of overtly political art were common during the war, and have also been revived in later scholarly literature, sometimes in a more Manichean form.[42] The question of what should be classified as art and what as propaganda is not an easy one to settle, however. Sure enough, one may propose general definitions that appear to make the distinction relatively clear. Works of art, it may be said, do not seek straight-forward responses. They address subjects in a way that transcend the immediate historical moment from which they emerge. Works of propaganda, by contrast, aim to elicit a reduced range of responses which displace alternative points of view and directly serve historically specific interests.[43] But in most individual cases it is difficult to classify works as *either* art *or* propaganda. Individual images tend rather to sit somewhere on a spectrum, in

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[40] Gamonal Torres, M. *Arte y Política en la Guerra Civil Española*, 53. Gamonal seems to have in mind, although he does not state so explicitly, something like the constructivist art of revolutionary Russia, and is certainly right in suggesting that Spain did not produce a comparable equivalent. However, his claim that there were no future and/or utopian visions formulated in cultural circles is, it seems to me, a less than accurate description of progressive cultural activity during the war. For a discussion around this question, see Chapter 8 below.

[41] Cited in Aznar Soler, M. 'La revista Nueva Cultura y la construcción del Frente Popular cultural', 14

[42] At times Gamonal Torres, for example, writes as if there were clearly definable 'camps' supporting or opposing propagandistic art, even though most actors took a rather ambiguous position on the matter and collaborated with magazines of various tendencies. See *Arte y Política en la Guerra Civil Española*, 57.

[43] The definition of propaganda used here draws on that proposed by T. J. Clark in *Farewell to an idea: episodes from a history of modernism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 292.

which all artworks are interested to some degree. The question of what is seen as art and what is dismissed as propaganda depends on the extent to which this interestedness is visible, which in turn depends on the extent to which it jars or harmonizes with the already existing interests of the beholder. In the simplest terms, what is art for one may be propaganda for another.

To engage in further definitional exercises would, however, distract us from a more important question – and one that lies at the heart of the analysis presented here. For debates regarding the artistic value of propaganda are essentially debates about the role of politics in art. This role must take one form or another whenever art makes a claim to social relevance. The question for artists like Renau – indeed, the question that preoccupied much of the European interwar avant-garde – was not so much whether artistic production should engage with politics but how. In this regard the present-day theorist Jacques Rancière has usefully described the interwar relation between art and politics as a negotiation between two different conceptions of the avant-garde. The first, rooted in the aesthetic philosophy of German Idealism (especially the work of Schiller), is concerned with the 'aesthetic anticipation of the future' and promotes a global subjectivity that stresses 'the potentiality inherent in innovative sensible modes of experience.'[44] The second is based on a military and topographical notion, which in politics becomes linked to the party, representing itself as an advanced detachment able to 'read and interpret the signs of history' and to sum up the essential conditions for change.[45] Both conceptions described a path to a new social order, and throughout the Republican period, Renau, like many other progressive Republican producers, would oscillate between the two. To make categorical distinctions between art and propaganda is to blind oneself to the nuances and tensions that this vacillation entailed.

Finally the analysis in the thesis seeks always to address questions of reception. To come to any solid conclusions about reception is of course notoriously difficult. Besides the sheer complexity that surrounds all communication processes, historians' work is further complicated by the often acute scarcity of empirical material for analysis. With this in mind, the ambition to study reception must first and foremost find expression in an analytical perspective, not the empirical establishment of psychological 'facts'. A realistic aim is not, in other words, to say with any exactitude how a specific image was interpreted by a specific audience, but rather to suggest a set of plausible

[44] Rancière, J. *The Politics of Aesthetics*, 29f.
[45] Ibid.

interpretative possibilities when a specific image is inserted into a specific environment. The key is once again adequate contextualisation. In most cases this study will not address reception directly, but the conditions which determined an artwork's historically specific meaning.

Empirical scope of thesis

To explore issues concerning the function and social meaning of art it is also necessary to conduct close readings of the individual works themselves. As Renau was an exceptionally prolific artist, it has not been possible to present a detailed study of all interesting artworks and illustrations that he produced during the 1930s, but rather to make a representative selection. The selection has been informed, in the first instance, by the need to highlight the specific formal and symbolic aspects linking Renau's artistic practices to his politics. The focus thus falls on artworks that may be considered representative of Renau's cultural activism at a particular time, as well as artworks that indicate important changes in Renau's formal and/or political strategy. The majority of the works I analyse are quite well known – indeed many are considered cornerstones of Renau's political *oeuvre*.

The possibility of tracing change across a complex and busy era also forms an important part of the decision to base this thesis on one person instead of a group or a specific artistic trend. Groups and trends are of course present: the artistic circle gathered around Renau is often central to the analysis below, and among Renau's multifaceted visual production the focus is above all on his social realism, which is analysed from a broader European perspective. Yet apart from the fact that a biographical framework helps, in this case, to grant the historical narrative an overarching unity, the focus on an individual is valuable as it allows us to see how shifting historical forces had a concrete impact on individual life experiences. Such a perspective clearly helps to deepen our understanding of the relevant historical period, even if the chosen individual cannot necessarily be seen as 'exemplary' or 'typical' in any quantifiable sense.

Lastly, it should be noted that the specific analytical focus adopted for this thesis means that several important aspects of Renau's work during the Republican years have been excluded from the exposition below. One area that is barely touched on at all is Renau's work in advertising. This is not to deny that his advertising formed a large and important part of Renau's artistic life; the exclusion is rather a logical consequence of

the fact that the main interest for this thesis is Renau's development as a political and cultural activist. Another area that could be the subject of an entire thesis in itself, yet is only briefly addressed here, concerns Renau's contribution to national efforts to protect the artistic heritage from war damage. The decision not to explore this area is based on the fact that his work in this regard was mainly administrative and only indirectly related to his own artistic and cultural-political project. As such, its ramifications, great as they were in many other respects, are not directly relevant to the themes of this thesis.[46] Finally, it should also be noted that relatively little will be said about Renau's contribution to the Republican pavilion at the international exhibition in Paris in 1937. This is partly because Renau's responsibilities were once again predominantly administrative, partly because there are already several excellent works published with regards to the one significant artistic contribution he did make, that is, the framing of two of the five main sections of the pavilion's exhibition space with a complex series of photomurals.[47] These murals certainly constitute a important part of Renau's political *oeuvre*, but as they have been extensively analysed elsewhere, they are only briefly commented on in this thesis.

Structure of the thesis

The main body of the thesis is divided into eight chapters: five covering the pre-war Republic, and three that focus on Renau's work during the war. More space has been dedicated to the pre-war years because this was when Renau's artistic and political vision acquired its defining form, which also makes it a logical focal point for the conceptual analysis in the thesis. For the war period itself, the main question posed is how Renau's project was modified as a result of radically new social conditions. The thesis also asks to what extent Renau saw his cultural ideas implemented Republic-wide. The war section is more concise, first because Renau had less time for his own

[46] For Renau's work as General Director of Fine Arts, see Cabañas Bravo, M. *Josep Renau: Arte y Propaganda en Guerra.* For recent studies regarding the safeguarding of the heritage, see also Colorado Castellary, A. (Ed.) *Partrimonio, Guerra Civil y Posguerra* (Madrid: Universidad Complutense de Madrid, 2010); Colorado Castellary, A. (Ed.) *Arte salvado: 70 aniversario del salvamento del patrimonio artistico español y de la intervencion internacional* (Madrid: Sociedad Estatal de Conmemoraciones Culturales, 2010); Cabañas Bravo, M., López-Yarto Elizalde, A., Rincón García, W. (Coords.) *Arte en tiempos de guerra* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 2009); and Argerich, I & Ara, J. (ed) *Arte protegido. Memoria de la Junta del Tesoro Artístico durante la Guerra Civil* (Madrid: Ministerio de Cultura, 2003). For first-hand accounts written by protagonists, see, for example, León, M. T. *La Historia Tiene la Palabra (Noticias Sobre el Salvamiento del Tesoro Artístico)*(2nd Ed.) (Madrid: Hispamerica, 1977 [1944]); Vaamonde, J. L. *Salvamento y protección del tesoro artístico español durante la guerra* (Caracas: [no publ], 1973); and Renau, J. *Arte en Peligro, 1936-1939* (Valencia: Ayuntamiento de Valencia, 1980) .

[47] Mendelson, J. *Documenting Spain*, and Rosón, M. 'Fotomurales del Pabellón Español de 1937'.

work, or to develop his own ideas, and also because the available empirical data becomes much less plentiful – except in areas that fall outside of the scope of this thesis. Even if Renau was able to return to more creative tasks after April 1938, when he became responsible for visual propaganda production in the Republican Army, there is still a problem with documentation, probably because much paperwork pertaining to the last stages of the war was destroyed or transported out of the country. In any case, the epilogue could not be anything but an epilogue since the positive and innovative vision that Renau had propagated was in the war's final stages increasingly replaced by concerns centred on pure survival.

1. THE MAKING OF AN AVANT-GARDE ARTIST (1907-1930)

Josep Renau was born in Valencia on 7 May, 1907, the first child of José Renau Montoro and Matilde Berenguer Cortés,[1] The family was of relatively modest means, but as Renau Montoro taught at the San Carlos School of Fine Arts (Escuela de Bellas Artes de San Carlos) and moreover attracted wealthy clients through his restoration business, they were obliged to keep up appearances of a more comfortable middle-class life.[2] From the beginning it seems Renau Montoro had clear plans for Josep, who he hoped would fulfil the artistic dreams he himself had been unable to realize. The young boy was accordingly introduced to the classical masterpieces at an early age and given all the technical training necessary to commence his journey as a successful artist. As he proved to be a gifted and talented student, Josep was also called to help out with his father's restoration business. Such detailed and technical work did not interest him at all and to some degree only alienated him from the world of painting. Indeed, it seems the monotonous experience of restoration work strongly came to influence his early view that the art of the old masters represented, despite their undeniable value, a dead legacy in the modern world.[3]

In September 1920, when he was thirteen years of age, Renau enrolled in the art school where his father taught. Strict teaching methods and the particular aesthetic direction of the school soon clashed, however, with the independent ideas of the young man. Following a rebellious outburst Renau was expelled. His father punished him by making him work in a print shop instead, a position which he kept even after he was invited to resume his studies and complete his degree.[4] By the time he graduated in 1927 he had acquired a solid technical and theoretical base from which he could continue his artistic career, as well as a close group of friends who, with some additions, would come to constitute the nucleus of Valencia's artistic avant-garde in the 1930s. Among these were Manuela Ballester, a painter and Renau's future wife; her brother, the

1 Renau Montoro and Berenguer Cortés would have six children in total – José, Alejandro, Lolita, Juan, Tildica, and Apolo. The latter died very young, however. See Rose Martínez Montón's introduction to the recent re-edition of Juan Renau's *Pasos y Sombras* (Valencia: Editorial Renacimiento, 2011), 13. All subsequent references to *Pasos y Sombras* will give the page number of the original 1953 edition.

2 This entailed considerable everyday sacrifices, from the mother endlessly washing and repairing his one shirt and suit to the father regularly opting for cheaper, if much less pleasant, forms of public transport. Renau, J. *Pasos y Sombras*, 13f.

3 Forment, A. 'Josep Renau. Vida y Obra' in Brihuega, J. (Ed.) *Josep Renau*, 39.

4 Ibid., 40.

sculptor Antonio Ballester; Francisco Badía, also a sculptor; and Francisco Carreño, a painter with whom Renau would collaborate particularly closely with in the coming years.[5]

Commencing his working life, Renau found his main inspiration in the multitude of international magazines available in the print shop (*Jugend Kunst*, *Valori Plastici*, *Nouvelle Revue Francaise*, and *The Studio*, among others).[6] His work was already dominated in many respects by the influences of Art Deco, and simplified geometric forms and vibrant colour depicting elegant men and women clearly signalled a greater interest in urban modernity than traditional landscapes [Fig.1].[7] His formal experimentation had no stated goal, yet it clearly signalled a desire, shared by his friends, to escape the stultifying conservatism permeating Valencia's cultural environment.[8] According to Renau himself, they avoided the pastoral style associated with local master Joaquín Sorolla like 'the devil shuns blessed water', and on popular holidays, suffused with folklore, they simply left the city.[9] Neither did Spanish painting on a national level offer much in the form of spiritual or creative nourishment, according to the artist's autobiographical notes.[10] Only magazines and print culture seem to have brought new ideas and would thus constitute a predominant influence on his formation as an artist. Indeed, his interest in this regard would continue to inform his artistic development for the greater part of his life.

Renau's first exhibition

In autumn 1928, one year after his graduation, Renau went to Madrid to further his career and seek new inspiration. A visit to an acquaintance of his father's, Dr José Francés – an influential member of the Royal Academy of San Fernando and the probable reason why Renau chose Madrid over Barcelona – led to the organisation of his first exhibition.[11] It would take place in one of the city's most prestigious galleries: the Círculo de Bellas Artes.

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5 In his autobiographical notes written for the facsimile edition of *Nueva Cultura*, Renau described how he and his friends would have regular meetings where cultural and later political literature would be analysed and discussed. See ‘Notas al margen', 458ff.

6 Forment, A. 'Josep Renau. Vida y Obra', 40.

7 See also the celebrated poster for 'Exposición Guillot' (1927) and other early works reproduced in Brihuega, J. (Ed.) *Josep Renau*, 73-76.

8 Cf. Francisco Agramunt's description of the artistic environment in 1920s Valencia as provincial and dominanted by tradition and mediocrity. *La Vanguardia artística*, 44.

9 Renau, J. 'Notas al margen', 461.

10 Ibid., 462.

11 See Renau, J. 'Notas al margen', 462f.

Immediately upon its opening on 17 December 1928, the exhibition was declared a huge success. The press hailed him as an exceptional talent, and a succession of notable members of Madrid high society, princess Isabel among them, came to see his refined and 'elegant' works.[12] Critics spoke of an illustrious future, and evenings were spent, in response to rapidly forthcoming dinner invitations, in the company of the capital's cultural and political elite.[13] At a stroke, it seemed, Renau had won the recognition that most of his peers could only hope to get after a lifetime of hard work.

What fascinated the critics above all was Renau's modernist yet restrained formal language. José Francés, who generally championed a rather conservative outlook with regards to the arts,[14] wrote in his own published review of the exhibition that the artist represented 'modernity without extravagance.'[15] Similarly, *ABC*'s weekly supplement *Blanco y Negro* approvingly stated that Renau knew how to 'displace a line' without 'jeopardising the solidity of the form.' Laudably, he had taken from cubism only what was 'good and useful'. The reviewer concluded that Renau did not 'stylize' out of 'snobbism', but out of 'a passion for modern expression.'[16]

Renau's adoption and mastery of a modernist aesthetic appeared all the more impressive (and surprising) when critics considered his provincial origin. With this fact in mind, *Blanco y Negro*'s reviewer suggested that the artist's striving towards an entirely modern expression even gave rise to a paradoxical consequence, as the disparity between form and content could be such that the finalised canvas appeared completely estranged from the context providing its original inspiration:

> Llibris Vermells – Valencian peasant women – urgently requires a change of title. These peasants have lost all their countryside air, and would not seem out of place in the hall of a modern hotel. The fact is that this young artist, with his somewhat rustic looks, as if arriving from the villages of Levante's heartland, has acquired a stylistic cosmopolitanism that now impedes his understanding of his native environment.[17]

This judgement, part of a positive review, is clearly double-edged, and points to a problem that would be central to Renau's later decision to give his artistic practice a new

[12] Ibid. Cf. *ABC*, 18 Dec 1928, 24.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Forment, A. *Josep Renau*, 51.
[15] *La Esfera*, 12 Jan 1929, 44.
[16] *Blanco y Negro*, 6 Jan 1929, 22.
[17] Ibid., 23.

orientation. But it also clarifies what his art at this stage set out to do. Renau effectively used formal techniques to transform traditional subject matters and adapt them to an imagined modern sensibility. Through his art, he attempted to modernise his cultural heritage, if in ways which would later seem to himself to be mainly cosmetic.

The fact that 'modernity' was here something imagined rather than experienced is key to its significance for Renau's work. Modernity represented an aspiration, a goal to which he strived; a desire for renewal and accelerated progress. As suggested by the Introduction above, Renau's later use of the phrase 'nostalgia for the future' stand as an elegant encapsulation of what it was that impelled his artistic production. It is also important to note that this aspiration did not only harbour a temporal but also a spatial, or geographical, dimension. Modernity, as imagined by Renau, was always located elsewhere. This elsewhere, as we shall see, would correspond to different locations at different stages of Renau's career. The most notable shift in focus would occur when he turned away from the centres of cosmopolitan capitalism to instead draw inspiration from the heart of a new socialist world, the USSR – a shift which would also change what he perceived to be modernity's chief characteristics. At the time of his first exhibition, the journey that would lead him to this shift in perception had only just begun.

Renau's critical triumph in the national capital did not, as far as the artist himself was concerned, bring about a desired confirmation of his talents, but rather marked the beginning of a profound and eventually life-changing crisis. The praise heaped upon his work seemed inauthentic; 'too conventional and cold,' as he later described it.[18] His father had always told him that he would have to work long and hard before any recognition could be expected, yet success had now arrived so easily, almost effortlessly.[19] His paintings suddenly seemed emptied of meaning. Commentators spoke of him as a skilled draughtsman with a keen eye for new visual trends, but hardly anyone treated his work as serious art. His achievement, even if remarkable, was in a greater cultural context largely superficial and insignificant.

This contrast was particularly clear in the guarded admiration expressed by Dr. José Francés, who according to art historian Albert Forment had previously been fiercely opposed to any promotion of avant-garde art.[20] As noted by Forment, the terms used by Francés to describe Renau's work – 'illustration' and 'magazine art' (*arte*

[18] Renau, J. 'Notas al margen', 463.
[19] Ibid., 463f.
[20] Forment, A. *Josep Renau*, 51, 53f.

editorial) produced by a 'draughtsman' and 'poster artist' – unequivocally defined Renau's work as belonging to a (lesser) commercial form of artistic creation.[21] These terms can be contrasted with those used for a neighbouring exhibition, reviewed in the same article. That exhibition, showing works by Catalan painter Juan Cardona, presented traditional motifs painted in a academic style, which despite their lack of originality were described as containing real artistic value.[22] Put simply, Cardona's academic painting was art; Renau's modern painting a form of fashionable commercial illustration. It would seem, then, that Renau was welcomed into the artistic establishment as long as his work did not make any artistic claims beyond that of being tasteful decoration. His 'modern expression' was acceptable as long as it remained inconsequential and transient.

The politics of the avant-garde

That Renau wanted to achieve more with his art became evident in the so-called Yellow Manifesto, a text that was printed and distributed among Valencia's artists and students six months after the exhibition at the Círculo de Bellas Artes.[23] The manifesto, actually entitled 'Regarding the Exhibition of Art of the Levante = Valencia, 1929,' formulated a critical response to a local exhibition of the same name and in process gave expression to Renau's far-reaching artistic vision. As made clear in the manifesto's introduction, the critique was not in the first instance directed at the work of the older generation (indeed, Renau's father, José Renau Montoro, was one of the contributing artists) but rather at the art of 'inert youth,' described as lifeless egoists enjoying comforts that other epochs had created through 'fighting and suffering.'[24] Rather than aiming to take painting further, these young artists had filled the exhibition in question with sterile landscapes and dull conventional scenes. Attacking his peer's lack of ambition, Renau, writing in first person plural, blasted:

> We want to feel the emotion, not of the form and the colour, but of the soul of the form and the colour. We want a dynamic sensitivity, emotional moisture, passionate colour, voluptuous madness.[25]

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21 Ibid. The specific terms appear in *La Esfera*, 12 Jan 1929, 44.

22 Ibid., 43f.

23 Thus called after the colour of the paper on which it was first printed. Art historian Vicente Aguilera Cerni claims, however, that the name was never really used at the time, and instead calls it 'Manifesto de Arte de Levante'. See Agramunt Lacruz, F. *La vanguardia artística*, 76.

24 The manifesto is reproduced in its entirety in Aguilera Cerni, V. *Tonico Ballester* (Valencia: Ayuntamiento de Valencia, 1986), 35-37 [fn 9].

25 Ibid., 36.

Art had to go beyond material appearance, not only to offer a more truthful and vivid image of human experiences, but also to better reflect the historical moment in which it was created. Renau demanded that it aspire to portray the spirit of the times – or, to use his own phrase, 'the moral physiognomy of an era'. Such a reflection of reality would not only reverberate in the present: by revealing the truth about a contemporary environment, the artist would also participate in the shaping of times to come. To conclude his incendiary pamphlet, Renau turned to the future with an uncompromising proposal:

> 'The future […] lies before us, it is ours and we can mould it according to our sense [*moldearlo a nuestro sentir*]. Let us move towards it, and when our today is yesterday, should our works not reflect our present concerns, should they be inconsequential to the people of tomorrow, let them be destroyed, burned, and their ashes thrown to the wind.'[26]

As well as a comment on the works of the Levante exhibition, this could well be read as a response to his disappointing and frustrating experiences in Madrid.

Renau's Yellow Manifesto was never published in any newspaper or magazine, and therefore could not, in art historian Francisco Agramunt's view, have had a great impact on Valencian society in general.[27] Neither was Renau's unpublished manifesto the first calling for a new orientation in art; only eleven months before, in July 1928, the poet Juan Lacomba had read his 'Manifesto of Young Art', which similarly advocated artistic changes the better to reflect contemporary times.[28] Nonetheless, Renau's text contained a new tone, at once aggressive and optimistic, which distinguished his manifesto from local predecessors. Never before had art adhering to traditional academic standards been criticised in such terms. According Rafael Pérez Contel, a painter who would later work closely with Renau, this tone explains in large part the text's significant influence, if not among the Valencian public at large, then at least among the city's progressive cultural circles, formed above all among the bohemian middle-class students of San Carlos art school.[29] Indeed, in his first-hand account of the Valencian art scene in the 1930s, Pérez Contel suggested that the very existence of such circles in Valencia must, to a large degree, be ascribed the inspirational presence of

[26] Ibid., 37.
[27] Agramunt Lacruz, F. *La vanguardia artística*, 79.
[28] Ibid., 75. Read at the Exposición de Arte Joven in the Sala Emporium on 23-31 July 1928.
[29] Pérez Contel, R. *Artistas en Valencia 1936-1939 (Vol. 1-2)* (Valencia: Conselleria de Cultura, Educacció i Ciència, 1986), 268f.

Renau, a presence which became even more prominent with the distribution of this passionate plea for artistic renewal.[30]

The Yellow Manifesto is, in many respects, a typical avant-garde document. With its combative language and disdain for outdated tradition, the text clearly takes inspiration from the first of all avant-garde declarations: the Futurist Manifesto, written by Filippo Tommaso Marinetti (1876-1944) as an incendiary exhortation to embrace modern sensibilities and first published in the French daily *Le Figaro* in 1909. Renau and his friends had read Marinetti's text – 'under the moonlight, as its author recommended' – some years earlier, and had been profoundly impressed by its bold propositions.[31] What fascinated the group was no doubt the audacity and intensity of the writing – adopted, as we've seen, by Renau in his own authorial debut – as well as its call to poetic courage before the new creative possibilities of the machine age.[32] Furthermore, in his own visualisation and faintly eroticised description of these possibilities, of art capturing 'emotional moisture' and 'voluptuous madness,' Renau appeared to draw on the language of Surrealism. The latter influence is not surprising, as Surrealism was the dominant international avant-garde movement at the time.

Yet to see the deeper theoretical significance of the Yellow Manifesto's content, attention should not only be paid to rhetorical affinities but also to its defence of two key ideas concerning art, ideas which were not only present in Futurism and Surrealism but arguably lay at the heart of twentieth-century avant-garde ambitions more generally. First, it called for vivid and sensuous artistic expressions, which would guide audiences towards more 'complete' life experiences. Second, it expressed an artistic desire to participate in the formation of future ways of life. Both, by extension, entailed an indirect, if not direct, engagement with questions concerning social development and politics broadly construed. Before returning to Renau's artistic development, more needs to be said about this particular dimension of avant-garde practice, which, at heart, provided the theoretical foundation informing, consciously or not, modern ideas of what art was and what it was capable of.

The political gesture of avant-garde art can, in the first instance, be conceived as a gesture of protest – a protest against the monotony of established art and the dead rationality of its guardian class, as well as against art's institutional relegation to a

[30] Ibid. Cf. Various authors. *Historia del Arte Valenciano, Vol 6: El siglo XX hasta la guerra del 36.* (Valencia: Consorci d'Editors Valencians, 1988), 14-21.

[31] Renau, J. 'Notas al margen', 462.

[32] The link between the Yellow Manifesto and the Futurist Manifesto is also made by Forment. See *Josep Renau*, 62.

separate, 'decorative' sphere.[33] This is evident in the Yellow Manifesto, but can also be glimpsed in most avant-garde tendencies from the Futurist Manifesto onwards. In its Surrealist manifestations, which perhaps embody this attitude most explicitly, such protest often took the form of playful subversion, seeking to question cultural and epistemological hierarchies through a mixing of 'high' and 'low' art forms,[34] as well as celebrations of the fortuitous, irrational, and instinctive as categories conveying valuable knowledge.[35] In this subversive mode, humour – ironic and sarcastic above all – was seldom far from the surface.[36] Sarcasm would also later be apparent in some of Renau's political art, if typically with a dark twist, but would also go beyond the confines of the art work to inform attitudes and modes of sociability among his circle of colleagues and friends. Pérez Contel highlighted this in his description of the only gallery and meeting place for progressive artist in 1930s Valencia, the Sala Blava:

> In the Sala we debated everything between heaven and earth, we argued without insults, but with sarcasm and jokes, and we celebrated successes without that kind of pedantry, that stupid seriousness so prevalent among young people.[37]

While the artists themselves doubtlessly saw such sarcasm as part of a wider rebellion against an ossified society, it appears the Valencian conservative art establishment was also quick to politicise the subversive behaviour of recalcitrant groups. According to Pérez Contel, local defenders of academic art traditions would typically refer to progressive artists, regardless of political affiliation (if any), as 'bolsheviks'.[38]

However, while the protest as such signalled an attempt to break free from oppressive conventions and institutions, there is also a deeper sense in which art can be

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[33] The most extensive and by now classic analysis of this dynamic can be found in Bürger, P. *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (Manchester: MUP, 1984). For another analysis that likewise places the rebellion against academicism at the heart of a definition of modernism, while also linking this to the prospect of social revolution, see Anderson, P. 'Modernity and Revolution' *New Left Review* no 144 (March/April 1984), 96-113.

[34] Cf. Butler, C. *Modernism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, OUP, 2010), 1-14. The mixing of 'high' and 'low' forms has also been highlighted by Jacques Rancière. See, for example, 'Contemporary Art and the Politics of the Aesthetics' in Hinderliter, B., Kaizen, W., Maimon, V., Mansoor, J., & McCormick, S. (Eds.) *Communities of Sense: Rethinking Aesthetics and Politics* (London: Duke University Press, 2009), 43.

[35] This is particularly clear in the importance attached to 'chance' and irrational behaviour in Surrealism, as well as Surrealist experiments in automatism, designed to give free expression to the unconscious. See, for example, 'Death and Desire: The Surrealist Adventure' in Nicholls, P. *Modernisms: A literary guide* (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 1995), 279-300.

[36] José Ortega y Gasset also include irony among the defining characteristics of avant-garde art. Ortega y Gasset, J. *La deshumanización del arte. Ideas sobre la novela* Madrid: Castalia, 2009 [1925], 80. See discussion below for more details.

[37] Agramunt Lacruz, F. *La vanguardia artística*, 187.

[38] Pérez Contel, R. *Artistas en Valencia*, 41.

linked to politics and questions of emancipation. Precisely by offering an alternative mode of politics,[39] art has been seen, especially in the influential tradition emerging out of German Idealist writings on aesthetics, to carry a potential to realise the utopian promises of a new community that politics proper fails to deliver.[40] Renau may well have been familiar with such aspects of the German philosophical tradition, not least since he won school prizes for his essays on art theory.[41] But even if he did not have any detailed knowledge of German aesthetic philosophy, it is nonetheless clear that the proclamations of the 'Yellow Manifesto' rest on a series of assumptions which all have their roots in this intellectual tradition. To understand fully the implications of Renau's manifesto, then, as well as to gain a comprehensive view of debates concerning the relation between art and politics in interwar Spain and elsewhere, we must briefly examine some of the foundational developments of aesthetics as a philosophical subject. At the heart of this subject lies, according to all standard accounts, the notion of art's autonomy, first elaborated in the work of German philosopher Immanuel Kant.[42]

The autonomy of art and its political implications

Kant established the basis for the autonomy of art in his *Critique of Judgement* (1790), where he was concerned with the conceptually distinct character of aesthetic judgements, or, in his words, judgements of Beauty.[43] Aesthetic judgements are formed, according to Kant, in the 'free play' of the faculty of the intellect with the faculty of perception. An object is not examined in order to find out 'what it is', but is perceived as something uniquely particular, which through its particular qualities shows something general. To recognise this interconnectedness aesthetic judgements must be

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[39] Jacques Rancière calls the politics of aesthetics a 'meta-politics' to indicate that it is a politics of representations rather than institutional influence, coercive power, etc.

[40] See below for a more detailed discussion. According to Jacques Rancière, the starting point for such notions can be found in Schiller's *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Mankind* (1794). See *The Politics of Aesthetics*, 20-30, esp. 27. See also, by the same author, 'The Aesthetic Revolution and its Outcomes' *New Left Review*, 14 (March-April, 2002), 133-151.

[41] Forment, A. *Josep Renau*, 36f. According to Forment, Renau later remembered having read, among others, Solomon Reinach (*Apollo: A General History of the Plastic Arts*, 1906), Heinrich Wolfflin (*Principles of Art History*, 1914) and Wilhelm Worringer (*Form in Gothic*, 1911). Even if these do not relate directly to the thinkers referred to below, it must be considered likely that Renau, who was by all accounts a voracious reader and interested in art theory, came across their ideas at some point in his early career. An undated note in his personal archive shows that he was, at any rate, familiar with the aesthetic theories of German Idealism later in life. Archivo Josep Renau (Valencia), 'Apuntes sueltos manuscritos o mecanografiados (El Quijote, Ideologia del Arte, Abstracion y realismo)', 2/6.10.

[42] For a good introduction, see Harrington, Austin, *Art and Social Theory: Sociological Arguments in Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Polity, 2004).

[43] Here Kant built, in a sense, on the aestheticism founded by Baumgarten in 1750, seeking to elevate a notion of the beatiful that was free of social concerns. Harrington, Austin, *Art and Social Theory*, 13.

disinterested, necessary, final, and universal.[44] Aesthetic judgements are, in other words, autonomous in the sense that they stand apart from other forms of rationality. They possess a rationality of their own, where what is experienced is the same as what is known, and consciousness is at one with the world.

A number of German philosophers followed the idea that the aesthetic experience occupied a special and elevated place in human understandings of the world. In the 'Oldest Systematic Programme of German Idealism' (1797), signed by Hegel, Hölderlin, and Schelling, art was proclaimed to comprise all ideas; hence 'truth and goodness are fraternally united only in beauty.'[45] The autonomous character of the aesthetic judgement became the autonomy of art, and Hegel, in his *Lectures on Aesthetics* (1820-29) stated that 'art has the vocation of revealing *the truth* in the form of a sensuous artistic shape.'[46]

While thinkers like Schopenhauer and Nietzsche would be more inclined to see the aesthetic experience as providing vital, if momentary, relief from brute reality, the notion of art as potential bearer of truth was retained, as we have seen, by many avant-garde artists, as well as many critics affiliated with Marxism or the Frankfurt School of critical theory. Here a dividing line soon appeared between those who saw art as a means of explicitly communicating the truth of social relations under capitalism and those who saw above all a potential for subversive protest, not so much describing, but rather intimating, by virtue of its form, an alternative existence or mode of being in society.[47] Though the Yellow Manifesto would appear to fall in the latter category, Renau's subsequent development as an artist-activist would entail rapid shift towards more overtly political modes of relating art to truth.

In order to appreciate the real significance of either strategy, however, it is necessary to refer briefly to another foundational but slightly different elaboration of aesthetic autonomy: that appearing in Friedrich Schiller's *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Mankind* (1794). In this treatise, conceived as a response to the failures of the French Revolution, Schiller advanced the view that aesthetic experience, conceived in terms of Kantian 'free play', can be instrumental both in the moral elevation of

[44] Ibid., 85. To be more precise, aesthetic judgements need to be free from considerations of use-value; they need to be free from contingency; they need to consider the object as being its own purpose; and they need to be universal in the sense that to declare something beautiful is to declare that all human beings should find it beautiful.

[45] Ibid., 118.

[46] Ibid., 121.

[47] Ibid., 121-167.

humanity and the successful establishment of a free social community.[48] As suggested by the contemporary philosopher Jacques Rancière, the key to this assertion must be sought in the fact that 'play' was here conceived as an experience where oppositions between subject and object, activity and passivity, will and resistance, were effectively cancelled out.[49] The social significance of the aesthetic experience was in other words based on a particular conceptualisation of co-existence that dissolved any logic of domination. On the basis of this conceptualisation, it was possible to envision a new form of equality. While the potential inherent in this equality would appear to be entirely theoretical, Schiller included in his exposition some comments regarding an Ancient Greek statue which arguably provided a sense of what such equality might look like in practice. He described the statue as a perfect expression of idleness and in this sense a natural product of a society where, in his imagination, there were no real distinctions or oppositions between art, politics, and life.[50] It seemed, then, that the internal dynamics of the aesthetic experience could underpin an entire social order – an order where all constituent parts contributed equally to an integrated and harmonious whole.

On this reading, Schiller clarifies several characteristics of the legacy of German Idealism in modernist conceptions of art. First, as the reference to Ancient Greece suggests, art is never simply art but always constitutes, in Rancière's words, an 'autonomous form of life.'[51] Moreover, Schiller indicated that art was not only an expression of life but 'a form of its self-education.'[52] The social importance of this fact was discerned in the aforementioned 'Oldest Systematic Programme of German Idealism' too. Here Hegel, Hölderlin, and Schelling maintained that art must provide the basis on which a common world is constructed and create a fabric of experience shared by the elite and by the common people. According to this model, the construction of a new society was not necessarily undertaken in opposition to existing power structures but through the formulation of a new collective ethos which would ultimately replace politics with universal consensus. The relevance of such dreams to interwar Europe is clear, as we shall see, when increasingly interventionist states and collectivist ideologies

[48] For a highly sophisticated analysis of the place of Schiller's *Letters* in the western artistic imagination, see Rancière, J. 'The Aesthetic Revolution and its Outcomes'. For a shorter summary of the main points, see Rancière, J. *The Politics of Aesthetics*, 27. On Schiller, see also Harrington, Austin, *Art and Social Theory*, 119.

[49] Rancière, J. 'The Aesthetic Revolution and its Outcomes', 136.

[50] Ibid., 136f.

[51] Ibid., 137.

[52] Ibid., 137.

of the 1930s employed all means of aesthetic production to mobilise their populations around vaguely defined visions of a future community.[53] In a time characterised by the entry of the 'masses' into politics, all politics became, to some extent, aestheticised. And whether or not artists were directly involved in political movements – which they increasingly were during the 1930s – their aesthetics became a part of politics. This is particularly true of the multifaceted projects launched by the interwar avant-gardes.

In Spain, the most influential interwar analysis of avant-garde aesthetics, José Ortega y Gasset's *The Dehumanization of Art*, published in 1925, would reinforce certain aspects of the German Idealist conception of art while clarifying the potential social significance of artistic innovation. To explain and justify his analytical effort, Ortega y Gasset suggested that 'pure art and science', precisely for being the activities that are 'most free and least affected by the social conditions of each era', provided 'the first instances where one can glimpse a change in the sensibility of the collective.'[54] With this idea in mind, Ortega y Gasset's essay aimed to identify the defining characteristics of what he simply termed 'new art', or 'the new style' (by which he appeared to have meant, broadly, art that departs from naturalistic representation). In so doing he attributed to this art a number of intellectualised qualities making it not only, in his terms, 'dehumanized,'[55] but also profoundly transformative. The most important of these was that 'new art' aimed to explore a world beyond the charted fields of human experience, an exploration which could potentially expand our realms of perception. In a sense, Ortega y Gasset argued, the avant-garde poet begun his work where 'ordinary' human reality ended:

> His destiny is to live his human itinerary; his mission is to invent what does not exist. In this way the poetic vocation is justified. The poet augments the world, adding to the real, which is already there by itself, a continent of the unreal. Author comes from ”auctor”, he who augments. The Latinos used that word to describe the general who

[53] See chapter 2 below for a more detailed discussion of these links.

[54] Ortega y Gasset, J. *La deshumanización del arte*, 112. Cf. Saint Simon: artists must 'serve as a vanguard in the great enterprise of establishing the public good', and 'proclaim the future of the human species.' Lorenzo, J. 'Ciencia y Vanguardia' in Albaladejo Mayordomo, T. et al. *Las vanguardias*, 34.

[55] More will be said about these qualities on pages 75-77 below. At this stage it suffices to say Ortega y Gasset's term was based on the idea that 'dehumanised' art could not, because of its abstracted form, be understood by everyone, and that its intellectualised approach to representation produced artworks with which it was impossible to engage emotionally. See Ortega y Gasset, J. *La deshumanización del arte*, 69-73, 81ff.

gained new territory for the fatherland.[56]

Ortega y Gasset, in other words, conceived of the nature of artistic invention as an opening up of new psychological possibilities, or a conquest, to continue the colonial metaphor, of new imaginary territories. Art could thus participate in the formation of the future insofar as it redefined the structural boundaries within which individual and collective subjectivities were transformed. The unreal, once uncovered, became but a new real.

That said, in the view of Ortega, avant-garde art could not be an instrument to realise the Idealist dream of a common humanity. On the contrary, its 'dehumanized' nature made such transcendental claims inherently impossible. Neither, he wrote, did 'new artists' show any interest in demanding such a role for their art. Their irreverent and ironic attitude towards canonical artistic creation was also directed towards their own production, which, in Ortega's analysis, pretended to represent no more than its own intrinsic reality.[57] In the final analysis, it wished to carry no greater social weight than that associated with games or sports.[58]

This, as we have already seen, was not the case with Renau, nor with many of his artistic colleagues. Ortega y Gasset's conclusions exercised a formative influence on the cultural environment in which they worked, as seen not least in the fact that the very notion of 'dehumanized' art often became obligatory starting points for theoretical discussions about art.[59] But for Renau, as for the Idealist philosophers discussed above, the artwork in itself should seek to communicate a transcendental truth of some kind ('the moral physiognomy of an era,' in Renau's words). If he also saw a need to experiment and to develop new forms of expression, it was because this truth had to correspond to the continuously changing conditions of history. Innovation was thus important, but should not be understood as an exploration of the unreal as pure fantasy. Rather the unreal must here be seen as consisting of hitherto unrealised possibilities, made visible by art's intervention at a particular historical conjunction. Defined in such terms, Ortega's description of the artist's work succinctly illustrates the fundamental logic of Renau's ambition, and puts into clearer terms the task described in his manifesto.

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[56] Ibid., 100.
[57] Ibid., 107f, 120-123. Cf. Butler, C. *Modernism*, 17-18.
[58] Ibid., 121.
[59] This will become clear in the analysis below, especially in chapters 2 to 4. See also the introduction by Gloria Rey Faraldos in Ortega y Gasset, J. *La deshumanización del arte*, 6-55, esp. 41.

The search for a new artistic direction

If Renau's programmatic pamphlet seemed impatient for resolute action to renovate art, his own artistic development at the time of his writing the Yellow Manifesto had, however, ground to a virtual halt. He had returned to Valencia in March 1929, where he had been received as a successful artist and instant local celebrity. Critics continued to hold his work in high esteem, and his professional career was undeniably given a significant boost as local and national clients asked for original cover designs, posters, and illustrations in ever greater numbers.[60] Yet in his autobiographical account, Renau emphasised another aspect of his experience during these years. Events had overwhelmed him, and he had gone along with the air of 'youthful euphoria', he wrote, while hiding a growing sense of disorientation and insecurity.[61] Thus, beneath the surface, commercial success was paralleled by creative stagnation, and after a while he almost entirely ceased to paint. Such assertions are particularly striking when read against the confident and aggressive tone of his manifesto produced at the same time. Perhaps that too was part of the feigned euphoria; perhaps it voiced the frustration of someone feeling trapped.[62] Either way he needed new inspiration, which for the moment eluded him whatever he did.

In this inner crisis, Renau would come question not only his own artistic practices, but also the social environment and audience for which it had been produced. Here again the protagonist's retrospective account of 1977 appears to contradict the outward signs of contemporary sources. To some extent this may well be because his autobiographical narrative was been rationalised, consciously or not, to explain the trajectory leading him to Marxism and political art. Yet there are no primary sources to directly contradict the details of his accounts, so it would be perfectly plausible to consider this a period when work commitments and public persona contradicted inner desires – a situation which in itself is far from uncommon. Either way, according to Albert Forment, popular and widely distributed national magazines like *Nuevo Mundo* and *La Esfera*, fashionable general interest publications which had begun to publish his work, may in many respects be indicative of the social as well as professional alliances maintained by Renau at this time.[63] *La Esfera* is particularly significant, as it was one of the principal promoters of Art Deco illustration in interwar Spain and a characteristic

[60] Forment, A. *Josep Renau*, 56, 59f. See also Bellón, F. *Josep Renau*, 131.
[61] Renau, J. 'Notas al margen', 464f.
[62] Renau himself did not (as far as I know) comment on the manifesto himself at any point in his later life.
[63] Forment, A. *Josep Renau*, 56, 67.

forum for 'the frivolity and eroticism' typical, in Forment's view, of the 'roaring' (*joiosos*) twenties.[64] Considered in combination with first-hand accounts and contemporary interviews, where Renau, impeccably 'suited from top to toe,'[65] was said to like the 'aristocratic life' (if only 'on the surface') and described as someone 'frequently seen dancing at social gatherings,'[66] this collaboration clearly suggest that his artistic identity remained one associated with the modern fashions of the affluent urban middle class. Insofar as a rebellious side was acknowledged, it was described as a youthful protest against academic art traditions only.[67]

But this image may be complemented by Renau's later insistence that his Madrid experience had caused disappointment in more ways than one. He had not only lost faith in his painting, but also felt deeply ambivalent about the social circles he had striven to enter. Among extravagant dinner receptions and distinguished people who could help his career, he had found no one who could offer what he really sought as an artist. Moreover, his insight into the lifestyle of Madrid's cultural establishment had generated little respect for the authority and 'refinement' it was supposed to represent.[68] If outwardly a champion of a commercial aesthetic of urban fashion, then, privately he grew increasingly disillusioned with the social classes with which this aesthetic was primarily associated.

His quest for inspiration would consequently take various forms. First it involved more organised engagement with the local avant-garde, gathered primarily around the small gallery Sala Blava, which had opened in July 1929 (that is, the same month that Renau distributed his Yellow Manifesto).[69] Founded by a ceramics manufacturer and bohemian intellectual 'seeker', Fernando Gascón Sirera, Sala Blava was modelled on Barcelona's Els Quatre Gats, a café attracting many of the city's progressive artists.[70] In the conservative cultural climate of 1920s Valencia, Sala Blava

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64 Ibid., 56.

65 Rafael Pérez Contel quoted in Forment, A. *Josep Renau*, 57. Cf. description of Renau's love of the American way of life at the time in Bellón, F. 'Manuela Ballester, hija, hermana y esposa de artista' *Laberintos: revista de estudios sobre los exilios culturales españoles* No 10-11 (2008-2009), 149.

66 Miñana, F. 'Biografía de un hombre de veintiún años'.

67 In his interview ('Biografía de un hombre de veintiún años'), Federico Miñana characterised Renau as a 'bad student' on the basis of his rebellion at San Carlos School of Fine Arts.

68 Renau, J. 'Notas al margen', 463. Renau later reiterated this claim in a stronger version, hinting at decadence and sexual promiscuity. See Bellón, F. *Josep Renau*, 121.

69 Agramunt Lacruz, F. *La vanguardia artística*, 173. See also, by the same author, 'La Sala Blava, núcleo de la vanguardia valenciana de los años treinta' in *Cimal*, 19-20 (1983), 19-24.

70 Though it did organise notable exhibtions too. Two of the earlier ones were 'Primera Manifestación Artística' in 1930 and Exposició de Pintura, Escultura i Dibuix in March 1931. The latter included contributions from Renau and his colleagues. See Agramunt Lacruz, F. *La vanguardia artística,*180f. See also Aguilera Cerni, V. 'Valencia Años 30: notas sobre ideología y compromiso' in Aguilera Cerni,

became one of the few places where less conventional spirits could gather and find mutual support.[71] According to Pérez Contel, Renau's friend and colleague, it was a kind of island, where 'shipwrecked' artists could find refuge; a 'chapel' for the youth devoted to modern artistic creeds.[72] Its opposition to dominant cultural preferences did not go unnoticed, as testified by the widely publicised debates surrounding its opening exhibition. Inaugurated on 3 July, 1929, the exhibition featured the unconventional and expressionistic works by one of Renau's favourite painters, José Gutiérrez Solana (1886-1945).[73] As the exhibition organisers were aware (the Sala Blava proudly announced that they would exhibit 'the painter of so-called ugly things'[74]), many found the sombre mood and sometimes macabre subject matter of Solana's work highly disagreeable. Yet the real controversy was caused when one of Spain's foremost champions of vanguard art and later fascist sympathiser, Ernesto Giménez Caballero, hurt local sensibilities by suggesting that Solana's dark vision depicted nothing less than the essence of contemporary Valencian society.[75] Whether Renau agreed with the latter statement is unclear, but, as we have seen, he was definitely anxious to depart from the pastoral aesthetic held up by Giménez Caballero's critics as the only acceptable code for depictions of Valencia: that is, the aesthetic associated above all with Joaquín Sorolla.

In addition to alternative artistic formulas, Sala Blava would also establish links with regional Valencian nationalism. The founder of the gallery was forced for economic reasons to give up ownership in 1930, and the venue was bought by the Agrupació Valencianista Republicana, a nationalist groupuscule founded that same year.[76] As a political phenomenon, Valencian nationalism was relatively weak, especially compared with corresponding movements in Catalonia and the Basque Country, even though it did enjoy cautiously boosted confidence around 1930, when widespread protests against the Restoration Monarchy (1875-1931) made political change seem imminent.[77] Its impact on cultural life was stronger. At the Sala, the change

V. (Ed.) *Arte Valenciano. Años 30* (Valencia: Generalitat Valenciana, 1998), 9-37.

71 Another place were they gathered was the studio belonging to the painter Francisco Carreño. See Agramunt Lacruz, F. *La vanguardia artística*, 176.

72 Rafael Pérez Contel in Agramunt Lacruz, F. *La vanguardia artística*, 178.

73 Ibid., 178-180. Date for opening from *El Mercantil Valenciano* 3 July 1929, 3. Renau expressed his liking for Gutiérrez Solana in his interview with Federico Miñana (also in Forment, A. *Josep Renau*, 59).

74 *El Mercantil Valenciano* 3 July 1929, 3.

75 See, for example, *El Mercantil Valenciano* 7 July 1929, 4. For other contemporary criticism, see *El Mercantil Valenciano* 9 July 1929, 3; *La Libertad*, 2 Jan 1930, 3. For a slightly later review, see *Mirador* 3 May 1934, 7.

76 Under this regime, the Sala Blava came to represent a broader cultural wing of this movement, which took the organisational name *Acció d'Art*. See Agramunt Lacruz, F. 'La Sala Blava', 22.

77 Historian Manuel Aznar has described the outlook of Valencian intellectuals at this time as one of

meant that the spectrum of activities was broadened, and until the gallery's closure in the summer of 1936,[78] it organised events related to literature, poetry, and theatre, as well as visual art, and became a meeting place for progressive intellectuals in general.

The reinforced presence of nationalism no doubt influenced Renau, who had been raised in a Valencian-speaking family and now found a discursive framework to distance himself from 'cosmopolitan' Madrid. This influence was first of all evident in his change of signature – from a 'Frenchified' Renau Beger to the more Valencian Pepet Renau. But he also collaborated with initiatives, especially the publishing series *Nostra Novel·la*, that hoped to expand the influence of vernacular literature and arts.[79] The aim of such ventures was intimately connected with a more ambitious avant-garde project which saw efforts to democratise vernacular letters as a strategy for regional cultural regeneration. Again, this was seen as intrinsically linked to politics, as the poet Carles Salvador, writing for the literary publication *Taula de Lletres Valencianes* (1927-1936), explained: 'we choose to write in Valencian because of politics and being conscious of the responsibilities we have as citizens. Literature, for us, is a means, not an end.'[80] In reality, the aspiration to popularise Valencian literature largely failed to materialise, however. This was, in the view of the cultural historian Manuel Aznar Soler, largely because of the absence of a sufficiently large vernacular readership.[81] Still, the conception of the project as such is important as it would have suggested to Renau the possibility of avant-gardes tied to alternative sites of modernity.[82]

Yet, even if Renau had thus taken an interest in the culture of his native region, the hope of finding inspiration or guidance in more cosmopolitan centres remained with him, and around September 1929 he went back to Madrid to work and to explore new artistic ideas. Again he would return disheartened. He had set about 'eagerly "seeking the light" among Madrid's intellectual *tertulias*', and 'got to know closely the most prestigious cultural environments of Spain's capital' as well as 'a good part of the most

'moderated euphoria' and 'prudent optimism.' See Aznar Soler, M. & Blasco, R. *La política cultural al País Valencià (1927-1939)* (Valencia: Institució Alfons el Magnánim, 1985), 40.

78 Without offering any further detail Francisco Agramunt suggests that the problem was a lack of committed collaborators. See *La vanguardia artística*, 188.

79 Ibid., 76f. See also Luis Alcaide, J. 'La ilustración gráfica valenciana en la década de los años 30' in Aguilera Cerni, V. (Ed.) *Arte Valenciano,* 91-124; and Aznar Soler, M. & Blasco, R. *La política cultural al País Valencià*, 59.

80 Quoted in Aznar Soler, M. & Blasco, R. *La política cultural al País Valencià*, 32f.

81 Ibid., 21.

82 Questions concerning the possibility of alternative sites of modernity were explicitly addressed by the *Taula*'s editors, who asked in the January 1930 issue whether it was possible to form a 'provincial avant-garde'. For a disussion of this idea, see editors introduction in Geist, A. L. & Monleón, J. B. (Eds.) *Modernism and Its Margins: Reinscribing Cultural Modernity from Spain and Latin America* (London: Taylor and Francis, 1999).

famous writers and artists of the era […].' Yet in the end he had not found 'even a drop' of what he was looking for.[83] What this would be, he could not, according to his autobiographical writings, define with any precision, but by reflecting on the nature of his second trip as soon as he had returned once more to Valencia, he would nonetheless arrive at an important clarification bringing him nearer to a solution to his creative problem.

According to Renau's autobiographical account of 1977, the one thing that was clear upon their return home in November or December 1929 was that his travel companion, the sculptor Francisco Badía, was entirely content with his visit to the capital. In contrast to his own experience, Badía had familiarised himself with Madrid's ordinary residential areas, as well as its grand museums and exhibitions, and this difference made Renau re-evaluate the way he had used his time. How come it had never struck him to take a stroll down working-class neighbourhoods? Why had he not even considered these parts of the city as a possible source of inspiration? He began to think back, and remembered the generosity of the peasants of a small village where his family had spent several summers. He remembered that it was precisely in this village that he had painted several of the works later exhibited in Madrid. Yet he had never even thought about showing any of the friends he had there the paintings that he was working on; for some reason, he was convinced (as indeed one of exhibition's reviewers would be) that they would not understand. While returning to these memories, then, the nebulous question that had troubled him since the exhibition – why do I paint? – now crystallised into a much more concrete and pressing one: *for whom* do I paint?[84] His answer – that the primary audience for his work should be the broad working classes – would entail great changes both in the form and content of his artistic production.

To complete the picture of how Renau came to this decision, a picture which at this stage relies heavily on the protagonist's own retrospective testimony, and which should thus be seen as provisional, it is necessary to briefly return, once more, to the Madrid exhibition of December 1928, and consider another outcome of Renau's experience; namely, his growing interest in anarchist literature. Probably as a result of a sensed disagreement with his benefactors among Madrid's cultural elite, he had spent his days rummaging in the city's bookshops for radical writers like Eliseo Recleus, Malatesta, Bakunin, etc. – names he had first come across at a conference in the

[83] Renau, J. 'Notas al margen', 464.
[84] Ibid.

Valencian *ateneo* some years earlier.[85] His choice of anarchism over other political directions was never explained by Renau at any length, but seems to have been conditioned by the fact that it represented the only revolutionary movement with significant popular support in the Levante, especially after the previously numerous socialists had seen their union leadership discredited as a result of collaboration with the Primo de Rivera dictatorship (1923-1930).[86] Returning from the capital in spring 1929, he had made initial contacts with the anarcho-syndicalist union CNT, at the same time as he had seen political awareness slowly spreading among other members of his closest circle. Now, in the spring of 1930, returning from his second stay in Madrid and determined to turn his new political consciousness into practice, he found that most of his artistic colleagues were similarly reconsidering their work, starting from the same overarching observation: that the cultural modernisation conceived as their fundamental goal could not be realised without a social revolution.[87]

[85] Ibid., 463.

[86] Renau mentions in his memoirs that the socialists were seen as discredited in Valencia. Ibid. 466. For a succint analysis of the relations within the left in the first decades of the 20th century, see Graham, H. *The Spanish Republic at War, 1936-1939* (Cambridge, CUP, 2002), 1-21. See also Ben-Ami, S. *The Origins of the Second Republic in Spain*, 104-127.

[87] Ibid., 465.

2. THE TURN TO POLITICS (1930-1933)

In formulating their conclusion on the cultural necessity of revolution, Renau and his companions effectively aligned themselves with a growing group of artists and writers who from the end of the First World War had maintained that art should express an overt political commitment and contribute to social change through collaboration with progressive political movements. As such, the idea of art conveying a social message was by no means a novelty of the 1914-1918 war; antecedents can be found at least as far back as the French Revolution, while in Spain the so-called Generation of 1898 had reacted to perceived symptoms of national decline by infusing their work with social critique.[1] Yet the unprecedented destruction of the Great War, the profound and many-sided crisis it generated across the continent, shaking the very foundations of European self-perceptions, brought a new tone to such rhetoric.[2] In the eyes of most progressives, as well as the majority of people suffering the war's immediate consequences, the old regime and its ruling elites, who were seen to be responsible for – if not also profiteering from – the bloodshed of the trenches, were irrevocably de-legitimised as a result of the conflict. Calls for social change acquired a new urgency, and while established power-holders were determined to defend their privileges, mass-organisations on both the left and the right began to mobilise with increasing intensity. The Bolshevik revolution of October 1917 further sharpened conflicts across the continent, as it offered a concrete example to follow and constant reminder that radical change – social, political, and cultural – could be effected without delay.

One of the first attempts to gather progressive 'intellectuals' in an international organisation came from a French group led by anti-war novelist Henri Barbusse. Taking the name Clarté, they hoped to create an International of Thought to operate alongside the International of Workers, and published a rousing manifesto appearing in Spanish translation in the cultural magazine *Cosmopolis* on 27 September 1919.[3] The material

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1 See Albaladejo Mayordomo, T. et al. *Las vanguardias*, 7-13. See also Tuñon de Lara, M. *Medio Siglo de Cultura Española (1885-1936)* (3rd ed) (Madrid: Tecnos, 1984) and Fusi, J. P. *Un Siglo de España* One of Valencia's most renowned writers, Vicente Blasco Ibáñez had gone further than most of his literary contemporaries by stating, in 1905, that art must offer a path to revolution. Álvarez Junco, J. 'Racionalismo, romanticismo y moralismo en la cultura política republicana de comienzos de siglo' in Guereña, J.-L. & Tiana, A. *Clases Populares, Cultura, Educación. Siglos XIX-XX* (Madrid: Casa de Velázquez, 1989), 366.

2 For a powerful analysis of the impact of the Great War on the European psyche, see Eksteins, M. *The Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1989).

3 Originally published in *Le Populaire de Paris* on 17 January 1919. For an overview of the initial

conflict of the World War had given way to a deeper and even more fateful conflict of ideas, the authors began, forcing people to choose 'either to maintain, or totally rewrite, from one end of the world to the other, the statutes of communal life.' From their perspective, the choice was obvious, as the war had effectively invalidated the first option. It had 'shattered appearances', had 'put into sharp relief the lies', the 'old mistakes', and the 'habitually maintained fallacies' that had been a result, in the past, of a 'long martyrdom of justice.' The time had come, in other words, to depart from this disorder and organise social life 'according to the laws of reason.' In this task, 'thinkers and artists', as 'spiritual inventors', had to play a leading role.[4] They could not form isolated elites preoccupied solely with aesthetic pleasure, but had to face 'their human duty,' which meant that those concerned with Beauty had to 'introduce it into life, and impart on it the truth'. Only by accepting this responsibility would they contribute to the formation of the 'moral accord' necessary to guarantee lasting peace.

Although the movement never advanced beyond plans and proclamations,[5] Clarté's manifesto is important here, partly because figures like Barbusse would later exert great influence on like-minded writers and artists in Spain – Renau included[6] – and partly because its political goals were described in terms strongly reminiscent of German Idealist philosophers' vision of aesthetics and art. The idea of creating new sensibilities and, ultimately, new forms of life, making possible the realisation of a united humanity, was here transposed to the sphere of politics proper and presented as a political proposal. The initial step of this transferral was not, of course, taken in the manifesto itself, but in a particular conception of revolution that first appeared with Marx. As Jacques Rancière has pointed out, this is evident in the Paris manuscripts, where Marx declared that the coming revolution will not be merely 'formal' or 'political', but 'human'. The 'human' revolution would make possible a free political community where men and women could realise their fullest potential while still pertaining to a social organisation characterised by harmony, integration, and totality. This idea provided, according to Rancière, the basis on which the political vanguard and the

development of the movement, see Racine, N. 'The Clarté Movement in France, 1919-21' *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 2, No. 2, Literature and Society (Apr., 1967), 195-208. Subsequent quotes are translated from the Spanish version.

4 As some contemporary critics noted, this was of course at odds with the materialist orientation of Marxism, to which founders like Barbusse professedly adhered. See Eastman, M. 'The Clarté Movement' *The Liberator*, Vol. 3, No. 4 (April 1920), 40-42.

5 Racine, N. 'The Clarté Movement in France', 208.

6 Barbusse's writings would frequently be reproduced in *Nueva Cultura*. It should be said, however, that there are no evidence of Renau actually having read the original Clarté manifesto.

artistic avant-garde collaborated in the 1920s and 1930s. As he puts it, 'each side was attached to the same programme: the construction of new forms of life, in which the self-suppression of politics would match the self-suppression of art.'[7] It was a programme that in general terms sought to replace a morally bankrupt social order – an order which in the eyes of many progressives showed definite proof of its continued post-war decline by allowing the emergence fascism – with a society where humanist concern for individual self-fulfilment would triumph over cold calculations of economics or utility. As in Schiller's vision of Greece, such a society required that political practices and artistic practices would no longer belong to separate spheres but constitute a single expression of life's self-formation. Initial steps towards this goal would be taken in the cultural project Renau developed towards the middle of the 1930s, in which politics and art were also understood as continually reinforcing and renewing each other.

In Spain, such ideas would begin to take shape in the late 1920s, but the years of the Great War, and in particular 1917, had also been critical in staging a new social dynamic to which Spanish artists and writers responded in increasingly direct ways. Both internal and external factors were at play, as Spain's neutrality in the war did not make the country immune to its repercussions. A war-related export boom was followed by an economic crisis marked by high inflation and unemployment, which in August 1917 prompted socialist and anarchist unions to declare a general strike. Even if the strike was bloodily suppressed with the help of the army, it nonetheless signalled, in the view of Marxist historian Manuel Tuñon de Lara, an important shift whereby political mass-organisations emerged not as organs of anarchic protest but as credible contenders for state-power.[8] Combined with simultaneous expressions of discontent among both military officers and Catalan parliamentary deputies demanding greater autonomy for Catalonia, the events of 1917 represented a severe political and ideological challenge for the Restoration Monarchy.[9] The news of the Bolshevik Revolution then triggered a period of intense social unrest: in the agrarian south among impoverished day labourers

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7 Rancière, J. 'The Aesthetic Revolution', 138. Cf. the Surrealist poet Louis Aragon's claim that: 'There is nothing more poetic that the revolution.' Various authors. *Fotomontaje de entreguerras, 1919-1939* (Madrid: Fundación Juan March, 2012), 120. For the collaboration between Clarté, seeing itself as a political vanguard, and the Surrealists, representing the artistic vanguard, see Lewis, H. *Dada Turns Red: The Politics of Surrealism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1988), 37-54, esp. 42.

8 Tuñon de Lara, M. *Medio Siglo de Cultura Española…*, 188f.

9 Events of 1917 have been seen as a crisis of hegemony, in which the elite lost its ability to direct and dominate civil society through ideological consensus. Aguado, A. & Ramos, M. A. *La modernización de España (1917-1939): Cultura y vida cotidiana.* (Madrid: Síntesis, 2002), 18f.

who suffered immense hardships under a quasi-feudal social system, and also in Barcelona where deadly labour conflicts pitting intransigent employers against increasingly radical unions. Altogether this created an atmosphere seen by contemporaries as verging on undeclared civil war.[10] Failure to resolve the unstable situation, further aggravated by political pressure resulting from military set-backs in colonial Morocco, led General Miguel Primo de Rivera to stage a coup in 1923 and impose, with the King's consent, a dictatorship that would last the rest of the decade.[11] Overall, then, a series of seismic changes, most of which were fundamentally products of Spain's uneven process of industrialisation and urbanisation, converged to produce in the post-First World War period new realities that changed the stakes of politics and generated social conflicts of an unprecedented scale and intensity.

Corresponding to these changes, there was, as indicated, a shift in attitudes among Spain's cultural producers. If 1898 gave rise to writers concerned with contemporary problems, the years following 1917 saw the emergence of public intellectuals committed to the construction of a new society.[12] Whatever form that commitment took, it inevitably had to respond to the dynamics of burgeoning mass politics. The most prominent example was perhaps Ortega y Gasset's advocacy of a new meritocracy, where 'a select minority' rather than the 'rebelling masses' would replace the lethargic oligarchy of the old regime. Yet others, especially on the progressive left, tied their opposition to the status quo to the promotion of equality and popular sovereignty.[13]

Cultural efforts to engage with egalitarian politics took a variety of forms. Early attempts to create a proletarian culture, tentative and largely unsuccessful, could be seen in Ángel Pumarega's *Unión Cultural Proletaria,* founded in 1922.[14] Later in the decade, new radical magazines like *Post-Guerra* (1927-1928), inspired by the proclamations of Henri Barbusse, similarly sought to lay the bases for a political alternative by creating common ground between young 'intellectuals' and workers. As an essential part of the

[10] For images of the Bolshevik Revolution in Spain, see Cruz, R. '!Luzbel vuelve al mundo! Las imágenes de la Rusia Soviética y la acción colectiva en España.' in Cruz, R. & Pérez Ledesma, M. (Eds.) *Cultura Y Movilización En La España Contemporánea* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1997). For a social history of class conflict in early 20th century Barcelona, see Ealham, C. *Class, Culture and Conflict in Barcelona, 1898-1937* (London: Taylor and Francis, 2004).

[11] For an extensive analysis of the politics of the Primo dictatorship, see Quiroga, A. *Making Spaniards.*

[12] Aguado, A. & Ramos, M. A. *La modernización de España*, 30.

[13] This perhaps found its most extreme formulation in playwright Ramón del Valle-Inclán's anwer to a 1920 survey posing Tolstoy's question, 'What must we do?'. 'What must we do?', replied Valle-Inclán, 'Not art. We must not make art now, since to play in these times is immoral, detestable [*una canallada*]. First we must achieve social justice.' Fuentes, V. *La marcha al pueblo,* 50.

[14] Salaün, S. 'Las vanguardias políticas: la cuestión estética', 214.

democratisation process, it also encouraged the emergence of collective art.[15] But in general terms, it was printed mass-media, together with radical book publishing, that was recognised as a principal means to have an impact on an increasingly literate and socially mobile population. As the turn of the decade saw intensified protests against the Primo dictatorship, *Post-Guerra*'s successor, *Nueva España* (1930-1931), called on 'the young' to found 'organs of opinion that bring the need for a new politics of democracy and of intervention in public life to the most remote towns.'[16] Artists and writers were but a small part of the dynamic of mass-politics, yet they would find it increasingly difficult to remain impassive before the events taking place in the next decade.

Renau's discovery of Marxism

After returning from his second trip to Madrid in spring 1930, politics rapidly became a primary concern for Renau. He felt that his earlier purely theoretical explorations in anarchism had reached their limit, and, unlike his artistic colleagues, he sought practical involvement in Valencia's libertarian circles. He became active in the Ateneo Libertario on Camí del Grau, and participated in various forms of direct action in opposition to the dictatorship and monarchy. The results of this soon left him disillusioned, however. The outcome of libertarian activism, he deduced, was almost always negative, and Renau later described how the discrepancy between the 'benevolent audacity' exhibited by fellow anarchists and the 'terrible naiveté' (*terible infantilismo*) of their practical strategy soon became apparent even to an 'nascent' and 'petit-bourgeois' revolutionary like himself. Given the lack of focus and organisational rigour, it seemed to him that these 'self-sacrificing' activists were engaged in a form of revolutionary gymnastics that showed no concern for efficacy or results. Similarly, he found anarchist approaches to cultural questions plagued by inconsistencies and even ignorance.[17] In short, anarchism, as Renau had experienced it, did not appear an effective vehicle for the social revolution he had in mind.

The open-ended journey of self-education and discovery being undertaken by Renau and his artistic circle of friends was underwritten to a degree by professionally

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[15] Fuentes, V. *La marcha al pueblo,* 56, 38. See also Gómez, M. *El largo viaje. Política y cultura en la evolución del Partido Comunista de España, 1920-1939.* (Madrid: Ediciones de la Torre, 2005), chapter 3.

[16] Quoted in Medelson, J. with de Diego, E. 'Political Practice and the Arts in Spain, 1927-1936' in Marquardt, V. H. (Ed.) *Art and Journals on the Political Front* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1997), 189.

[17] Renau, J. 'Notas al margen', 466f.

advancing careers and increased income. For Renau especially, this had been a positive side to his second stay in Madrid:

> In terms of work, I had no problems at all, [my employers] paid me well and I had more than enough to live on, even enough to buy books, lots of books, which I leafed through anxiously. With those we plugged important gaps in our knowledge, particularly regarding the latest 'isms': Cubism, the Dadaist movement – which we knew hardly anything about – and Surrealism. The two last ones fitted very well with my anarchic positions back then.[18]

The books and magazines informing Renau's cultural and political rebellion were usually purchased from a kiosk in Valencia's main square or in the International Bookshop (Librería Internacional) located on Calle Pintor Sorolla.[19] Having no experience of international travel, or personal contacts outside of Spain, bookshops were the main portal through which Renau and his collaborators could access the new ideas then traversing the continent. With regards to socio-political literature, they read and discussed *The New Russia* (1926), a travelogue and political 'best-seller' by prominent socialist writer and politician Julio Álvarez del Vayo, as well as Diego Hidalgo's *A Spanish Notary in Russia* (1929), another immensely popular account of the same genre.[20] Even so, Renau later claimed that their attitude towards the Soviet Union at this stage rarely went beyond 'eager curiosity', and that their knowledge of Marxism was virtually nil. In his own analysis, this ignorance was in large part due to the 'conspicuous absence' of communists within their immediate intellectual environment at that time.[21]

Still, at some point during this period, Renau came across a short text by one of the founders of the Russian Social Democratic Party, Georgii V. Plekhanov, entitled *Art and Social Life* (1912/13). Its impact on Renau was profound. More will be said about

[18] Ibid, 464f. Josep Renau's youngest brother, Juan, also mentioned in his memoirs that Josep would spend all he earned on political literature. See *Pasos y Sombras*, 258.

[19] The importance of the kiosk is highlighted by Bellón. *Josep Renau*, 110. Reference to the Librería Internacional is made in Agramunt Lacruz, F. *La vanguardia artística*, 24. Perhaps there is a certain irony in the fact that they would nourish their artistic rebellion with books bought on a street named after the conservative art establishment's local icon.

[20] The daily *El Sol* called *The New Russia* the most successful book of recent times. See Fuentes, V. *La marcha al pueblo en las letras españolas*, 37. Diego Hidalgo's book was also, as mentioned, immensly popular: its first edition sold out in 45 days, and by 1931 it was in its fourth edition. See the introduction by Henri Barbusse in Hidalgo, D. *Un notario español en Rusia* (4th ed) (Madrid: Cenit, 1931). These readings coincided with a general increase in popularity of political literature, which will be discussed on page 74 below. See Ribas, P. *La introducción del marxismo en España (1869-1939): Ensayo bibliographico* (Madrid: Ediciones de la Torre, 1981)

[21] Renau, J. 'Notas al margen', 467.

Plekhanov's argument below, but his central propositions – stating that progressive art must give expression to the greatest emancipatory ideas of its time, and that the abstracted styles associated with the avant-garde were incapable of fulfilling this task – provided a confirmation as well as a corrective for Renau. (In his autobiographical account, he admitted to blushing from embarrassment when reading the book, not least because his latest initiative, a very short lived magazine called *Proa*, had completely gone against Plekhanov's insights.[22]) The new ideological perspective he took from Plekhanov led Renau to search for more literature within the Marxist tradition. At its forefront stood, of course, *The Communist Manifesto*, which Renau believed made such a strong impression on him that it would determine his political orientation for the rest of his life.[23]

What was it in Marxism that Renau found so convincing? One part of the answer, provided by the artist himself, relates to his disillusion with anarchism, and the fact that his misgivings regarding anarchist tactics – centred, as mentioned, on their organisational naiveté and apparent disregard for efficacy – were echoed in the anti-anarchist criticisms Renau read in Engels' own series of articles entitled 'The Bakuninists at Work.'[24] For Renau, there appeared to be, in other words, direct correspondence between Marxist ideas and his own experience, a shared perspective that pointed to a new political home. Yet what impressed Renau above all were the foundational propositions of Marxist theory – 'the complexities of historical materialism' and 'the intricate problem of the dialectic method', as he described them.[25] These concepts seemed to provide tools to explain historical and social phenomena whose inter-connections had previously eluded him. Once he had overcome the initial challenge of comprehension, he said, 'clarity' became the 'primordial sign' of his world, and 'confused aspects' of his life were immediately illuminated. The discovery seemed to have been akin to an epiphany, a secular revelation that was probably all the more powerful for occurring in opposition to a deeply catholic environment. His discoveries not only alleviated his complexes for being an 'illiterate' autodidact – something which

[22] Ibid., 468. No one seems to have seen a copy of *Proa* and José Ramón Cancer Matinero has even suggested, for a series of relatively intricate reasons, that the magazine may never actually have existed and that the work Renau remembered in this regard was that appearing in *Murta* (1931-1932). Either way, the issue of which of the two short-lived magazine should be referred is not of any substantial consequence here.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Ibid. These articles, published in 1873, analysed the activities of Mikhail Bakunin's Spanish followers during the short-lived First Spanish Republic, 1873-1874.

[25] Ibid.

allegedly did him 'so much good' that he found himself walking around Valencia as a 'happy child in new shoes'[26] – but also gave his political and artistic activities a firm sense of direction. The grand narrative of Marxism, encompassing a total world-view, allowed him to grasp the nature of historical development and attach his vision of modernity to a cosmological truth. It allowed him, in short, to concretise the ambition expressed in his own manifesto. Through the insights of Marxism, he believed he could glimpse the future, prepare for it, and play an active part in its unfolding.

The proclamation of the Second Republic

The year of 1930 was a decisive year for Renau, as it was for Spanish society as a whole. The artist later remarked that, compared to any other period in his life, the hours at that time had 'three times as many minutes and the months three times as many days,' and that the consequent confusion was not only in his head but also, in good part, in the very air of those 'vertiginous times.'[27] In January, as a result of mounting popular pressure, the King persuaded Primo de Rivera to step down, after which a military government under General Dámaso Berenguer was formed.[28] Rather than pacifying the population, this only galvanised support for further change, and critique was increasingly directed at the King himself. On 17 August leading republicans united against the monarchy in the 'Pact of San Sebastián.' The planned general strike and military rising, intended to overthrow the regime, eventually failed, but widespread support for arrested republican politicians, as well as the two captains executed for leading the military coup attempt, nonetheless indicated the extent to which they represented the popular mood.[29] In November, a funeral march attended predominantly by workers suffered brutal police intervention, leaving two dead and forty-nine wounded, while Ortega published an influential article calling on the Spanish people to conquer and reconstruct the state.[30] In the middle of February, the King replaced General Berenguer with Juan Bautista Aznar, who formed a government together with the old monarchist parties. In an attempt to provide the regime with renewed legitimacy, municipal elections were called in April 1931. Monarchist candidates suffered heavy

[26] Ibid.
[27] Ibid., 466.
[28] An important part of these protests were driven by students and intellectuals. See Ben-Ami, S. *The Origins of the Second Republic in Spain*, 36-44.
[29] Ben-Ami, S. *The Origins of the Second Republic in Spain*, 68-103.
[30] For an account of the funeral march, see *El Sol* 15 November 1930, 3. Ortega y Gasset's famous attack on the dictatorship, entitled 'El Error Berenguer' was published on the front page of the same issue.

defeats in urban centres, where, in contrast to the politically 'controlled' countryside, the vote was taken to be a true reflection of the popular will. King Alfonso XIII abdicated, and left for France. On 14 April 1931 the Second Republic was proclaimed, prompting widespread scenes of jubilation.

The fall of the monarchy brought promise of new social possibilities, and fired the hope of the multitude who had seen their ambitions thwarted by the rigidly hierarchical structure of the old traditional order. More than merely a formal regime change, the Republic came to signify progression, a vehicle to realise the ideals of democracy and justice.[31] Yet once the initial euphoria had faded, the broad alliance that had brought the Republic into being, including republican conservatives, liberal reformists and socialists of various hues, would be severely tested, both before and after the initial provisional cabinet was succeeded by an elected republican-socialist coalition government on 15 December 1931. Not only were conservative elites, comprised primarily of large landowners allied with various clerical, political, and industrial powers, as well as sectors of the military establishment, determined to oppose any reform initiative that would compromise their interests, but differences in expectations and ideological goals among progressives would pose a considerable challenge too, and would gradually serve to weaken the new regime's social support. To a degree, these differences – significantly present also within the socialist movement itself – would manifest themselves from the very beginning, as illustrated by the reception of the Republic's proclamation in Santander, where the workers' club (the Casa del Pueblo) raised the Republican banner and the post office the red flag flag of socialism.[32] Yet the primary division here – that between reformist and revolutionary politics – would also be deepened by the minimal efficacy of Republican reform. At first, the reaction of the libertarian Sindicato Único de la Metalurgia in Valencia, which welcomed any new opportunities resulting from the regime change but did not see the Republic in itself as enough, could be said to be representative of the attitude among more radical

[31] Thus Republican campaigners arriving at a village shortly before the proclaimation of the Second Republic were greeted by the call 'Long live the men who bring us the rule of law!'. Quoted in Montero, E. 'Reform idealised: The Intellectual and Ideological Origins of the Second Republic', in Graham, H. and Labanyi, J. (Eds.) *Spanish Cultural Studies* (Oxford: OUP, 1995), 129.

[32] Martínez, F. A., Laguna, A., Ruis, I., Selva, E., and Bordería, E. 'La cultura popular durante la Segunda República: Una política de la cultura' in Uría, J. (Ed) *La cultura popular en la España contemporánea: doce estudios* (Madrid: Biblioteca Nueva, 2003), 162f.

progressives.[33] But as economic limitations,[34] strategic miscalculations,[35] parliamentary intransigence, and local failures to implement legislation all meant that the first reformist government would not fully deliver on the promises expected of the Republic, the most disadvantaged sectors began to adopt other means to achieve their goals.[36] Social tensions were also exacerbated by Republican unwillingness to reform the forces of public order, which often responded to workers' protests with extreme brutality. This was particularly galling when they were seen to be defending employers blatantly disregarding progressive legal measures, as was frequently the case in the agrarian south.[37] As a result, social conflicts intensified dramatically throughout the tenure of the first Republican government, and violent opposition to the reform project would not only come from the conservative establishment – whose first attempt to recover control of the state came with the failed military coup of August 1932 – but also from revolutionary workers whose patience was tested by the impotence of parliamentary politics to effect sufficiently rapid change.

Renau joins the Valencian PCE

Around the time when the Republic was proclaimed, the twenty-four-year-old Renau joined the Valencian youth section of the Spanish Communist Party (Partido Comunista de España, PCE). In so doing he was hardly following a general trend, for even at a time of increased political activity, the PCE remained a very small party, nationally as well as locally. Formed in 1921, it was still something of a 'newcomer' in Spanish politics, and had struggled to find a place in a radical field of politics already occupied by well-established anarchist, anarcho-syndicalist, and socialist organisations.[38] Like the CNT (but not the Socialist Party or its trade union, the UGT), the PCE had also been outlawed during the Primo de Rivera dictatorship, making it yet harder to develop an organisational base.[39] Its legality would be restored with the Republic, but years of

[33] Ibid., 162.

[34] To some extent caused by the fact that the Republic came into being at the height of the Great Depression.

[35] Most prominent among these were, arguably, relatively radical proposals to secularise education (see chapter 3 below for more detail), which alienated large sectors of socially conservative Catholics, and the failure to demilitarise public order.

[36] This included local strikes, violence, occupation and cultivation of unused land, etc. For a good account how social conflict escalated during the first Republican years, see Preston, P. *The Spanish Holocaust: Inquisition and Extermination in Twentieth Century Spain* (London: Harper, 2013), 3-33.

[37] Ibid. See esp. 30.

[38] Cruz, R. 'Como Cristo sobre las aguas. La cultura política bolchevique en España' in Morales Moya, A. (Coord.) *Las claves de la España del siglo XX: Ideologías y movimientos políticos* (Madrid: Sociedad Estatal España Nuevo Milenio, 2001), 187.

[39] For an overview of the organisational activities of the PCE during its first decade, see Cruz, R. *El*

clandestinity had left their mark. An indication of the operative method and very small size of the Valencian PCE can be seen in the circumstances of Renau's admission, which was allegedly formalised with a brief night-time meeting in a dark street behind the train station. He was made political secretary of the local committee within weeks.[40]

If Renau's endorsement of Marxism was prompted in part by his negative experience of anarchist activism and a desire to participate in a movement he thought better placed to achieve tangible change, it must be asked why he did not join the much more powerful Socialist Party (Partido Socialista Obrero Español, PSOE), one of the driving forces behind the establishment of the Republic and later a key part of its first coalition government. Renau did not address the question directly in his autobiographical account, but a number of reasons may be suggested. First, as direct consequence of its small size, the PCE actually offered – in contrast to the PSOE and its associated trade union, UGT, which operated with a rigid and bureaucratic structure where promotion was slow – better opportunities for members to have a meaningful impact on the party and local political life. Second, as indicated briefly in the previous chapter, the socialist trade union UGT had collaborated with the Primo de Rivera dictatorship. Spanish socialism was consequently seen, to some extent, as an integral part of the discredited establishment that Renau had decided to rebel against. Third, if the PCE was weak in numbers, it gained, at least in its members' own eyes, more than compensatory strength from its political convictions. This strength was not only rooted in a belief in the practical power of Marxist doctrine but also in an awareness of the importance of the communist movement internationally. Indeed, the feeling of being part of a greater political community, which through the Bolshevik revolution had already realised part of its aspiration to be a force for global change, was no doubt an intrinsic part of the uncompromising self-belief that underpinned the party's attraction more generally.[41] Its radicalism clearly appealed to restless souls like Renau who amidst political and economic crises rejected slow parliamentary engagement and instead propagated revolutionary change.

Partido Comunista de España en la II República (Madrid: Alianza, 1987), especially chapters 7 and 8. Hernández Sánchez, F. *Guerra o Revolución: El Partido Comunista en la guerra civil* (Barcelona, Crítica, 2010), 43-55.

[40] Its Valencian branch was described by Rafael Pérez Contel as consisting of 'four cats' who celebrated every new recruit by throwing a party. Cited in Agramunt Lacruz, F. *La vanguardia artística*, 290.

[41] Take, for example, the case of the university student Alejandra Soler, who joined the still relatively small PCE in 1934 after Spanish social conflicts had escalated to a stage where her engagement with the national student union, Federación Universitaria Escolar, seemed insufficient and needed to be supplemented by engagement with a bigger and more powerful organisation. Interview with the author, 22 June 2012. See also Cruz, R. *El Partido Comunista*, chapter 6.

The PCE was one of the few organisations to mount vociferous opposition to the Republic right from the start. According to the official party line, guided by the dogma of the Comintern's 'Third Period' which prohibited all collaboration with reformist forces, only the dictatorship of the proletariat was an option and anything else had to be condemned as reactionary. Indeed, a small group, including members of the PCE's national leadership, had gone into central Madrid to protest against the new 'bourgeois' regime on the very day of its fêted proclamation, provoking hostile reactions from jubilant crowds.[42] The fact that few shared the party's dismissive opinion during the optimistic spring days of April did not necessarily trouble the PCE faithful, however. Remarking on their 'total isolation' at this time, the then General Secretary José Bullejos wrote in his memoirs: 'we did not change our position, nor did we modify the tone of the propaganda. We were proud to go against the stream.'[43] Again, such attitudes would have been underwritten by the fact that many, if not most, communists were convinced that their Marxist-Leninist teachings represented a fundamental truth, and that this truth would not be altered by 'the masses' enthusiasm for superficial change.[44] For some sympathetic observers, like Renau's youngest brother, Juan, later to join the party himself, this characteristic lent communists an air of 'exalted martyrs,' 'rushing to throw themselves to the ultimate sacrifice.'[45] Not uncharacteristically, their set-backs were incorporated into a greater narrative of selfless 'heroes' pledging loyalty to an ideal, confident that they would ultimately be vindicated by history.

Despite energetic efforts to step up recruitment, the Valencian party membership remained small in the pre-civil war years. After a year of campaigning, of devoting more time to politics than to work, families, or anything else, the number of members was still around thirty, according to Renau.[46] Few would pay them sustained attention apart from the police, who in an indirect confirmation of the intensity of their labours allegedly refused to believe that the short membership list obtained from a raid on their

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42 Hernández Sánchez, F. *Guerra o Revolución*, 58.

43 Bullejos, J. *La Comintern en España. Recuerdos de mi vida* (Mexico: Impresiones Modernas, 1972), 123f.

44 Cf. Juan Renau stating that communists must 'never give in to the abortive enthusiasms of street festivities' (entregarse jamás a los entusiasmos abortados de charanga). In *Pasos y Sombras*, 289.

45 Ibid. See also Cruz, R. 'Como Cristo sobre las aguas', 189f. For a study of how similar attitudes were present in the German communist movement, see Weitz, E. *Creating German Communism, 1890–1990* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 278.

46 Renau, J. 'Notas al margen', 468. According to Fernando Hernández Sánchez, PCE had a total of 4,950 members nationwide at the time of the Republic's proclamation, mostly spread out in very small groups. The relatively low membership numbers given for specific groups in the north (Santander, Vizcaya, and Guipúzcoa), where the PCE was much stronger than in Valencia, make Renau's figure seem plausible. See *Guerra o Revolución*, 54f.

offices was the true one.[47] One reason for their failure to grow resided in practical strategy, which soon revealed a relatively sterile pattern: apart from copying and distributing material sent from the central committee in Madrid, which seems to have been the main form of operational interaction with the party's Central Committee, Renau and his comrades would organise marches, usually every other Sunday. These invariably ended in the central square, where Assault Guards faithfully waited to disperse them with their batons. Sometimes popular support was greater than others, but on the whole little was achieved.[48] Another problem, discernable in their response to the proclamation of the Republic, stemmed from the fact that standardised international slogans often failed to reflect local concerns. This was at times apparent even to the party activists themselves, as shown in Juan Renau's reflection on his first experience of activism – a demonstration against imperialist war and unemployment. 'For an instant', he later wrote, having described his wait on the central square where people were happily going about their business or heading for the beach on a hot Sunday morning, 'I'm struck by the absurdity of it all. I imagine no one speaks about war, and there are hardly any unemployed workers in Valencia. But discipline is discipline.'[49]

That said, even party discipline had its limits. It may have been the same demonstration against unemployment – which even the socialist Casa del Pueblo had suggested was virtually non-existent in Valencia – which ended in such humiliating failure that Josep Renau felt compelled to protest about it, in his capacity as Political Secretary, to the PCE's Central Committee in Madrid.[50] In his own account, their response was threatening, and it appears the Valencian section only escaped serious sanction as a result of a complete change in the national party leadership shortly afterwards.[51] Even if communists, as disciplined and self-sacrificing defenders of a cause, were 'proud to go against the stream,' there were moments when blind obedience to party hierarchy could not override members' awareness of their persistent failure to advance towards their goal.

One important characteristic of the PCE group including Renau was the

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47 Ibid., 469.

48 Ibid., 471f. The square referred to was called Plaza Emilio Castelar at the time, today Plaza del Ayuntamiento.

49 Renau, J. *Pasos y Sombras*, 312f.

50 Renau, J. 'Notas al margen', 472. Cf. Bellón, F. *Josep Renau*, 156. What exactly the letter said does not emerge from the sources but Renau was apparently unhappy about the narrow and sectarian approach of the Party at this time.

51 Ibid. The leadership change took place at the IV PCE Congress in Seville, March 1932.

members' relatively young age.[52] Politicised youth, and especially students linked to the progressive university association, the Federación Universitaria Escolar (FUE), had played a significant part in the protests against the monarchy.[53] Josep's six-years-younger brother Juan had been, and remained, active within the Valencian FUE, as was Alejandra Soler, a history student who would join Josep Renau's PCE cell, 'Ruzafa',[54] towards the end of 1934, when she was 21 years old. Greater political involvement of the young would frequently lead to a radicalisation of debates, but also to the introduction of new issues to the political agenda. Critical among these was gender equality, which would come to occupy an important part of the activities of the Valencian group. While the Republic somewhat improved the status of women in Spain and crucially passed the law of 1 October enfranchising all citizens over 23 years of age, grass-roots activists like Alejandra Soler campaigned, through both the Valencian FUE and the PCE, for further de facto recognition of women's rights.[55] Manuela Ballester too, a young talented artist, Renau's partner, and likewise a member of the Ruzafa cell, contributed to such debates through articles published in various radical magazines.[56] While men were evidently less active in these campaigns, and often found it difficult to translate gendered aspects of egalitarian doctrine into practice,[57] the increasing presence

[52] This is based on the members of the 'Ruzafa' cell as indicated by Emilio Gómez Nadal. These included, apart from Josep Renau, Manuela Ballester, the writer Angel Gaos, the student and later teacher Alejandra Soler, and Arnaldo Azzati, a writer whose father (Félix Azzati) edited the Valencian daily (founded by Vicente Blasco Ibáñez) *El Pueblo.* See *Gómez Andrés, A. & Pérez i Moragón, F. (Eds.) Emili Gómez Nadal: Diaris i records* (Valencia 2008), 386. To this group we should add Manuela's younger brother Antonio Ballester, who discussed his participation l in a 1980 interview available at CDHM (Salamanca), Fuentes_Orales-Mexico, no 9. Their young age is of course not the least surprising if this had been a cell of PCE's youth section, the Juventud Comunista (JC). Yet Alejandra Soler claims that she was never part of the JC, but joined the main party straight away, which suggests that the cell composition referred by Gómez was of the main party, if later in the Republican period, as Gómez joined at the time of Popular Front elections in 1936. For a brief overview of Gómez's professional and political career, see Pérez i Móragón, F. 'Emili Gómez Nadal, un intel·lectual en la cruilla del segle XX' *Laberintos: revista de estudios sobre los exilios culturales españoles* No 10-11 (2008-2009), 286-288.

[53] Besides protesting against the dictatorship, the FUE campaigned above all for equal access to education. For a recent account of FUE in Valencia, see Perales Birlanga, G. *Católicos y Liberales: El movimiento estudiantil en la Universidad de Valencia (1875-1939)* (Valencia: PUV, 2009). For a broader overview of the role of youth organisations in Spanish politics at this time, see Souto Kustrín, S. *Paso a la juventud. Movilización democrática, estalinismo y revolución en la República Española* (Valencia: PUV, 2013).

[54] Named after a residential area in central Valencia.

[55] Interview with the author 22 June 2012. She was particularly concerned to raise women's sense of self-worth – especially in rural areas. See also Alejandra Soler's memoir *La vida es un río cuadaloso con peligrosos rápidos. Al final de todo...sigo comunista* (2nd Ed) (Valencia: PUV, 2009). Regarding changing positions of women in politics, it should also be mentioned that the Second Republic also included, for the first time, female members of parliament. Viktoria Kent (Partido Radical Socialista), Clara Campoamor (Partido Republicano Radical), and Margarita Nelken (PSOE).

[56] See 'Una madre en defensa de sus hijos' in *Orto*, 8 (October 1932) and 'Mujeres intellectuales' in *Nueva Cultura*, 5 (June-July 1935). During the civil war she edited the magazine *Pasionaria.*

[57] Aguado, A. & Ramos, M. A. *La modernización de España*, 182. See also 261-276 for an analysis of

of such questions in political discourse signalled a new perspective, consubstantial with the emergence of young people to direct emancipatory politics towards new concerns.

Another noteworthy characteristic of the Valencian PCE was that it contained hardly any workers. Renau recalled a committee, allegedly indicative of the social composition of the local membership overall, consisting of three painters, one singer, three of four students, and an artisan.[58] Similarly, Emili Gómez Nadal, a journalist and writer, later claimed that the Ruzafa cell, of which he too was a member, was essentially one of 'intellectuals.' Although it has been suggested that the national PCE membership included a relatively low percentage of industrial workers in general (unsurprising considering the country's uneven industrialisation),[59] he stated that the Valencian section was, even so, 'a rather odd [*particular*] organisation within the PC, very quaint [*pintoresca*].'[60] Whether the last remark was meant to suggest a certain disconnectedness from the grit of 'real' revolutionary activism or simply the presence of strong idealism is not clear. Either way, an element of idealism would help to explain why the PCE recruits, who came mainly from middle- and lower middle-class backgrounds, decided to dedicate themselves to a credo of worker-centred politics in the first place. This seems particularly relevant in relation to artists and writers who combined political commitment with avant-garde experimentation. Such activists, of whom Renau is a perfect example, had already rebelled against the norms of dominant bourgeois society in their creative work and no doubt hoped that the working masses, when the revolution eventually came, would dismantle not only an oppressive economic structure but also the sclerotic cultural hierarchies that in their view held everyone imprisoned in a spiritual sense. Indeed, progressive writers like José Díaz Fernández insisted (and whether or not Renau read him, he would have agreed) that cultural revival could only spread with the rising working classes, because the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie were both exhausted as historically progressive cultural forces.[61] What was at stake here was not only material improvements for the working classes but the creation of a social order that would benefit all productive members of society by bringing greater freedoms and new possibilities of self-expression. That this was central to the Ruzafa group is

these tension which became particularly evident during the civil war.

58 Renau, J. 'Notas al margen', 468. See also Tonico Ballester interview in CDHM (Salamanca), Fuentes_Orales-Mexico, no 9, 35.

59 See Cruz, R. *El Partido Comunista*, chapter 3. See also Hernández Sánchez, F.*Guerra o Revolución*, 279.

60 Gómez Andrés, A. & Pérez i Moragón, F. (Eds.) *Emili Gómez Nadal*, 386.

61 See 'Acerca del arte nuevo' *Postguerra* (27 September 1927). Reproduced in Cobb, C. *La Cultura y el Pueblo. España, 1930-1939* (Barcelona: Laia, 1981), 163-168.

suggested by Emili Gómez Nadal's comment above, as well as by his admission that his own militancy had mainly developed on a cultural and intellectual level. To some extent this would gradually become true of Renau too, at least from 1934, when he resigned from his post as Political Secretary.[62]

Politics in the cultural sphere

Considering the fact of the PCE's relative weakness, as well as the influence of Renau's vocational interests, it is not surprising that he also came to engage in other organisational initiatives, often ones with a broader base than the PCE, and focusing to a greater extent on cultural questions. The first project was the Unión de Escritores y Artistas Proletarios (UEAP), founded by himself and his colleagues in 1932-33.[63] The name is misleading, as nor did this organisation contain many 'proletarians'. That said, the wording was not entirely of the founders' choosing. The original name contained the term 'Revolutionary' instead of 'Proletarian', but when they applied to have the organisation registered, the governor of Valencia, Luis Doporto, a Geography and History professor with old republican credentials, objected to the inclusion of 'Revolutionary' on the basis that it was 'very aggressive' and implied 'a radical cultural change', something which was 'unacceptable.'[64] Hence the organisation had to indicate its political orientation by naming the social sector it sympathised with, rather than an epithet they could apply to a majority of its members.

The motivation for forming the UEAP – an organisation undoubtedly working for 'radical cultural change' – was spelled out in dramatic terms in a call to its inaugural meeting, published in the Valencian daily *El Pueblo* on 7 May 1933. The text, attributed to Renau,[65] began by describing the state of the global economy, at the time suffering the full consequences of the Great Depression, in close to apocalyptic terms:

> A tragic wind blows across the universal landscape. The tall buildings

[62] Bellón, F. *Josep Renau*,199. The reasons for his resignation, as well as its exact date, are not clear. It may be that frustration with party strategy led him to focus more on cultural propaganda work. It may also be that the increased political repression that followed the change of government in November 1933 meant that formal leadership of the local PCE section came at too high a prince, especially when Renau's career was going from strength to strength and he and Manuela had just had their first child (Ruy, born on 5 May 1934).

[63] Founders were Josep and Juan Renau, Pascual Pla y Beltrán, Ángel Gaos, Francisco Badía, Rafael Pérez Contel, Manuela and Antonio Ballester, Emilio Gómez Nadal, Francisco Carreño, and José Bueno Ortuño. See Rose Martínez Montón's introduction to the 2011 edition of Renau, J. *Pasos y Sombras*, 19f.

[64] Agramunt Lacruz, F. *La vanguardia artística*, 274. This information originally comes from Pérez Contel, and is given in summary form in his *Artistas en Valencia*, 653. Also mentioned in Renau, J. 'Notas al margen', 473.

[65] Reprinted in Cobb, C. *La cultura y el pueblo*, 235-238.

> of capitalism crack and fall crashing to the ground in the five corners [*sic*] of the world. The administrators of this chaos speak in technical jargon of an economic crisis and formulate scientifically satisfactory yet useless recipes.[66]

Capitalist society, the text continued, was 'absurd and parasitic', and had arrived 'at the end of its destiny.' Its forms of community obstructed the course of history, and threatened 'to hinder the development of life.' The cold facts – overproduction, forced unemployment, the slaughter of 'imperialist' wars – all but spoke for themselves. Only one country had been saved from 'misery and ruin': the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR).[67]

The world was consequently being divided into two camps: one led by a bourgeoisie which was turning to fascism and another led by the working classes – the 'exploited' and 'oppressed' called to organise their self-defence. As stated by Clarté fourteen years earlier, artists and writers could not remain impassive before this 'epic struggle.' A retreat into solitude to produce art that is 'pure and dehumanised' at a time when 'all human problems acquire dramatic urgency' would be a 'cowardly desertion' and a 'crime.' In their awareness of this, members of the UEAP did not intend to turn their backs on the world. On the contrary, they aimed to immerse themselves in the 'torrent of life', and with 'intellectual arms and epic spirit' open a 'breach' in history, preparing the path for 'a new world and a new civilisation, more just and humane.'[68]

Organisationally, the UEAP was not tied to any political party, and the positions espoused by its membership stretched, according to Pérez Contel, across the spectrum of progressive politics.[69] Yet collectively UEAP was part of a new network, extending across Spain and Europe, and composed of cultural producers who sought new ways to organise in support of revolutionary sectors of the workers' movement. The first steps had been taken in France with the foundation, on 17 March 1932, of the Association des Ècrivains et Artistes Révolutionaires (AEAR).[70] Renau and his colleagues saw the Valencian UEAP as its Spanish equivalent, but another section, using a direct translation

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66 Ibid., 235.
67 Ibid., 235f.
68 Ibid., 238 .
69 Pérez Contel, R. *Artistas en Valencia*, 650-652.
70 Founded by Paul Vaillant-Couturier, together with Romain Rolland and Henri Barbusse, as the French section of the International Union of Revolutionary Writers, which had been established in Moscow in 1927. Stanton, M. 'French intellectual groups and the Popular Front' in Alexander, M. & Graham, H. *The French and Spanish Popular Fronts. Comparative perspectives* (Cambridge: CUP, 1989), 254-269.

of the French name, was also set up around the same time in Madrid, on the initiative of the writers Rafael Alberti and Maria Teresa León,[71] and yet another section appeared in Catalonia.[72] If any of them could be said to have represented Spain abroad, it was the Madrid group led by Alberti and León, not least because Alberti had the most influential international connections and would speak on behalf of the Spanish organisation at the Congress of Soviet Writers in August 1934.[73] Surprisingly, within Spain, there appears to have been no formal organisational structure to co-ordinate activities between the three sections, even if ad hoc collaboration did occur.[74] Specific initiatives involved organising exhibitions, as seen in the Primera Exposición de Arte Revolucionario, held in the capital between 1-12 December 1933, with accompanying exhibitions organised in Valencia,[75] as well as the publication of the Madrid-based magazine *Octubre: Escritores y Artistas Revolucionarios* (1933-1934).[76] Beyond these examples there are few traces of AEAR/UEAP's impact. Indeed, Gómez later remarked that the Valencian section, which Renau claimed had about seventy members,[77] was 'very superficial.'[78] Yet even so its existence must be considered significant, at least insofar as it offered a broad organisational alternative helping artists and writers to participate in the struggle for a new society in their vocational capacity – that is, as artists and writers, rather than party activists. Renau's engagement in UEAP was from this perspective an indication that, after a time of intense devotion to the party, his primary political interests would approximate those outlined in the preceding manifestos of Barbusse, where art was conceived as a function of politics and politics as a function of art.

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71 Fuentes, V. *La marcha al pueblo en las letras españolas,* 60.

72 *Octubre* (October-November 1933), 1

73 Fuentes, V. *La marcha al pueblo en las letras españolas*, 62. Indeed, the couple's contacts in Moscow naturally made them natural candidates, from an international perspective, to lead the organisation's Spanish section. See Elorza, A. and Bizcarrondo, M. *Queridos Camaradas: La International Comunista y España, 1919-1939* (Barcelona: Planeta, 1999), 195-198.

74 Cf. Agramunt Lacruz, F. *La vanguardia artística*, 276. The poet Pascual Pla y Beltrán looked after administrative matters because he was jobless. The group met in the studios of Renau, Francisco Carreño, and José Sabina.

75 See *Octubre* (April 1934), 16.

76 Alberti claimed at the 'First Congress of Soviet Writers' of August 1934 that *Octubre* succeeded in reaching the working masses. According to literary historian Victor Fuentes, however, it only reached small nuclei in 'capitals' and some parts of 'la campiña' of Córdoba, Jaén, and Málaga – who read and commented on the content and contributed with transcriptions of protest songs rooted in folklore. See Fuentes, V. *La marcha al pueblo,* 62.

77 In his autobiographical notes, Renau admitted that the contemporary claim to have 125 members, as stated in the in the October-November issue of *Octubre*, was almost certainly exaggerated. Renau, J. 'Notas al margen', 473 (fn 4).

78 Gómez Andrés, A. & Pérez i Moragón, F. (Eds.) *Emili Gómez Nadal*, 391.

3. ETHICS THROUGH AESTHETICS: THE POLITICS OF CULTURAL REFORM (1931-1933)

Renau's most influential contribution to the political life of the pre-war Republic did not materialise through either the PCE or the UEAP, despite his evident dedication to both, but rather through his collaboration with a number of political magazines.[1] Working with magazines and other print media, not only as an artist but also as a writer and editor, had the obvious advantage of allowing him to communicate his ideas to a mass audience. Such work followed naturally from his belief that art must come to the people, rather than the other way around,[2] and fulfilled an essential function in the task of mobilising 'the masses' in support of his political goals. That said, the magazines with which he collaborated did not represent a uniform party political viewpoint, even if they did share an advocacy of proletarian revolution. While magazines like *Octubre* (1933-1934) and *Nuestro Cinema* (1932-1935) were broadly Marxist in orientation, others, most notably those that witnessed Renau's beginnings as a political artist, were inspired by some form of anarchism – the primary examples being *Orto* (1932-1934), *Estudios* (1928-1937), and *La Revista Blanca* (1923-1936). *Nueva Cultura* (1935-1937) was not tied to any specific ideology but sought to operate as a forum for collaboration across the progressive left. Still, with the possible exception of the somewhat mystical work made for *Estudios* between 1935 and 1936, the overall message of his political work in this period is remarkably coherent. It constitutes an integral testament to his ideas and a vivid indication of the particular cultural environment in which they were embedded. Taken together, this work gives us a much fuller sense of his ideological outlook than does his party membership alone.

The forging of a new Republican nation

Before looking more closely at specific magazines and artworks, however, more must be said in order to situate this body of work within the broader context of Republican cultural politics. As suggested above, the arrival of the Republic meant that progressive

[1] When asked about the importance of Renau within the Valencia party organisation, Alejandra Soler, who as mentioned joined at the very end of 1934, when Renau had just stepped down from leading roles within the local PCE, said that his contributions to party activities amounted to very little. Interview with the author, 22 June 2012.

[2] See inteview with Manuel García García in García, M. et al. *Josep Renau*, 278-280.

politicians and intellectuals could finally begin a modernisation project that had found steadily growing support among reformist workers and cosmopolitan middling classes. The ideological character of this particular project was to a large degree tied to the multiform yet identifiable philosophical-political outlook of the aforementioned group of academics and writers who since the turn of the century, and with greater intensity after the First World War, had engaged with social debates and in several cases had become leading figures of the Republican movement.[3] Many had links with the Institución Libre de Enseñanza (ILE), an independent educational institute founded 1876 in protest against state interference in the academic sphere, but later seeking to participate in government-driven change.[4] In the first decades of the twentieth century, the ILE had come to act, in the words of historian Enrique Montero, as 'contemporary Spain's first think-tank in matters of politics, educational reform, and the promotion of science,'[5] and had moreover sought to cement its influence by educating a new national leadership. Conceived as an 'natural aristocracy' of 'lofty intellectual and moral culture,'[6] this leadership would maintain healthy traditions while also helping the Spain to develop and modernise. To many *institucionistas,* then, the arrival of the Republic represented first of all an opportunity to replace an obsolete oligarchy with a new elite, capable of regenerating the country socially, economically, and culturally.[7]

Yet to reform a country comprehensively, replacing the political leadership would not be enough. *institucionistas* had long recognised the need for an expansion and improvement of the national education system, both to facilitate progress and, crucially, to defuse the threat of revolution.[8] This task was tackled determinedly by the first Republican government, which devised an ambitious cultural programme aiming to instil in the Spanish population a new set of cultural values that would serve as a base in

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3 Their influence and prominence in the first democratic parliament has led many to call the new regime 'the intellectual's Republic', following in an article by José Martínez Ruiz (better know as 'Azorin'). See Aguado, A. & Ramos, M. A. *La modernización de España*, 153; For a discussion focusing particularly on the role of intellectuals in Spanish politics at this time, see also Bécarud, J. and López Campillo, E. *Los intelectuales españoles durante la II República* (Madrid: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1978) and Arbeloa, V. M. and de Santiago, M. *Intelectuales ante la segunda república española* (Salamanca: Ediciones Almar, 1981).

4 The ILE was inspired from its foundation by the post-Kantian thought of German philosopher Karl Krause (1781-1832).

5 Montero, E. 'Reform idealised: The Intellectual and Ideological Origins of the Second Republic', in Graham, H. and Labanyi, J. (Eds.) *Spanish Cultural Studies*, 125.

6 Culture here meaning something aking to German 'bildung' – i.e. the broad education by which one becomes 'cultured'.

7 In the view of Tuñon de Lara, the ILE effectively tried to facilitate the ascendancy of the middling classes to positions of power from which they had been excluded by the Restoration system. *Medio Siglo de Cultura Española*, 44.

8 See editors introduction to *Spanish Cultural Studies*, 2.

the formation of a new Republican nation. At the heart of these efforts stood a plan to reform and expand primary education. The challenge of educating a population of whom 44,37% were registered as illiterate was recognised by the first Republican Minister of Public Instruction and Fine Arts, Marcelino Domingo, who stated that the Republic aimed 'to bring about a fundamental transformation of Spanish reality so that Spain may become an authentic democracy.'[9] The creation of about 2,000 schools per year in the first biennium (even if many of these were just a single classroom) and 13,580 teaching posts between April 1931 and November 1933, at which point the incoming conservative government halted the programme, indicated a genuine determination to make that fundamental transformation happen.[10] So too did the much disputed and ultimately unsuccessful attempt to impose a teaching ban on the religious orders, who had previously had a virtual monopoly on primary education.[11] Considering that the Republic represented a secularising project, seeking to detach the population from its connection to traditional – and above all religious – authority, the reduction of church influence in education was, as prominent republican and later president Manuel Azaña said, essentially a matter of self-defence.[12] But such measures also corresponded to an idea of the moral responsibility of the state, which in the Republican view, again expressed by Azaña, had an obligation to take control of education and further 'civilisation' throughout its territory.[13]

In addition to traditional schooling, a number of influential reformist Republicans also saw art as an important pedagogical tool. As an indication, perhaps, of the Kantian roots of their intellectual training, they believed art had the capacity to alter and refine audiences' sensibilities, and accordingly granted it a pivotal role in the dissemination of new republican values. The prominent *institucionalista* Fernando de los Ríos, Marcelino Domingo's successor at the Ministry of Public Instruction and Fine

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[9] Domingo is quoted in Cobb, C. 'The Republican State and Mass Educational-Cultural Initiatives 1931-1936' in Graham, H. and Labanyi, J. (Eds.) *Spanish Cultural Studies*, 133. Literacy figures based on the census of 1930, taken from Cobb, C. *Los Milicianos de la Cultura*. (Bilbao: Universidad del País Vasco, 1995), 26. On the same page Cobb also quotes another, significantly lower estimate (33,73%) but the first has been used since it is also closer to the estimate of 42.2% given in Aguado, A. & Ramos, M. A. *La modernización de España*, 16.

[10] Ibid. The first government spent 7% of national budget on 'política educativo-cultural'. It wanted to raise the figure to 10%, but never managed to go that far, according to Eduardo Huertas Vázquez. See *La Política Cultural De La Segunda República Española* (Madrid: Ministerio de Cultura, 1988), 28.

[11] This only became law in May 1933, five months before a conservative government came to power that was determined to oppose secularisation measures.

[12] Cobb, C. 'The Republican State and Mass Educational-Cultural Initiatives 1931-1936' in Graham, H. and Labanyi, J. (Eds.) *Spanish Cultural Studies*, 135.

[13] Aguado, A. & Ramos, M. A. *La modernización de España*, 154. Cf. Article 48 in Republican constitution of 1931.

Arts, stated the case clearly in an interview of July 1932. After describing the work undertaken at the ministry, de los Ríos justified their efforts by mentioning his personal conviction that 'Spaniards' could easily assimilate 'ethics through aesthetics.'[14] Elsewhere he would also add that it was critical for the future of Spanish culture that these two factors be effectively co-ordinated.[15] Thus echoing the logic whereby a 'moral accord' could be achieved through art, de los Rios too suggested that aesthetics represented way of life and must be harmonised with collective aspirations.[16] The zeal with which the government and other organisations pursued this goal would arguably add credence to the writer Ernesto Giménez Caballero's (critical) remark, referring to educational policy as a whole, that the Republic had come to Spain 'to replace the Catholic religion with the religion of culture.'[17]

The Misiones Pedagógicas

The most emblematic expression of reformist Republican educational philosophy, and the primary means by which the dictum 'ethics through aesthetics' was to be converted into practice, was the Misiones Pedagógicas. Founded on 29 May 1931, the Misiones consisted of teams of teachers and university students, as well as cultural workers of various kinds, who travelled the Spanish countryside to visit remote villages to present educational programmes aiming, in the official formulation, 'to disseminate general culture, modern forms of teaching, and education concerning citizenship.'[18] In practice, this work would take the form of lectures, poetry readings, theatrical and musical performances (involving choirs, and, if feasible, small orchestras) as well as art exhibitions utilising reproductions from the Prado Museum and occasional cinema screenings. Although the cultural dimension of this work has received by far the most attention, both from contemporary commentators and later historians, the Misiones' lectures would also deal with practical subjects like agricultural production,[19] medicine,[20] and the characteristics of the new democratic regime.[21] There would also be

[14] *El Sol* 24 July 1932, 12.

[15] A statement of his to this effect ('...en un país como el nuestro la coordinación de la ética con la estética es esencial para el porvenir de la cultura.') is cited in Huertas Vázquez, E *La Política Cultural*, 56f.

[16] Cf. the precedents discussed on pages 30-32 and 40f.

[17] Huertas Vázquez, E. *La Política Cultural*, 20. Orginally from an essay on Azaña, Giménez Caballero, E. *Manuel Azaña (Profecías españolas)* (Madrid, 1975 [1932]), 173.

[18] *Gaceta de Madrid* 30 May 1931, 1034.

[19] Highlighted in Caudet, F. *Las cenizas del fénix. La cultura española en los años 30* (Madrid: Ediciones de la Torre, 1993), 83-106.

[20] Mentioned by Fernando de los Ríos in *El Sol* interview, 24 July 1932, 12.

[21] *Gaceta de Madrid* 30 May 1931, 1034. See also Cobb, C. 'The Republican State and Mass

sessions introducing local teachers to new teaching techniques.[22] Before leaving a location, the 'missionaries' would moreover provide some means of local people engaging in further cultural activities; typically a small library, but it could also be a gramophone with selected records, or even a cinema projector.[23] Between January 1931 and December 1933, they had visited 300 villages and created 3000 rural libraries. The theatre and the choir had gone to 115 villages, while the travelling museum had exhibited two collections of reproductions in 60 places. In total, almost 4000 villages – to some extent covering most of the country but mostly located in and around the central regions of Old Castile[24] – had had some sort of contact with the organisation.[25]

According to Manuel Bartolomé Cossío, the last director of the ILE and an admired political advisor among Republicans, the primary function of the Misiones Pedagógicas, of which he was the founder and 'mentor', was to 'counter isolation'.[26] This ambition had at least two components. First, as seen in efforts to familiarise villagers with other areas of Spain as well as with the Republic's political constitution, it was a means to reduce the distance between different parts of the country, between city and countryside, and a means, above all, to link 'isolated' rural areas with the capital.[27] The Misiones were, in other words, born out of an effort to create an integrated national identity, based on a new imaginary tied to national geography and modern state institutions. Given time, this could have played a crucial role in consolidating the new regime, as it served to alter social frames of reference and displace traditional structures of power. Politically, the Misiones was a way simultaneously to announce and secure the establishment of the Republic, while also signalling its adherence to a more inclusive notion of citizenship.

Second, the Misiones was a means of counteracting spiritual isolation. This is indicated in the founding decree's stipulation that missionaries pay 'particular attention' to the rural population's 'spiritual interests',[28] but also, and more revealingly, in Cossío's

Educational-Cultural Initiatives 1931-1936' in Graham, H. and Labanyi, J. (Eds.) *Spanish Cultural Studies*, 135.

22 Ibid.

23 Fernando de los Ríos in *El Sol* 24 July 1932, 12.

24 See maps in Holguín, S. E. *Creating Spaniards: culture and national identity in Republican Spain* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2002), 55-78.

25 See the organisations own report: *Patronato de Misiónes Pedagógicas. Septiembre de 1931 – Deciembre 1933* (Madrid 1934), xxi. Figures frequently reproduced in scholarly literature. See, for example, Tuñon de Lara, M. *Medio Siglo de Cultura Española*, 262ff.

26 Statement taken from *Patronato de Misiones Pedagógicas*, x. For a succinct biography, see Huertas Vázquez, E. *La Política Cultural*, 61-63.

27 Holguín, S. E. *Creating Spaniards*, 55-78.

28 *Gaceta de Madrid* 30 May 1931, 1034.

statement for the organisational report of 1934:

> If isolation provides the starting point for the Misiones, and social justice its foundation, it is clear that the essence of these [Misiones] stems from the opposite of isolation, which is communication to enrich souls and encourage in them the emergence of a small world of ideas and interests, of relations human and divine that previously did not exist.[29]

If there appears to be a tension here between grandeur and modesty (working for social justice and opposing isolation amounts, in the end, to creating 'a small world of ideas and interests'), we should once again recall the political value that had historically been ascribed to the aesthetic experience.[30] Cossío was first of all referring to the importance of opening up internal horizons, imagining new realities, which would in turn help the politically and culturally disenfranchised to formulate new identities – identities that would no longer correspond to the limited space that a rigid social structure had assigned them. Underpinning his vision was a recognition of potential, which could be readily translated into a principle of equality. The poet Antonio Machado, also active in the Misiones,[31] stated the case bluntly while speaking about the democratisation of culture more generally:

> What is at the heart of the movement of the working masses is an aspiration to perfection through culture... But, people say, 'How are these brutes ever going to be cultured?' What these brutes want is not being brutes. Everything that is defined as a privilege is a dead value.[32]

The categorical shift referred to by Machado was (and remains) a pre-condition of any conceptualisation of emancipation. As such, it explains the fierce opposition voiced by conservatives who claimed that initiatives like the Misiones Pedagógicas propagated an 'unrealistic' view of people or even violated a 'natural' and divinely ordained order.[33] It moreover shows why such a shift was indeed commonly sought by progressive organisations of the left, and why it constituted a central ambition of the political

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29 *Patronato de Misiones Pedagógicas*, x.

30 Cf. dicussion on the Idealist origins of modern art on pages 29-32 above. Tuñon de Lara has highlighted that Cossío, like de los Ríos, was particularly interested in the social importance of aesthetics. See *Medio Siglo de Cultura Española*, 52.

31 Machado was a member of the board of the Misiones. See first page of *Patronato de Misiones Pedagógicas*.

32 From a 1934 interview cited in Caudet, F. *Las cenizas del fénix*, 35f.

33 For a selection of hostile reactions, see Holguín, S. E. *Creating Spaniards*, 55-78. The conservative government voted into power in November 1933 slashed the budget of the Misiones Pedagógicas by half. See Huertas Vázquez, E *La Política Cultural*, 26f.

magazines to which Renau was contributing by 1932.[34] Yet it must be stressed that neither Machado nor Cossío conceived of the Misiones as preparing the ground for a workers' revolution.[35] On the contrary, if the intellectual elevation of the rural population had to entail a radical transformation of self-perceptions, it was because only this would allow an approximation of the sensibilities of the educated classes – epitomised by the ILE establishment itself – that now constituted the cultural model of the new Republican nation. Combating isolation through a recognition of equality was, in the *insitucionalista* view, above all a strategy to guarantee progress in an orderly fashion.

The initiative to extend education to parts of the population previously partially or wholly excluded from it did not stop with government initiatives like the Misiones Pedagógicas. The travelling theatre company La Barraca, founded in 1932 and led by the poet Federico Garcia Lorca, operated as an independent group performing in towns and villages,[36] while the student theatre El Búho, directed by the writer Max Aub, similarly represented an non-governmental initiative taking performances to the countryside around Valencia.[37] Although not directly linked to the Ministry of Public Instruction and Fine Arts or the ILE, these projects largely shared their assumptions, and moreover stand as eloquent testaments to the public spirit and optimism that inspired many progressives in the initial Republican period.[38] Alejandra Soler, the university student active in Renau's PCE cell from 1934, insisted in a 2012 interview that 'everyone' in those days wanted to be 'useful'. Towards the end of his life, Renau too suggested that this sentiment underpinned his work at the time.[39] Student unions moreover organised urban and worker-centred schemes, most notably the Universidad Popular, likewise intended to facilitate access to education.[40] Such initiatives stemmed

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[34] For a broad introduction, see De Luis, F. *Cincuenta años de cultura obrera en España, 1890-1940* (Madrid: Pablo Iglesias, 1994).

[35] Although Machado would come to be broadly supportive of an increasingly radical workers' movement in the run-up to and during the civil war.

[36] Part of the 'outreach' department (Departamento de Extensión Universitaria) of the umbrella organisation of provincial sections of the FUE, the Unión Federal de Estudiantes Hispanos (UFEH). The UFEH was, however, supported financially by the Ministry of Public Instruction and Fine Arts. Tuñon de Lara, M. *Medio Siglo de Cultura Española*, 265.

[37] Part of the Valencian FUE. See Perales Birlanga, G. *Católicos y Liberales*, 320.

[38] Cf. Tuñon de Lara, M. *Medio Siglo de Cultura Española*, 267f.

[39] Alejandra Soler, interview with the author, 22 July 2012. For Renau's comments, see interview with José Manuel Fajardo in *Mundo Obrero*, 28 May 1980, 21.

[40] This mainly consisted of students giving evening classes for workers, using the facilities of the University, though there were also more far-reaching experiments with students living together with workers. Tuñon de Lara, M. *Medio Siglo de Cultura Española*, 265. For comments on the varied results obtained in Valencia, see Perales Birlanga, G. *Católicos y Liberales*, 318f.

from older attempts within the socialist and anarchist movements to provide working-class constituencies with improved educational opportunities, but while the Universidad Popular operated primarily as a means to extend the benefits of state university education, older worker-oriented initiatives – especially those sponsored by anarchist groups – were primarily concerned to offer general and and political instruction based on alternative ideological perspectives. [41]

The reception of the Misiones Pedagógicas

Before returning to Renau, it must be asked how these initiatives were received by the rural population. Obviously there are very few – not to say no – direct sources, as the rural audience, a great part of which was illiterate, tended not to leave any independent written records describing their experiences. The nearest thing we have are testimonies from those who participated in the various 'missions.' Their reactions cover a range of views and emotions, from triumphant confirmation to scepticism and disillusion. Alejandra Soler, active in El Búho, has described the impact of their performances in terms that vindicate the aspiration of Cossío:

> Many of them were illiterate. They had never read a verse, or seen a theatre representation in verse. And still to this day I have not seen people with eyes shining brighter […] than these illiterate peasants, who came to see […] 'Fuenteovejuna,'[42] and who rose from their chairs, delighted to understand what we were teaching them. It was wonderful. It was, I don't know, human wisdom entering brains as if to impregnate them and make them open their eyes.'[43]

Whether members of those audiences really did understand cannot, of course, be ascertained. That said, although reception would no doubt have depended on local socio-economic conditions, the plot of Fuenteovejuna, describing how the murder of a tyrannical rural commandant goes unpunished because the entire village assumes collective responsibility for the deed, may clearly have resonated with ordinary villagers for whom daily life was a struggle, just as much as it fitted the agenda of a Republic representing the democratic overthrow of a dictatorial regime. And insofar as the performances primarily aimed to spark audiences' interest in the national cultural heritage, evident enthusiasm was perhaps sufficient feed-back to prove the their worth

[41] De Luis, F. *Cincuenta años de cultura obrera en España*.
[42] A play by Félix Arturo Lope de Vega y Carpio (1562-1635) first published in 1619.
[43] Interview with the author, 22 July 2012.

as a starting point for change.

Other testimonies too suggested that classical theatre was particularly well received by the rural population. At times this was explained by reference to a correspondence between the cultural environment of the plays' origins and the nature of their audience in the 1930s: one report from the Misiones Pedagógicas stated that if their theatre feeds off the same repertoire as its more 'primitive' predecessors, 'it is only because it is directed to an audience that is analogous in its tastes, sensibilities, emotional response and language...'[44] Again, it is hardly surprising if traditional plays, describing scenes which rural audiences would have recognised to some degree, proved more successful than works associated with urban modernity.[45] Yet it is interesting to note that this comment also takes art to be yet another measure of rural people's backwardness. Their tastes both confirmed and reinforced their cultural location in a national past. The cultural strategy adopted to promote national unity and inter-connectedness served equally, in other words, to emphasise difference and distance.

There were also other moments when missionaries remarked on the inadequacy of providing spiritual enrichment without adding material help too. 'They needed bread and medicine […] and we had only songs and poems in our bags', the playwright Alejandro Casona lamented after visiting the village of San Martín de Castañeda (Zamora) in 1934.[46] Also Lorca, as he was coming to an end of his touring with La Barraca in spring 1936, remarked that hunger precludes any ability to appreciate beauty.[47] The fact that the Misiones focused on peasants' perceived spiritual rather material poverty has furthermore generated historical critique. To Tuñon de Lara, writing in the 1960s, their approach was akin to 'planting trees upside down.'[48] Considering the delay in enacting social and agricultural legislation, even where this was not entirely the government's fault, a cynical view would even suggest that the Misiones provided a cultural substitute for more tangible socio-economic reform.

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44 Tuñon de Lara, M. *Medio Siglo de Cultura Española*, 264.

45 Alejandra Soler, who performed both new and classical works with El Búho, claimed modern works were less effective as they seemed harder for the audience to follow. Interview, 22 July 2012. According to the painter Ramón Gaya, who was one of the 'missionaries' responsible for the travelling museum, villagers also responded sceptically to most kinds of painting. See Basilio, M. M. *Visual Propaganda, Exhibitions, and the Spanish Civil War* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 73, 108.

46 Cited in Cobb, C. 'The Republican State and Mass Educational-Cultural Initiatives 1931-1936' in Graham, H. and Labanyi, J. (Eds.) *Spanish Cultural Studies*, 136.

47 Tuñon de Lara, M. *Medio Siglo de Cultura Española*, 244.

48 Ibid., 264. See also Cruz, R. *En el nombre del pueblo: República, rebelión y guerra en la España de 1936* (Madrid: Siglo XXI, 2006), where the author argues that the actual results of the cultural and educational drive of the first years were far from impressive. See esp. 48f.

Renau's criticisms of the Misiones

Renau and his colleagues too were critical of the Misiones Pedagógicas, which despite good intentions and 'generous attitudes' had in their view to be regarded as wholly insufficient. Their greatest problem – easily tied to a materialist critique – was a lack of interest in feedback. In effect, as Renau later suggested, the rural population was treated like an 'empty sack' to be filled with 'leftist' versions of Golden Age art.[49] Audiences were presumed to be entirely passive, and culture was distributed from above, as if through charity.[50] Regardless of progressive intent, this was a paternalistic, not to say elitist, approach to the task of regenerating and democratising Spain.

But in addition to the lack of reciprocity, there was another problem, rooted in the very heritage that organisations like the Misiones Pedagógicas sought to popularise. While the group gathered around Renau had, like most progressive artists and writers, profound respect for the 'humanist traditions' of their national past, they were also critical of certain characteristics typically present in the works of the Spanish Golden Age. According to Renau, they objected, above all, to its 'individualist', 'aestheticist', and 'fatalist' nature, tendencies which moreover appeared to find new forms in much contemporary work, produced by progressive Republicans as well as others.[51] Even if the former drew on tradition with the objective of modernising it, this tendency amounted, in Renau's view, to an essentialist form of cultural conservatism which in fact hindered the realisation of the Republic's progressive goals. It offered, in short, neither ethics nor aesthetics that corresponded to the people's contemporary needs. What was required here were entirely new cultural co-ordinates, inspiring the creation of a truly modern Spain.[52] Exactly how this vision might be elaborated would become the central question of his most far reaching cultural project, *Nueva Cultura*, but was a fundamental concern from the beginning of his days as a politicised artist.

The difference between the values which reformist *institucionistas* hoped to instil in the population and those propagated by more radical figures like Renau can be clarified further by analysing the way their diverging aesthetic ideals were perceived to

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49 Renau, J. 'Notas al margen', 477.

50 The idea of culture being distributed like charity is recurrent in the scholarly literature. See, for example, Cobb, C. 'The Republican State and Mass Educational-Cultural Initiatives 1931-1936' in Graham, H. and Labanyi, J. (Eds.) *Spanish Cultural Studies*, 136.

51 The primary representative of progressive Republicans adopting this approach would be García Lorca and his *Gypsy Ballads* (Romancero Gitano), published in 1928. This is particularly clear in a 1976 interview with Renau by Inmaculada Julián González. See Julián González, I. *El Cartel Republicano en la Guerra Civil Española* (Madrid: Ministerio de Cultura, 1993), 185f.

52 Renau, J. 'Notas al margen', 474f.

correspond to political virtue. In connection with his statement regarding the capacity of Spaniards to assimilate 'ethics through aesthetics', Fernando de los Ríos had added that the goal of such education was to produce 'morally refined men' (*hombres moralmente exquisitos*).[53] In contrast to this ambition, aptly described by Machado as 'the gradual aristocratisation of the masses,'[54] the ambition of Renau and his colleagues was to transform 'the masses' into an agent of proletarian revolution, driving the revolt against all traditional – and above all aristocratic – modes of being. 'The refined' (*lo exquisito*) was precisely what Marxist writer César Arconada had, in a literary survey of June 1930, praised the avant-garde for having attacked (and in his opinion destroyed).[55] Although his choice of this word would not have been a conscious reference to de los Ríos's statement, Arconada's celebration of aggression marked a principal difference between reformist and revolutionary politics. Indeed, on the basis of this distinction, the correspondence between avant-garde attitudes and the way radical artists and writers imagined revolutionary subjectivity can be taken further: if refinement could be associated with contemplation and a certain degree of passivity, revolutionary ideals revolved around activity, violence, conquest. Conquest – part of Ortega's defining description of the avant-garde[56] – was a particularly pervasive trope whenever cultural and political discourses overlapped (on both the Left and the Right).[57] It recurred in 1935 in the celebrated statement by French writer André Malraux, which sharply contrasted with Spanish reformers' approach to the dissemination of cultural history and identity: 'Heritage', Malraux claimed, 'is not transmitted; it is conquered,'[58] Rather than a passive recipient of 'aristocratic' education, then, 'the masses', in the minds of most revolutionary writers and artists, had to be an active and creative agent, occupying the field of culture as producers as well as consumers, appropriating history on their own terms.

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53 Cited in Huertas Vázquez, E. *La Política Cultural*, 56.

54 Cited in Cobb, C. *La Cultura y el Pueblo*, 7.

55 *La Gaceta Literaria* 15 June 1930, 3f.

56 See page 32f above.

57 Arconada also discussed conquering the spheres of arts and politics. See *La Gaceta Literaria* 15 June 1930, 3f. For an example of this language on the right, see, for example, the national syndicalist publication edited by Ramiro Ledesma Ramos, *The Conquest of the State* (La Conquista del Estado).

58 The statement was made at the First International Congress of Writers for the Defence of Culture, held in Paris in June 1935. Anzar Soler, M. *I congreso internacional de escritores para la defensa de la cultura (Paris, 1935) Vol. 1* (Valencia: Generalitat Valenciana, 1987), 64.

4. ART TO GUIDE THE MASSES: *ORTO* AND *ESTUDIOS* (1932-1934)

To help achieve his radical artistic and political goals, Renau would, as suggested, work with magazines propagating a revolutionary egalitarian politics. What they proposed was not only another regime change, but an entirely new society based on different values, an alternative vision of a future nation. In Spain, calls for a radical break gathered momentum as the practical failures of the reforming Republic became increasingly evident. The mood changed again as a concentrated conservative counter-offensive, led by a new government after the November 1933 elections, threatened to turn back to the clocks on the few gains made during the first biennium.[1] At the same time, the international climate, marked by economic crisis and increasingly authoritarian responses to social unrest, most ominously represented by Hitler's ascent to power in January 1933, unmistakably indicated sharpening social conflicts ahead, as well as a further deterioration of the liberal system. To achieve the goals of popular enfranchisement in such an environment, a radical approach was needed, and with this a new kind of education. In spite of these increasing stakes, and well-intentioned egalitarian sentiments, the practical effort to mobilise 'the masses' around a new set of ideals remained, however, largely prescriptive and didactic.

The two magazines which more than any other launched Renau's career as a political artist, *Orto* and *Estudios*, were both eminently didactic in their outlook, and the idea that the proletariat had to achieve a certain level of political consciousness before fulfilling its revolutionary task was clearly reflected, albeit in significantly different ways, in its editorial ambitions. *Orto*, where Renau formed part of the editorial team as the graphic director,[2] stated in its inaugural issue of March 1932 (dedicated to 'the study of the crisis of the global economy') its intention to aid 'all those who want to see clearly and deeply in the intricate labyrinth of social problems.' It wished to teach its readers about 'the period of transition and construction of the New Era', and offered the following proclamation as a summary of its aims:

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1 This involved a reversal of land reform and labour agreements, as well as a halt to cultural expansion, etc. For an account of the effects this had on social relations, see, for example, Preston, P. *The Spanish Holocaust*, 52-89.

2 The main editor was Marín Civera, who was politically committed to the anarcho-syndicalist movement. See Paniagua, J. 'Estudio preliminar: Marín Civera y la cultura popular, Orto (1932-1934)' in the facsimile version of *Orto* (Valencia: Centro Francisco Tomás y Valiente UNED Alzira-Valencia & Fundación Instituto de Historia Social, 2001).

> Let the masses understand. Let them enrich their sensibilities. Let them think with rectitude. Let them proceed accurately.
>
> This is what we aim to achieve.[3]

If 'the masses' were clearly the main protagonists in *Orto*'s conception of politics, their impact, the editors seemed to suggest, would only have positive effect once they had been given correct instruction.

This particular attempt to guide progress failed to convince, however, as *Orto* eventually ran foul of its readers. Its last issue was published in January 1934, and appears to have been preceded by a sudden drop in sales – prompting the editors to insinuate, somewhat obliquely, that they were victims of a co-ordinated hostile campaign.[4] The problem seems to have been ideological differences, as the last editorial insisted on defending, as if against an accusation, the magazine's advocacy of discipline, control, and collectivity – terms which anarchists often responded to with ambivalence, if not outright hostility.[5] Perhaps its Marxist element was largely to blame for its failure to survive among Valencia's militant grass-roots, still predominantly influenced by anarchism.[6] It is also possible that *Orto*'s particularly strong focus on international subjects made its content somewhat remote from the immediate concerns of the Valencian readership.

By contrast, *Estudios*, launched in 1928 and described by the editors as a monthly magazine of 'anarcho-sexo-nudist' orientation, was hugely popular, both locally and nationally (indeed, its competition might have been a further contributory factor to *Orto*'s demise).[7] A direct successor to a publication called *Generacion Consciente* (1923-1928), *Estudios* was firmly established and enjoyed great prestige among Spanish libertarians, not least because of the quality of its articles and the attractiveness of both presentation and themes.[8] In addition to political commentary and general educational pieces, each issue contained practical advice on matters like diet and sex, for example. It achieved an impressive circulation, both geographically (covering not only Spain, but

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3 *Orto* (March 1932), 1.

4 No specific reasons explaining such a campaign were given. The drop in sales was highlighted already in the editorial of the April issue 1933, where the editors appealed to their readers to suggest changes if they were not happy with the magazine's current direction.

5 Workers need to realise that 'discipline is not slavery, nor control authoritarianism', they stated, and reminded its readers that 'the world of the future does not belong to individuals, but to collectives, to the great masses'. See editorial of *Orto* (January 1934).

6 Uniquely in Spain, *Orto* sought to marry the idea of Marxism with the ideas of Anarchism. Paniagua, J. 'Estudio preliminar', xv.

7 For a comprehensive study of *Estudios*, see Navarro Navarro, F. J. *El paraíso de la razón: la revista "Estudios" (1928-1937) y el mundo cultural anarquista* (Valencia, 1997).

8 Ibid.. See especially 70-76.

also France, Belgium, and Argentina) and also quantitatively.[9] According to Spanish cultural historian Javier Navarro Navarro, an estimate included in a 1933 CNT report by Russian anarcho-syndicalist Alexander Schapiro may be seen as a reliable indication of *Estudios*' regular print-run at this time: about 25,000 copies per month.[10] In Navarro's view, this figure may be compared with monthly print-runs of 6,000-8,000 copies for another flagship anarchist magazine (for which Renau also did a few covers), the Barcelona-based but also nationally distributed *La Revista Blanca* (1923-1936).[11] Whether or not the real figures consistently corresponded to these estimates, it is clear that *Estudios* offered Renau an opportunity to present his work in a highly respected forum that reached a large working-class audience.

In terms of its content, *Estudios* carried articles on politics, art, science, sexual education and health. In accordance with typical anarchist pedagogy, its approach was less prescriptive than that of *Orto* and placed a greater emphasis on self-improvement and independent learning. To introduce an element of dialogue between the magazine and its readership, *Estudios* also included, as did *Orto*,[12] a section where a knowledgeable collaborator, frequently a Dr. Roberto Remartínez, answered readers' questions.[13] A glance at this correspondence indicates that readers too placed great weight on their self-education, and later interviews with magazine subscribers saw them reiterating that a 'whole generation' benefited from its positive formative influence. As one interviewee stated:

> In terms of education, the magazine did a great job among people […]. Reading its pages, we discovered the value of culture in helping the individual to develop within society. […] They sparked in us a feeling of solidarity and self-overcoming (*superación*); a feeling of being something more in this world than just a number among the millions of beings who form part of it.[14]

Playing a part in this achievement, Renau's images were praised by readers for their 'eye-catching' qualities,[15] which made them an important means by which the magazine

[9] Ibid., 70f.
[10] Ibid., 67.
[11] Ibid. Renau's covers appear on the issues of 15 February 1934, 30 November 1934, and 4 January 1935.
[12] From December 1932, *Orto* included a 'consultorio sociológico' allowing readers to seek published answers to any question related to the magazine's field of interest.
[13] This section was predominantly geared towards questions relating to personal (often sexual) health, but would occassionally include broader cultural issues.
[14] Navarro Navarro, F. J. *El paraíso*, 74.
[15] This praise was also extended to the other artist working regularly for *Estudios*, Manuel Monleón.

communicated its political and cultural content.[16]

The role of Renau as an artist contributing to the educational projects of *Orto* and *Estudios* was necessarily different to that of those who contributed with written articles (though he occasionally did too). To understand why this was so, it must first of all be remembered that images cannot communicate conceptual knowledge.[17] They can only imitate written discourse through symbolic correspondences, and to the degree that these relations are less precise than linguistic relations (stabilised to some extent by the authority of dictionaries and logical connectors), they are also more open to interpretation. Any political reading of Renau's work would thus have been a result of a dynamic and less predictable exchange between its particular symbolic composition and audiences' understanding of the symbols themselves, as well as their possible inter-relations. It may thus be presumed that Renau neither simply taught his audiences new discursive knowledge, nor simply provided a symbolic mirror image of pre-existing conceptions. Rather, his influence would consist in guiding pre-existing conceptions, so as to bind them to certain associational patterns that gave each component a specific meaning.[18]

The politics of realism

Renau's determination to influence his readers, and thus make his images as effective as possible, was part of the reason why Renau's work for *Orto* and *Estudios* entailed not only a change in content, compared with his earlier and ongoing advertising work, but also a change in form. Instead of experimenting with Cubist and Surrealist influences, his political work operated decisively within the realm of realism. That realism should be his aesthetic choice in this context did not only relate to its perceived effectiveness in

Ibid., 210.

16 Ibid., 78, 209-217 (esp. 210). More prosaically, images also constituted a significant factor in boosting sales, and it is noteworthy that *Estudios* would not miss any opportunity to advertise 'sensational graphic material' on its cover. See Aug-Oct 1933, and ad for Renau's upcoming 'Ten Commandment' series in Jan 1934.

17 Here I agree with Susan Sontag's view in *On Photography* (London: Penguin, 1979) (see especially page 24).

18 Like all propaganda, Renau's images needed to draw on pre-existing conceptions to be effective. 'The propagandist', Aldous Huxley observed in 1936, 'is a man who canalises an already existing stream. In a land where there is no water, he digs in vain.' The metaphor is particularly apt in relation to images. If the impact of propaganda is generally greatest when preaching, as David Welch puts it, to the 'already partially converted', the propagandistic image needs an audience already initiated in the relevant discourse to be correctly understood at all. See David Welch 'Nazi Propaganda and the Volksgemeinschaft: Constructing a People's Community' *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 39, No. 2, Understanding Nazi Germany (April 2004), 213-238 (see especially 214 for Huxley quote and the idea of preaching to the 'partially converted').

conveying specific messages, but also to the fact that it was seen as expressive of a set of values matching his political orientation. Before considering specific images highlighting the visual-pedagogical strategies of *Orto* and *Estudios*, then, it is necessary to clarify the aesthetic logic as well the political stakes generally implied in this conception. In the case of Renau, this means returning, first of all, to the book that he believed was one of the most influential in defining his path as an artist devoted to politics: G.V. Plekhanov's *Art and Social Life*.

The main contention of Plekhanov's book, originally a lecture delivered in Liége and Paris in 1912, was that art, in order to maintain its vitality, needed to incorporate the emancipatory ideas of its time. At the beginning of the twentieth century, abstracted styles like Cubism were, in Plekhanov's opinion, incapable of doing this. The fundamental problem lay in their apparent appeal to a radical idealism, which stated that objective reality was unknowable and that truth was an isolated product of each individual. To Plekhanov, this idea was absurd, and made artists impervious to criticism, regardless of the quality of their work. It effectively meant that the painting corresponded only to an internal reality to which no external audience could have access.[19] At a time when human emancipation was inextricably linked to mass-movements and collective action, such ideas disconnected art from the historical forces of progress, and pushed it into a spiral of decay.[20]

These points were later stressed by the Spanish writer Ramón Sender, who in his review of Plekhanov's book agreed (in terms that brings us back to Renau's first solo exhibition of 1928) that Cubism, 'in itself accepted as a facile humoristic game', had 'descended to an inferior life; that of decorative art.' While 'aesthetically revolutionary', it had ultimately served a 'conservative social use'. Hence, Sender concluded, avant-garde artists experimenting with abstraction thought they were rebelling against tradition when in fact they were only disregarding precisely that which was 'new and vital' in their era.[21]

To engage with the progressive forces of the era, Plekhanov and Sender maintained, artists had to adopt some form of realist aesthetic. Theoretically, there were three major considerations – corresponding, respectively, to concerns for objectivity, accessibility, and collective action – that made adherence to realism within the

[19] Cf. Ortega's description of avant-garde art. See pages 32f above.

[20] Plekhanov, G. V. *Art and Social Life* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1953). See especially 61f. Note too that Plekhanov accepts that artistic isolation (rejection of social life) can be a valid protest, but under entirely different social conditions (see, for example, 67).

[21] Sender, R. 'Plejánov y el arte' *El Sol* 10 July 1929, 2. Also in Cobb, C. *La cultura*, 188-191.

progressive arts politically significant in Spain and elsewhere. These considerations were all implicitly if not explicitly addressed in Plekhanov's reasoning, but must be further explored for their full ramifications to become apparent.

First and foremost, as is clear from Plekhanov's argument, realism meant that art corresponded to an external and in theory universally accessible referent. This had an evident political value insofar as the referent could be a point of convergence for collective opinion – a referent enabling the emergence of what the Clarté manifesto of 1919 called a 'moral accord.'[22] Yet on a deeper level, this attribute is also essential if any aesthetic co-ordination of sensibilities is to produce an agreement on the conditions of collective action. Politically motivated endorsement of realism would thus logically revolve around a readiness to collapse the subjective mediation of Schiller's aesthetic epistemology (premised on a cancellation of opposites and a suspension of domination) in order to formulate objective truths and capture in art a fragment of the real.

This logic further underpinned an artistic interest, emerging at this time and shared by Renau, in documents and the documentary as a particular mode of representation. Documentary practices in art were from the beginning tied to collective concerns. These practices took shape across Europe around 1930 as a part of a burgeoning workers' movement, and responded to a need to give visibility to the new mass-subject of democratic politics.[23] To represent this subject adequately, artists sought to implement the philosophical precepts of realism in increasingly radical ways. In effect this reduced the distance between art and social knowledge, between fiction and non-fiction, art and non-art. Manifestations of this ambition can be seen in Soviet attempts to create a literature based on fact,[24] but also in suggestions, voiced by Renau among others, that art could be profitably informed by sociology.[25] It could further be detected in an article published in the inaugural issue of *Orto*, where Renau argued that art was unable to generate the great syntheses of the past and instead had to 'descend' to contemplate the realm of 'economy.'[26] The last example no doubt represented an attempt by the artist to align his practice with the materialist principles of Marxism, but it may

[22] See pages 40f above. Note the fact that Clarté demanded that artist should try to represent the truth as well as beauty in their works.

[23] See Jorge Ribalta's preface in Ribalta, J. (Ed.) *The Worker Photography Movement (1926-1939): Essays and Documents* (Madrid: Museo Reina Sofia, 2011), no page number.

[24] See, for example, Wolf, E.'The Author as Photographer: Tret'iakov's, Erenburg's, and Il'f's Images of the West' *Configurations*, Volume 18, Number 3, (Fall 2010), 383-403.

[25] See Renau, J. 'Cinema: El camino de la vida (Film ruso de Nicolaiekk)' in *Orto*, 5 (July 1932). See also, for example, Zambrana, A. 'Consideraciones literarias de un tipógrafo' in *La Gaceta Literaria* 15 Sept 1928, 4.

[26] Renau, J. 'Fundamentaciones de la crisis actual del Arte' *Orto*, 1 (March 1932). 41-44.

also serve as a reminder that the epistemological link between documentary practices and mass-politics typically contained an ideological dimension committing both to a programme of change. In this sense, as Molly Nesbit has observed in her study of avant-garde photographers, artists used 'the most common of formal materials, the document […] because they need to keep up with its modernity, to criticize it and to surpass it.'[27] *Orto*, similarly, presented itself as a magazine not of political opinion, but of 'social documentation,' guiding its readers towards a new era. Reports on an increased interest in non-fictional social literature as the political situation of the Republic grew increasingly volatile may further suggest that a faith in the transformative power of social knowledge was shared by members of the reading public too.[28] In conjunction with progressive politics, then, the promotion of the document may be seen as an attempt to take the aspirations of realism to a new level, an attempt that gave concrete expression to what French philosopher Alain Badiou has called the twentieth century's 'passion for the real' – that is, a desire not only to know the real, but also to convert previous centuries' utopian dreams into reality.[29]

Intrinsically linked to this collectivist vision was the notion of realist aesthetics' immediate accessibility. In this respect, realism was founded on the logic of mimesis. In the standard translation of the Aristotelian term, mimesis refers to imitations of actions taking place within a universally graspable plot.[30] Even if realism here substituted objective reality for the plot, the relation between representation and referent is essentially the same. As described by Jacques Rancière, mimesis presumed a concordance between the signs exhibited by the artwork, on the one hand, and the emotion and perception by which these signs were understood, on the other. There was a correspondence, in other words, between the two fundamental processes involved in communication through art – *poeisis* (relating to production and display) and *aisthesis* (relating to reception). Classical theatre thus operated in a space where the stage, the audience and the world were 'comprised in the same continuum.'[31] What was conveyed from the stage was equally accessible to – that is, equally available to the senses of – all members of the audience.

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[27] Cited Mendelson, J. *Documenting Spain*, xxii.

[28] Fuentes, V. *La marcha al pueblo*, 37-51 (especially 47). See also report form Madrid's annual book fair in *El Sol* 9 May 1934, 7.

[29] Badiou, A. *The Century* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007).

[30] For a succinct explanation of the Aristotelian concept of plot, see Malcom Heath's introduction to Aristotle's *Poetics* (London: Penguin, 1996).

[31] Rancière, J. *The Emancipated Spectator* (London: Verso, 2009), 60f.

Along similar lines, one of Renau's closest collaborators, the painter Francisco Carreño, would publish an article in *Nueva Cultura* describing realism as an inherently popular form which could give audiences direct access to meaning.[32] Accessibility was here taken to involve understanding as well as availability; a perception which was particularly pronounced in relation to photography – the realist image *par excellence.* 'No kind of representation,' asserted the Russian artist El Lissitzky in a claim which would later be echoed in Spain, is as completely comprehensible to all people as photography.[33] Politically, this carried obvious democratic overtones, and contrasted sharply with the abstracted aesthetics described by Ortega y Gasset as intrinsically incomprehensible to all but a select group.[34] Indeed, from this perspective the establishment of a democratic Republic clearly serves as an important contextual factor, in conjunction with intellectual developments within the international left,[35] to explain why the arts in Spain saw a more general resurgence of realism in the 1930s.[36]

The third reason why a return to realism was politically significant was that, in comparison with abstracted forms of avant-garde expression, it was taken to encourage strong emotive responses. Again, to understand why these associations were made quite categorically in 1930s Spain, we need to return to Ortega y Gasset's 'dehumanized' art. One of the fundamental characteristics of this art was emotional distance, maintained by the artist (and thus imposed on the audience) in order to arrive at pure aesthetic contemplation. Ortega y Gasset's illustrative example of what this entailed involved a man who is lying on his death bed and is surrounded by his wife, his doctor, a journalist, and a painter. Emotional engagement in the event is, in this example, strongest in the wife and gets progressively weaker with each character mentioned above. The painter takes virtually no interest at all in the distress before him, but rather contemplates the room's aesthetic qualities: the light, its shapes and colours, and so on.[37] For politically committed artists like Renau, this form of detachment was anathema, and Ortega y

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[32] See Carreño, F. 'Arte de Tendencia y la Caricatura' in *Nueva Cultura*, 11 (March-April 1936), 14f (part I), and *Nueva Cultura*, 12 (May-June 1936), 14f (part II).

[33] Ades, D. *Photomontage* (2nd ed.) (London: Thames & Hudson, 1986), 63. Cf. the proclamation in civil war magazine *Alianza*, 30 (11 May 1937), stating that photography was a language 'that the whole worlds understands.' Cited in Mendelson, J. *Revistas y Guerra*, 354.

[34] That is, people equipped with particular aesthetic sensibilities. Ortega y Gasset, J. *La deshumanización*, 70ff.

[35] Including the official adoption of socialist realism in the USSR at the 1934 Congress of Soviet Writers. For background and connections with Spain, see Aznar Soler, M. *Literatura española y antifascismo*, 36-47. For further comment, see also pages 118-120 below.

[36] Ernesto Gímenez Caballero was one of many who very clearly perceived realism's rising prestige in 1930s. Ibid., 19f.

[37] Ortega y Gasset, J. *La deshumanización*, 81ff.

Gasset's particular terminology frequently led advocates of realist art to emphasise, as did Ramón Sender in his favourable review of Plekhanov's book, its 'human and humanitarian' – as opposed to 'dehumanized' – nature.[38] Such normative twists to Ortega's essentially descriptive term were perhaps always likely to surface in left-wing criticism, not least because identification and empathy were cornerstones of the solidarity which progressive mass-movements needed to grow and act.

Photography as a political weapon

Concerns regarding objectivity, accessibility, and emotional identification were all central to Renau's use of photography, which constituted his primary means of exploring the possibilities of realism. As suggested by the simultaneous emergence of documentary arts, photography (together with film) was seen by Renau and countless contemporaries within the cultural circles of the socialist and communist left to offer an ideal base on which to develop an a cultural formula adhering to Marxist principles. As a form it denoted a primary interest in material reality; it was inherently made for mass-production, which undercut earlier models of privileged access to art; it effected a perfect instance of mimesis, which made it both universally understandable and conducive to the formation of new collectivities; and finally, it drew on developing representational technologies, which pointed to a symbolically important link with scientific progress and modernity. Photography offered, in short, a democratic mass-expression supremely equipped to capture the reality of contemporary society. Of course this, together with its association with objective truth, also made it a powerful political and educational tool. Such considerations no doubt provided the immediate motivation for Renau's adoption of the form. Before returning to the cultural battles of Republican Spain, then, it is necessary to analyse the particular propagandistic potential of photography and consider the ways in which it reinforced the ideological message of his visual artworks.

Photography was incorporated into Renau's work to create a number of different effects, but most commonly it was presented as incriminating evidence, a fact to expose establishment lies.[39] This is evident in series like 'Dark Pages of War: what they concealed from the people' (Paginas Negras de la Guerra: lo que se ocultó al pueblo),

[38] Sender, R. 'Plejánov y el arte'. See also Aznar Soler, M. *Literatura española y antifascismo*, 19f.

[39] Cf. the comments of a contemporary German worker photographer: 'All sorts of things could be denied, but a photograph was evidence you could not twist around so easily.' Stumberger, R. 'AIZ and the German Worker Photographers' in Ribalta, J. (Ed.) *The Worker Photography Movement*, 86.

published in *Estudios* between August and November 1933. Here censored photographs originally obtained by the French magazine *VU* were presented as revealing the true brutality of the First World War. Similarly, a photograph of colonial abuse, depicting a white man beating a black man who is tied to a tree, was published in *Orto* in August 1932 and reused by Renau for *Nueva Cultura* in March 1935, with a caption explaining that its distribution had been prohibited by a British court.[40] Less violent, but published with similar motives, was a photo feature on modern spying gadgets, which appeared, possibly as a result of Renau's connection with both magazines, first in *Octubre* (July-August 1933) and then, in expanded version, in *Estudios* (December 1933).[41] In short, the aim here was to prove the deceitful nature of the ruling classes (and, by implication, the inadequacy if not wilful obfuscations of mainstream media). In the latter example, the penetrating work of photography acquired an additional dimension as the actual machinery of duplicity was laid bare before readers' eyes. Yet in all cases photography was taken to reveal, as indisputable fact, what the ruling classes tried to conceal.

However, the objectivity of the photograph, while certainly real in relation to its indexicality, was often invoked in ways which extended its truth claim in problematic ways. One illustrative if relatively crude example of this appeared in a short illustrated column in the May 1933 issue of *Estudios* [Fig. 2]. This column was not necessarily put together by Renau, but the logic at work applied also to many of his later compositions, most notably the *Nueva Cultura* series 'Dark Testimonies of Our Times' (Testigos Negros de Nuestros Tiempos, 1935-1936, 1937).[42] In the *Estudios* example, cryptically entitled 'The Humane Sense of Women' (El Sentido Humano de la Mujer), we see two photographs of different women: one evidently a member of the urban bourgeoisie, seated in a living room; the other a peasant, portrayed by the outside wall of a simple stone house. The text to the right suggests that these images offer 'eloquent examples' of how the 'bourgeois' woman and the 'village' woman display diametrically opposed characteristics, which are in turn indicative of the moral composition of their class. The first is apparently 'artificial' and 'individualist', devoid of all maternal instinct, while the latter displays 'affection' and is ultimately suggestive of 'all that a woman can be: mother and sister, friend and lover.' The inclusion of a plastic doll next the former, and a

[40] *Nueva Cultura*, 3 (March 1935), 8. All images in *Orto* appeared in a separate picture section in the middle of the magazine, consisting of two sheets of thicker and better quality compared to the rest. The pages in this section were not numbered.

[41] *Octubre*, 2 (July-August 1933), 13. *Estudios* had the same arrangement as *Orto* with regards to visual material (see previous note). Hence it is not possible to provide references with page numbers.

[42] See chapter 5 below.

small lamb in the lap of the latter, suggesting an analogy between the peasant and the Virgin Mary, further reinforces the distinction in maternal capacity.[43] Besides the essentialist description whereby both women are reduced either to their child-bearing role or their relation to men (in itself indicative of the actual limitations imposed on female emancipation in most Spanish progressive movements at the time[44]) and the way anarchist propaganda made extensive use of Christian symbolism despite its fiercely anti-clerical stance,[45] the rhetorical strategy of the feature is noteworthy because it appeals to the objectivity of the photograph to validate a blatantly subjective reading of its content. In other words, photography serves as a device by which discursively derived meaning could appear to be anchored in objective reality and correspond to an undeniable truth. Such rhetorical techniques demonstrate clearly photography's potential as a political tool, which permitted actors to 'objectify' subjective conceptions and incorporate these into pre-determined cognitive patterns.

In a larger context, this conflation of objectivity and discourse was a powerful way to disrupt hegemonic perceptions in the public sphere, and place new social perspectives 'on firm ground.' This was arguably the fundamental aim of the progressive documentary photography movement of the 1930s. Typically less romanticizing of rural life than the *Estudios* example considered above, it set out to depict life in Europe's industrial centres as seen from a proletarian perspective, a perspective that was, as a rule, absent from mainstream media.[46] The movement spread to most European countries, but was particularly strong in Germany and Russia, where it had originated as a result of two almost simultaneous initiatives in 1926, hoping to encourage workers to supply worker magazines with photographs taken by themselves.[47] Although ultimately hampered by material limitations and at times contradictory attitudes from sympathetic professionals, 'worker photography' became in this sense one of the most effective

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43 Jesus is at times referred to as 'The lamb of God' in Christian teachings (from the Gospel of John).

44 See Aguado, A. & Ramos, M. A. *La modernización de España*, 120f. For a more extensive analysis of gender relations in working class communities, see Nash, M. *Mujer y movimiento obrero en España, 1931-1939* (Barcelona: Fontamara, 1981).

45 For a succinct analysis of the overlaps between libertarian and Christian discourse, Álvarez Junco, J. 'La subcultura anarquista en España: racionalismo y populismo' in Fonquerne, Y-R. & Esteban, A. (Coords.) *Culturas Populares: Diferencias, Divergencias, Conflictos* (Madrid: Universidad Complutense, 1986), 197-209.

46 Ribalta, J. *The Worker Photography Movement*, 84.

47 Ibid. In March 1926, the German illustrated worker magazine *AIZ* called on amateur photographers to send in images of their everyday life. The following month saw the publication of the first issue of *Sovetskoe foto*, a magazine dedicated to the task of enhancing the profile of photography in the building of socialism. Through these two initiatives a Europe-wide movement gradually emerged, aiming to use photography to strengthen the political and cultural mobilisation campaigns of the international left.

attempts to create a new proletarian art form.[48] On the whole, however, its lasting achievement was to provide the worker movement with a concrete visual language – that is, a means visibly to anchor progressive politics in the lived reality of everyday life. As such, it was not, as art historian Manuel J. Borja-Villel has pointed out, merely an artistic sub-genre, but 'an expression of a genuine *Weltanschauung*: a way of seeing and experiencing the world.'[49]

The worker photography movement did not, in the view of critic and curator Jorge Ribalta, have any real base in Spain, but magazines like *Orto*, as well as Alberti and Leon's *Octubre*, may well be seen as representatives of its politically charged aesthetics.[50] *Nueva Cultura*, whose visual elements took inspiration from illustrated workers' magazines like the German *Arbeiter-Illustrierte-Zeitung* (*A-I-Z*, 1924-1938) and the multi-lingual Soviet publication *SSSR na Stroike* (English title: *USSR in Construction*, 1930-1941,1949), would also show affinities with this movement. These magazines, like their international counterparts, reported on the plight of the poor in images as well as words, and photo features were instrumental in their efforts to put readers into contact with their class brethren elsewhere. As the world was going through the worst of the Great Depression, and aggressive right-wing regimes across Europe grew in strength, such features inevitably focused on the suffering and violence that frequently marred working class life. Widespread poverty and hunger was particularly shocking considering the unprecedented fact of overproduction, and one of the most powerful photo-spreads compiled by Renau as graphic editor for *Orto* juxtaposed three images of food being deliberately destroyed with a fourth showing children lynched by their own mother, allegedly unable to bear the thought of them slowly starving to death.[51] The 'evidence' of wilful waste next to the lifeless children makes the perversity of their fate painfully glaring, and as a whole the spread provides a more persuasive example of how an ethical argument could be strengthened by photography's documentary aesthetics.

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[48] Leading figures in the worker photography movement stressed the importance of grass-roots participation, yet when it came to evaluating and publishing the results, professional opinion and work was typically given precedence. See Wolf, E. 'The Soviet Union: From Worker to Proletarian Photography' in Ribalta, J. *The Worker Photography Movement*, 32-50.

[49] Borja-Villel, M. J. 'Presentation' in Ribalta, J. *The Worker Photography Movement.*

[50] That is, these magazines did not send out their own photographers, nor did they explicitly attempt to popularise photography as such among their readers, yet photography was the main form of illustration, which moreover had a similar style to that seen in European counterparts.

[51] *Orto*, 17 (November 1933).

The transformative power of photomontage

The technique of deploying contrasting juxtapositions to reinforce a particular interpretation of the photograph was also central to the art form that would be most intimately associated with Renau – photomontage. As an artistic technique, photomontage had first appeared in Germany and Russia around the time of First World War.[52] In Germany it was above all linked to the Berlin Dada movement, which sought to criticize the social order underwriting the conflict through a disjointed form of collage based on newspaper cuttings.[53] John Heartfield (born Helmut Herzfeld[54]), whose work would later constitute the single most important influence on the political art of Renau, was one of the principal figures in this group, and the pioneer of a subsequent form where the Dadaist collage was given a more didactic orientation. In Russia montage had similarly been used to oppose a traditional order and was, at least until the gradual imposition of socialist realism from 1928, closely associated – especially through Constructivists like Alexander Rodchenko and El Lissitzky – with the aesthetics of the Bolshevik Revolution. Although art historian Dawn Ades has suggested that there is little evidence of mutual creative influence between these groups in their early stages,[55] Heartfield's entry into the Communist Party in 1918 and growing prominence as a political agitator would eventually bring him into direct contact with the Bolshevik avant-garde and place his work at the heart of revolutionary art debates in both countries.[56] What had united German and Russian artists from the beginning was, according to Ades, the rise of social concerns on the artistic agenda, and a concomitant desire 'to move away from the limitations of abstraction without slipping back into antiquated illustrational or figurative modes.'[57] In this ambition, just as photography became a way to insert reality into the artwork, collage or montage permitted a range of expressive possibilities not available to adherents of traditional realism.[58] Photomontage was, in other words, an attempt to harness the power of the photograph – its accessibility and indexical realism – in order to manipulate and metaphorically

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52 Various forms of humoristic and popular manipulation of photographs can be seen to have their roots in the 19th century, however. See Naranjo, J. 'Josep Renau. Photomontage, Between Political Agitation and Artistic Production' in García, M. et al. *Josep Renau: Fotomontador*, 257.

53 See Ades, D. *Photomontage*.

54 Heartfield changed his name as a protest against the anti-British campaign seen in Germany during WWI. See Drew, J. (ed.) *John Heartfield 1891-1968: Photomontages* (London: Arts Council, 1969), 11.

55 Ades, D. *Photomontage*, 27.

56 Evans, D. *Photomontage: A Political Weapon* (London: Gordon Fraser, 1986), 15-21.

57 Ades, D. *Photomontage*, 64-66, 66.

58 Cf. Various artists. *Fotomontaje de entreguerras.*

transform the reality it represented.

The propagandistic potential of this technique could be explained in a number of ways. The possibility to disrupt perspectives, present unexpected or even shocking juxtapositions, allowed artists to produce forceful and compelling images that would more readily command audiences' attention.[59] By merging disparate objects, montage could jolt viewers out of cognitive habits or force them to see connections not normally visible to the naked eye. Yet even where the symbolic relations or metaphors were not entirely new to viewers – as would most often have been the case in the examples considered here – montage, as suggested above, could be influential in clarifying and perhaps dramatising these by sharpening contrasts which had previously not been so clear-cut.[60] The effect in such cases would be more subtle, but nonetheless powerful – indeed, probably more powerful than attempts to shock, as viewers might not have realised that they were being influenced. Finally, it must be remembered that appropriate exemplification often makes abstract propositions both accessible and easy to remember, which in itself has an obviously political value. In an interview towards the end of his life, Renau said that the 'secret' of art was 'to say things that everybody understands and nobody forgets.'[61] Photomontage, with its combined realism and flexibility, was an ideal medium to realise such an ambition and to put it to political use.

Renau's development as a montage artist went through several stages. Apart from an early Surrealist-inspired composition appearing in the short-lived Valencian magazine *Murta* (1931-1932),[62] his first montages drew primarily on the ideas of Soviet film maker Vsevolod I. Pudovkin.[63] The latter allegedly came to Renau via Juan Piqueras, the editor of a progressive film magazine with which he collaborated, *Nuestro Cinema* (1932-1935). 'Piqueras imprinted Pudovkin's theory on my mind', he later commented, 'that a pointless image, according to what it has at its side, changes its meaning and acquires another...'[64] The influence of this thought and its application to film may be glimpsed in compositions like the one appearing in the first issue of *Orto* (March 1932)[Fig. 3]. Here a nurse, situated in the middle of the pictorial field, is shown pumping breast milk into a glass bottle. Four additional scenes are incorporated

[59] Cf. *Estudios* readers describing Renau's work as 'eye-catching'. See page 71 above.
[60] Intelligibility was of overriding importance to both Heartfield and Renau, which meant that they avoided visual metaphors which risked being misunderstood or simply puzzling.
[61] García, M. et al. *Josep Renau*, 279.
[62] Called 'El hombre árctico' in *Murta*, 2 (December 1931).
[63] By first montages I mean those made in a period stretching, roughly, from March to November 1932.
[64] Cited in Forment, A. *Josep Renau*, 119.

in the corners: we see infant beds in a maternity ward, a baby being bottle fed, naked children walking in a row, and five, slightly older children, standing together and laughing. Accompanying an article on the economic crisis and eugenics, the image was presumably intended to defend the benefits of state investment in child care.[65] Thus Renau invited the viewer first to contemplate the central image, suggesting a form of rationalisation of infant care, and then to proceed to read the peripheral scenes sequentially, like a story culminating in a happy ending (after which, appropriately, the gaze is diverted back to the start and the circular process starts anew). Rather than various photographic fragments merged into one image, this was collection of images arranged to be read one by one in a certain order, much like a film.

Another example, slightly different but also indicative of the formal approach of Renau's first montage work, appeared in the September 1932 issue of *Estudios* and was entitled 'Panorama of bourgeois society' (Panorama de la sociedad burguesa)[Fig. 4]. This composition shows an urban landscape revealing stark class hierarchies. The top part is made up of skyscrapers, suited attendees at a high-society dinner, a luxury car, and a smiling woman with a horse, while the bottom part contains scenes from poor workers' homes. A dark horizontal field cuts the image in half, which leaves the two sections sharply divided. The only interaction between the two sections is represented by a man begging. Here again different pictorial elements are juxtaposed without really forming a unitary whole. In this case, however, the disconnection clearly forms part of the message conveyed, as the composition can be said to reinforce the notion of a fundamental binary opposition in society (the bourgeoisie versus the proletariat) and reminds us of the distinctly Manichean world-view associated with Bolshevism.[66]

Even if it could thus be applied with some success, this formal strategy was modified from late 1932, when Renau discovered the work of John Heartfield. In contrast to the sequential and segmented examples above, Heartfield had developed a technique where different photographic fragments were combined in one single compositional unit. Renau later suggested that this is the difference between collage, as seen in Dada experiments, and the political photomontage which Heartfield subsequently pioneered: while collage offered a fragmented image which could only

[65] The article, entitled 'La Eugénica ante la crisis económica mundial de hoy y sus previsiones para el futuro', criticised, for example, the rise in infant mortality rates and cuts to services in maternity wards.

[66] As highlighted by the historian Peter Holquist. See 'Violent Russia, Deadly Marxism? Russia in the Epoch of Violence, 1905-21' *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (Summer 2003), 652.

question the limitations of representation, montage did not diminish the formal realism of the picture, but rather aimed to create what he called 'a strictly photographic space.'[67] The interaction between the different elements would thus be more immediate and persuasive, enhancing the effect of visual metaphors and creative alterations of reality. By imitating the 'straight' press photograph, Heartfield's montage can also be read as a more unsettling (if perhaps self-defeating) critique of photography's truth claim as such.[68] Either way, an illustrative example, reproduced by Renau in the April 1933 issue of *Orto*, is Heartfield's 1932 image of a hyena prowling a muddy battlefield littered with dead bodies.[Fig. 5][69] It wears a top hat and a military medal where the inscription has been changed from 'Pour le Mérite' to 'Pour le Profit.' Together with the caption, 'War and Corpses – The Last Hope of the Rich', Heartfield communicated through one simple, effective image an uncompromising critique of the ruling classes, perceived by left-wing radicals both to have profited from the World War and be ready to start another in defence of their privileges.

The experience of seeing his first Heartfield montage on the November 1932 cover of *A-I-Z* was described by Renau as 'enlightenment.'[70] Contemplating the composition showing a white dove impaled on a bayonet [Fig. 6] – a comment on the violent suppression of an anti-fascist demonstration in Geneva that year – he saw, at a stroke, how his political convictions could be expressed in 'concrete images' and how he could best contribute to the revolutionary cause. By maintaining a semblance of photographic realism, Heartfield's formula contained, in Renau's view, a particular propagandistic potential that other montage artists had yet to explore. A desire to harness this potential for political purposes was, unsurprisingly, a fundamental driving force for Heartfield too, who in 1931 had told a Moscow audience:

> If I collect documents, combine them and do that in a clever way, then the agitational-propagandistic effect on the masses will be immense. And that is the most important thing for us. That is the foundation of our work. Therefore it is our task to influence the masses, as well, as strongly, as intensely as possible.[71]

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67 Renau, J. 'Homenaje a John Heartfield' First published in *Photovision*, no. 1, July-August, 1981. Reproduced in Brihuega, J. (Ed.) *Josep Renau*, 453-458. Quote on 456.

68 See Kriebel, S. 'Manufacturing Discontent: John Heartfield's Mass Medium' *New German Critique* 107, Vol. 36, No. 2, (Summer 2009), 53-88.

69 Published in *A-I-Z*, 18 (April 1932).

70 Evans, D. *Photomontage*, 22.

71 Ibid. p 19.

Although the political value of photomontage was far from uncontested in contemporary Marxist debates,[72] Heartfield and Renau were not the only ones convinced of the technique's efficaciousness. The cultural critic Walter Benjamin commented in 1934 that the German pioneer, who also produced images for a publishing house called Malik, had turned the simple book cover into a political weapon, while the surrealist poet Louis Aragon likened Heartfield's work to a 'knife that cuts into every heart.'[73] Before the revolutionary force of his twisted realism – its 'revolutionary beauty,' in the words of Aragon – audiences would be compelled to see the violent truths that underpinned contemporary society.[74]

Apart from its power to shock, montage artists and their Marxist champions of the 1930s maintained that photomontage also carried a crucial epistemological claim. The problem with straight photography, argued Benjamin, was that it generally failed to represent social relations. A picture of a factory building, to use his own example, tells us nothing about the exploitation that goes on inside.[75] The potential strength of photomontage was to incorporate into the image the discursive meaning that may make that exploitation visible.[76] This point was later emphasised by Renau, who in a 1981 essay on Heartfield claimed that political photomontage was in fact 'the only' artistic form that could represent, 'verisimilarly,' 'the absurd and paradoxical character' of the society in which we live. Photomontage captured its '*contradictory* essence,'[77] which could be neither visualised nor photographed in a real space. That such a procedure should moreover be distinguished from other forms of photographic manipulation had been pointed out in 1931 by the Hungarian art critic Alfréd Kemény, who offered the following clarification in the German worker photography magazine *Der Arbeiter-Fotograf*:

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[72] For a good empirical and theoretical analysis of Heartfield's reception in the USSR, see Gough, M. 'John Heartfield's biography of Soviet petroleum' in Mendelson, J. (Ed.) *Magazines, Modernity, and War* (Madrid: Ministerio de Cultura, 2008), 75-90. These debates should also be placed in the context of wider contemporary discussions concerning different understandings of realism. In his famous exchange with Bertolt Brecht, Georg Lukács claimed that photomotage could, at most, have the effect of a 'good joke,' while Brecht defended new representational techniques as necessary to capture the reality of twentieth century society. See Various authors *Aesthetics and Politics* (London: Verso, 2007), 28-86 (esp. 43, 83).

[73] For Benjamin's comment, see 'The Author as Producer' in Benjamin, W. *Reflections* (New York: Schocken Books, 1986), 229. For Aragon's comment, see text originally published in *Commune*, 20 (April 1935) but also reproduced in Various authors, *Fotomontaje de entreguerras*, 119-121 (quote on 120).

[74] Various authors, *Fotomontaje de entreguerras*, 119-121.

[75] See 'The Author as Producer', esp. 229f.

[76] Cf. Various authors, *Fotomontaje de entreguerras*, 121.

[77] Renau, J. 'Homenaje a John Heartfield', 455.

> While bourgeois photomontage uses photographed parts of reality to falsify social reality as a whole […], revolutionary photomontage by an "artist" (technician) of Marxist orientation brings photographic details (parts of reality) into a dialectical relationship, both formally and thematically: therefore it contains the actual relationship and contradictions of social reality.[78]

Thus, as long as it was correctly informed, an arrangement of several photographic images could simultaneously represent and aesthetically re-enact contemporary social relations. It did not trick the audience, but rather offered it an opportunity to *see through*, in art critic John Berger's term, the deceitful surface reality of bourgeois ideology and to contemplate a deeper truth regarding capitalism's inner logic.[79] 'Revolutionary photomontage' – as opposed 'bourgeois photomontage' – captured the complexity of contemporary society in a way which a single reality fragment (i.e. a straight photograph) could not do.

Photomontage in Orto *and* Estudios *(1932-1934)*

For all his praise for Heartfield, Renau did not simply copy his magisterial example. First of all, Renau rarely produced compositions where elements were truly arranged in one photographic space[80] – an effect that was easier for Heartfield to achieve since he, unlike Renau, used bespoke photos taken in his own studio.[81] The nearest Renau came was an integration of different elements into one image. An early example of this, providing a complement to 'Panorama of bourgeois society', appeared in the December 1932 issue of *Estudios* with the title 'Bourgeois sensibility' (Sensibilidad burguesa)[Fig. 7]. Here we see a smiling woman, evidently of the affluent classes, enjoying the company of her two cats, and, on the other side of a drawn brick wall, two children – unhappy, poor, apparently abandoned. The contrast between the situation of the children and the comfort enjoyed by the cats suggests that the woman utterly lacks compassion and that the indifference of the rich before the plight of the poor has taken on monstrous proportions. If viewers appear to be implicated by the boy's accusatory stare, it is

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78 Cited in Simmons, S. 'Picture as a Weapon in the German Mass Media, 1914-1930' in Marquardt, V. H. (Ed.) *Art and Journals*, 175.

79 Renau himself saw montage as a the most 'adequate form' to express Marxist-Leninist dialectics visually. See Renau, J. *La Batalla por una nova cultura* (Valencia: Eliseu Climent, 1978), 150.

80 Cf. Heartfield images like 'Hurrah, die Butter is alle' in *A-I-Z* (December 1935) and 'Mimikry' in *A-I-Z* (April 1934).

81 See Kriebel, S. 'Manufacturing discontent', 65, for comments on Heartfield's studio practice.

because only they can be expected to change the reality of the children's cruel exclusion.

As in 'Panorama', 'Bourgeois sensibility' offers an image where social division is portrayed as spatial division. Yet at the heart of the message is a question of common humanity, a status effectively denied to some of the most deprived social sectors of pre- and inter-war Spain. Many owners of the large estates across the south especially, did little to alleviate the brutal living and working conditions endured by the day-labourers in their employ, who during harvest times typically had to toil from sun rise to sun set for starvation wages and make do with virtually nothing during the remainder of the year. Conservative parts of the urban establishment similarly tended to view industrial workers, often living in cramped and unhygienic quarters, as simply troublesome rabble to which no concessions should be made.[82] The first Republican government tried to mitigate some of the suffering caused directly or indirectly by such attitudes, but to radical groups on the left change was, as indicated, too slow and insufficient. In fact, Renau's title implicitly discredits, as communists and anarchists explicitly did, the very validity of the reformist model as such: if disregard for the rights of the poor is to some extent inherent in the 'bourgeoisie', no 'bourgeois' regime – as the liberal Republic was labelled – could be expected to ensure genuine social justice.[83]

The coming of social justice had been the theme of Renau's montage for the previous issue of *Estudios* (November 1932). Entitled 'The dawn of social justice' (Amanecer de la justicia social)[Fig. 8], it shows a couple in evening dress dancing under a crystal chandelier, while two rural women and two hands – one reaching out as if to grasp something, the other a clenched fist – form a quarter-circle beneath them. One of the rural women has non-European features; a reminder of the fact that colonialism occupied a central place in Renau's and his colleagues' global understanding of social injustice.[84] But as this was not necessarily a big issue for the political left in Spain, we can assume that their knowledge of colonialism was largely shaped by features in foreign magazines like *A-I-Z*, which did address such questions.[85] It is also notable that all but the couple appear to have emerged out of a dark haze, and that the

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82 Cruz, R. *En el nombre del pueblo*, 30.

83 Cf. Juan Renau's references to the Republic as a 'Republiquita' (little Republic) that would make no substantial difference. *Pasos y Sombras*, 290.

84 Rosa Ballester, Manuela Ballester's younger sister, said in a 1979 interview that Renau would make references to colonial abuses from the early stages of his political activism. See CDMH (Salamanca) Fuentes_Orales-Mexico, no 10, 10. Both *Orto* and *Estudios* included articles of colonial abuse with relative regularity.

85 Manuel Monleón, the other main artist working for *Estudios*, even copied a Heartfield image for *A-I-Z* showing a black and a white clenched fist next to each other (*Ob schwarz, ob weiß*, 1931) for his cover for *Estudios*, 126 (February 1934).

women, observing the dancers with angry expressions, have an almost ghost-like quality. It is as if the politically and historically oppressed – appearing as a form of repressed social subconscious – have returned to demand their due from those benefiting from their labour. The montage was in all likelihood made before Renau penned his call to the inaugural meeting of the Unión de Escritores y Artistas Proletarios, but it is tempting to see in this composition a visualisation of a revolutionary 'breach in history,' providing the excluded with an entry point to a social space where equality in all its forms may be recognised and enacted.[86]

The oneiric quality apparent here is in fact a recurring and distinct feature of Renau's photomontages, through which the inclusion of photographic reality is accompanied or even countered by an aesthetic suggestion of dreams and nightmares. While this aesthetic is occasionally attached to a desirable possibility, it more frequently indicates an ideological veil that accompanies and obscures material exploitation, facilitating viewers' task of 'seeing through' by making visible the components and quality of its fabric. This can be seen in an untitled *Estudios* montage published in August 1933 where rural workers – mostly women – are toiling in a field, situated beneath a pulpit from which a smiling priest tells them 'Resignation, brethren. Christ suffered more for us.'[Fig. 9][87] Behind the pulpit, at the centre of the pictorial field, stands a gigantic crucifix, behind which a corpulent and visibly content man in suit – carrying a small yet plainly visible swastika on his lapel – hands the priest a bundle of notes.[88] The dark palette and sombre atmosphere of the composition recalls the religious painting of the Spanish Golden Age,[89] yet instead of celebrating piety and sacrifice it denounces religious discourse as a tool to conceal hypocrisy and legitimise suffering.

Again, such a view would not have been unfamiliar to the readers of *Estudios,* or any other radical left-wing magazine. Throughout the period of the Restoration monarchy (1875-1931), and continuing into the Republican era, the Church was perceived by substantial sectors of Spaniards as a legitimising tool for a constellation of ruling conservative powers, underpinned by a landowning elite, determined to maintain a social system based on rigid hierarchies and multiple forms of exclusion. Indeed, during the monarchy, with its repressive approach to any assertion of workers' rights,

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[86] See page 56 above.

[87] Org. 'Resignación hermanos. Más padeció Cristo por nosotros.'

[88] Again there is a similarity with a Heartfield montage ('Der sinn des Hitlergrusses', cover of *A-I-Z* [October 1932]) which shows how a saluting Hitler receives a bundle of notes from a huge suited man standing behind him. Both images linked the wealthy capitalist to fascism.

[89] Especially, perhaps, José de Ribera (1591-1652) and Francisco de Zurbarán (1598-1664).

the clergy's often pervasive and direct influence, particularly in cities, in spheres affecting both political and everyday life made it a key symbol of social control.[90] Church collaboration with state institutions blurred the boundary between religious and political authority, and for the urban poor, especially, the external imposition of a rigid though arbitrarily applied moral code added to material hardship a dimension of psychological abuse. Popular anticlerical views also held priests to be lazy, immoral and acting primarily out of their own material self-interest. 'What was the Church?', a Barcelona worker asked in 1936, 'Only a chain store dealing in funerals, baptisms, marriages, hospitals, education, money-lending, banks, cafés'.[91] While the poorest were denied their most basic needs, the Church was seen to use its position to amass fortunes for itself.

While such hypocrisy naturally embittered those most disadvantaged by the system of which religion was an integral part, it also generated much resentment among progressive sectors of the middling classes – the background from which Renau and many of his colleagues came. Their disdain for the clergy, like that of poorer sectors, was exacerbated by the subsequent opposition of the Church to Republican reform[92] – although their anticlericalism long pre-dated the Republic. The influence of writers like Vicente Blasco Ibáñez (1867-1928), a novelist and militant republican who caused controversy through his newspaper *El Pueblo*, contributed to the dissemination of anticlerical sentiments and had a particularly strong impact on the political atmosphere of his native Valencia. It is said that Renau's own father, José Renau Montoro, was an admirer of Blasco Ibáñez, and his youngest son Juan would later characterise him as an anti-clerical catholic. It seems Blasco Ibáñez was not the only factor here, however. The alleged failures of local priests to pay Renau Montoro for his artistic contributions to church processions, payments which the young Josep was typically sent to collect, may well have been enough to stir anticlerical feelings in the struggling father of five.[93] It may also have created a psychological foundation for the anticlerical sentiments of his eldest son.[94]

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[90] For a thoroughgoing analysis of the social roots of anti-clericalism on the Spanish left, see Thomas, M. *The Faith and the Fury: Popular Anticlerical Violence and Iconoclasm in Spain, 1931-1936* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2013).

[91] Cited in Graham, H. *The War and its Shadow*, 39.

[92] As a result of secularising legislation, not to mention the recurrence after 1931 of popular anti-clerical protests leading to church burnings, the Church tended to identify the Republic as a whole with anti-clericalism. See, for example, Preston, P. *The Spanish Holocaust*, 16f.

[93] Cf. page 21 above.

[94] Renau, J. *Pasos y Sombras*, 19.

To return to Renau's dark 1933 portrayal of clerical complicity in systemic oppression, then, it is evident that the catholic tropes serve to broaden the link between the culture of the church and the hypocrisy depicted, as well as to emphasise the benightedness and tragedy of the lives endured by the rural poor. The scene is infused with a sense of grotesque surreality, reinforced by the facial expression of the priest and the disproportionally huge cross with the man behind it. The only thing that seems truly real is the pained expression on the face of one woman who looks up towards the viewer.

The grotesque and surreal element of this image was greatly enhanced in a coloured montage series called 'The Ten Commandments' (Los Diez Mandamientos), published in *Estudios* between February and November 1934.[95] Satirizing the failure of the conservative establishment to live up to its own ethical doctrine, 'The Ten Commandments' combined caricatures of the rich with graphic images of brutality and bloodshed.[96] The first two installments, arguably the most accomplished from an artistic point of view, may in this sense be taken as representative of the tone of the series as a whole. The first, 'You shall have no other gods before me' (Amar a Dios sobre todas las cosas[97])[Fig. 10], which is the only one to contain a touch of humour, portrays a wealthy man, a representative of the bourgeoisie, who has himself taken the position of god. With a smug smile on his face he is surrounded by money and lightly dressed women (presumably representing prostitutes). His halo is made of bayonets. Here the supposedly virtuous ruling classes are, in other words, characterised by narcissism and megalomaniac ambitions, driven by materialistic desires that perverted love and glorified war.

The second commandment, 'You shall not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain' (No tomarás, en vano, a Dios por testigo)[Fig. 11], is more severe in its imagery. It shows the body of a prisoner, killed by decapitation, lying before a crucifix and a Nazi flag. The bloody scene appears to be located in a domestic saloon, with its dark-red silk drape drawn back to reveal the symbols that sanction murder. A hand enters the pictorial field from the right, suggesting an impotent gesture to stop what has occurred. Being a militant atheist, Renau no doubt felt that any calls for God's help in times of real crisis

[95] The idea as such came from Adja Junker's series of drawings of the same title, published in *Orto*, 9 (November 1932).

[96] It was described by the magazine as an 'implacable critique of the international bourgeoisie'. See the ad for the upcoming series in the picture section of *Estudios*, 125 (January 1934).

[97] Rather than a direct translation of the Spanish phrase, I have opted to use one of the standard translations of same commandment in English.

were bound to be 'in vain' – especially considering his 'true' face represented in the previous installment and his allies as represented here. To some degree, then, his recycling of the Christian message in this context may contain implicit criticism against workers still holding on to religious beliefs.[98] Even so, little can detract from the main charge of the montage, which is directed against a God that is portrayed as pitiless and cruel when his repressive law is offended.

Indeed, as the series continues the scenes become not only more formally complex, but also more violent, gruesome, and shocking. The fifth commandment, 'You shall not kill' (No matarás)[Fig. 12], is illustrated with a central figure pasted together from gunships, the façade of a symbolic 'Parliament of Peace', and a skull wearing the royal crown – all surrounded by red smoke and blood-drenched bodies. In the lower right corner we see a face which has been cut in half just below the nose, the raw flesh confronting the viewer like a grisly scream. Similarly the illustration for the eighth commandment, 'You shall not bear false witness against thy neighbour' (No mentirás) [Fig. 13], is built around four corpses whose blood stains most of the pictorial field, while a sign in the lower right corner tells an audience that total calm reigns the country. In these images it is as if Renau sought to shock his audiences into action by the sheer force of visual horror. Here the real takes on a predominantly psychological dimension; it manifests itself in suffering, severed limbs, the materiality of our bodily existence and death.[99] Photography is used relatively sparingly, only just enough to anchor in reality a a truly nightmare-ish vision of contemporary Spanish society. The hypocrisy of the Church and the catholic establishment were here tied to acts of extreme brutality, and politics appeared inseparable from violence.

Like all Renau's *Esudios* montages, the images constituting 'The Ten Commandments' series were printed on a separate page, as if to allow the possibility of them being cut out and used as a small poster for the home or the workplace. The idea in itself blurs the boundaries between the ephemerality of printed mass-media and the lasting value ascribed to more traditional artworks, and reinforces the fact that *Estudios* considered its task to be that of fostering an entire alternative culture, encompassing

[98] Cf. the *Orto* photo feature, presumably put together by Renau, entitled 'Freedom to pray and freedom to sleep.' Here Renau mocks working-class women in Depression-hit America for praying for more jobs. *Orto*, 8 (Octobre 1932).

[99] This is also a central aspect of 'the real', as conceptualised by Badiou and, before him, Jacques Lacan (among others). For an brief comparative discussion, see Buch, R. *The Pathos of the Real: On the Aesthetics of Violence in the Twentieth Century* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2010), 8-15.

new arts as well as new morals and education. That 'The Ten Commandments' was appreciated by readers (and, despite or perhaps because of its grim content, actually used as wall decoration) is suggested by an anecdote, supplied by Renau himself, describing events during the first phase of the civil war, when all social relations were indeed saturated with violence. Shortly after being appointed General Director of Fine Arts on 9 September 1936, Renau had to visit anarchist-held Toledo, in order to safeguard the artistic treasures of the city's cathedral. Entry into the city proved difficult, as the anarchist militia in command would not recognise any central government authority. Negotiations between Renau and the local leadership only took a turn for the better once the artist noticed that his *Estudios* series hung on the wall in the militia leader's office and could strategically indicate that he was the creator of the much admired works.[100]

In terms of form, 'The Ten Commandments' offers one of the clearest examples of the fact that Renau's practice also blurred the boundaries between photomontage, drawing, and painting. To a much greater extent than Heartfield, Renau included in his montages elements that were visibly drawn by hand.[101] He also made heavier use of air-brush – a tool which he claimed to have introduced to Spain before anyone else and which had quickly become central to his commercial poster work.[102] In purely technical terms, this is how he produced the oneiric atmosphere of montages like 'Dawn of social justice' and, to a lesser extent, the second installment of 'The Ten Commandments'. Yet it must be added that a less strictly realist aesthetic also formed part of the particular graphic style of *Estudios*, and in a sense reflected the magazine's holistic and spiritual outlook. Probably for the same reason, *Estudios* was the only political magazine which Renau supplied with designs that were based entirely on air-brush and devoid of overt social criticism.[103]

Nonetheless, the general point remains: montage, regardless of all contemporary claims about its quasi-scientific epistemological potential, was for Renau a technique that could not be categorically separated from other forms of visual representation.

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[100] Cited in Bellón, F. *Josep Renau*, 205.

[101] Again, this is partly a consequence of him trying to achieve Heartfield's effect without copying all aspects of his practice.

[102] For his claim to have been the first to use air-brush in Spain, see interview with Facundo Tomás Ferré, held during Renau's last visit to Valencia. Tomás Ferré, F. *Los Carteles Valencianos en la guerra civil* (Valencia: Ayuntamiento de Valencia, 1986), 107.

[103] See, for example, his series on the seasons, *Las cuarto estaciones*, in the January issue, 1935. Other examples include the series entitle *Hombres grandes y hombres funestos de la historia* (Februrary-November 1935), *El amor humano* (January 1936), and *La lucha por la vida* (February-September 1936).

Apart from the evidence of his own practice, this was suggested by a distinction he made in a 1933 article 'Cinema and Future Art' (El Cinema y el Arte Futuro), where science was described as the 'analytical' and art the 'synthesising' branch of human knowledge.[104] Considering its fundamental nature as assemblage, photomontage undeniably corresponded to his 'synthesising' category (while straight photography, according to this scheme, can be considered an 'analytical' fragment that can provide scientific information and direct links between art and material reality[105]). A clearer indication of Renau's view of photomontage as intrinsically tied to other forms of art would come in the 1981 essay where he described Heartfield as an artist who worked in the Realist tradition of Goya and Daumier and who should be seen as a painter using modern means.[106]

In terms of content, 'The Ten Commandments' reflected and coincided with an intensification of the social conflicts accompanying Spain's uneven twentieth-century development, which had reached a new pitch with the arrival of the Republic. The reversal of the 1931-33 republican-socialist coalition government's reform programme after the right's victory in the November 1933 elections – just as Depression-induced unemployment in Spain was reaching its peak – exacerbated tensions in city and countryside, and left huge numbers of people without the means to support themselves or their families.[107] In the agrarian south and south-west of Spain, minimal measures to protect unionised workers, to guarantee a fair distribution of work, and enforce agreements on minimum wages were either undermined or ignored, and union activity everywhere was met with increasingly harsh repression.[108] Strikes were called throughout the spring of 1934, all of which ended in stalemate or union defeat, and on 7 March the Minister of the Interior, Rafael Alonso Salazar, closed down the headquarters of the Socialist Youth, the Communist Party and the CNT after declaring a state of emergency.[109] In the cultural sector, most projects to expand education were halted and the budget for the Misiones Pegagógicas was cut by half.[110] This attack on progressive

[104] Reproduced in Pérez Merinero, C. & Pérez Merinero, D. *Del cinema como arma de clase: antología de Nuestro Cinema 1932-1935* (Valencia: Fernando Torres, 1975), 46.

[105] Forment has plausibly claimed that Renau was never interested in photography as a potential art form in itself (though he did, as we have seen, take great interest in it as document). See Forment, A. 'El artista en sus libros. La biblioteca Josep Renau' *Kalías*, no 9 (1993), 141.

[106] Renau, J. 'Homenaje a John Heartfield', 454f.

[107] Preston, P. *The Spanish Holocaust*, 52.

[108] Ibid., chapter 3.

[109] Ibid., 61, 78. 222 of 315 days of Radical government passed with a state of emergency declared, which meant that constitutional guarantees were suspended.

[110] Huertas Vázquez, E. *La Política Cultural De La Segunda República Española*, 25-27.

politics was paralleled by a new assertiveness among the conservative and extreme right sectors. The violent activities of fascist groups like the Juntas de Ofensiva Nacional Sindicalista (JONS) and Falange Española, the latter funded by wealthy monarchists as an instrument of political destabilisation, went largely unpunished, while the mass Catholic party, the Confederación Española de Derechas Autónomas (CEDA), gaining increasing influence in parliament, adopted a style and rhetoric making it practically indistinguishable, at least to Spain's contemporary left, from Italian Fascism or early Nazism.[111] The mixture of Catholic conservatism and fascist trappings found in the CEDA served for many as sufficient proof that the old conservative establishment, primarily comprised of ecclesiastical authorities, wealthy industrialists, and landowners, was turning to fascism in a desperate attempt to defend their respective interests. Hence the frequent juxtaposition of swastikas with bourgeois and religious symbolism in Renau's representation of the alliance oppressing Spain's poor. If the Republic had momentarily brought hope to the socially and economically disenfranchised, the centre-right government elected in 1933 (which would last for two years) and depended on the CEDA for its parliamentary majority appeared determined to extinguish that hope, if necessary with the boot of authoritarianism.

The growing unrest of 1934 culminated in a socialist-led revolutionary revolt in October – the subject of Renau's blood-soaked illustration of the eighth commandment. After nine months of continuous defeats, the left was in no position seriously to attempt a revolutionary conquest of the state, but when the President, Niceto Alcalá Zamora, invited the CEDA to form part of a new government, important sectors of the socialist movement felt they had no choice but to act against the erosion of the Republic's democratic potential. Lack of preparation and a wavering attitude among the socialist leadership nationally meant that the rising was swiftly defeated in Madrid and Barcelona and of minimal consequence in most other parts of the country. The only place where the insurrection was temporarily successful was the northern mining districts of Asturias, where the terrain and the miners' particular skills, as well as effective collaboration between socialist, communist, and anarchist organisations allowed the rank-and-file to hold out for two weeks. The governmental response was ferocious, and involved the deployment of Moroccan mercenaries who used brutal colonial tactics to terrorise the civilian population. Once the rising was defeated, the task of maintaining 'public order' went to Civil Guard Major Lisardo Doval Bravo, who,

[111] Preston, P. *The Spanish Holocaust*, 56.

equipped with special judicial powers, used savage methods to punish workers further for their insubordination.[112]

The events of October, despite causing little disturbance outside of Asturias, presented the government with an excuse to unleash a series of repressive measures across the country. Workers' clubs were closed, the socialist press was banned, and leaders of workers' organisations were arrested in cities, towns, and villages. In Valencia, Renau and Manuela Ballester, with whom he now had a six-months-old baby, Ruy, were among those detained.[113] Exactly how long they were kept in arrest is not clear, but since none of the available sources give any details on the matter, the detention was presumably relatively short.[114] Many were much less fortunate of course and thus the demand for a far-reaching amnesty for the thousands of people who remained in prison as a result of the events of October 1934 would become foundational to the reconstruction of a new broad left alliance, just as it was later also probably the most important rallying cry of the early 1936 Popular Front election campaign, as well as featuring in election posters by Renau and Manuela.[115] Overall the October rising and its aftermath would have a pervasive impact on all areas of politics; it raised the stakes of the social conflicts besetting the Republic, and accelerated the polarisation that would make social relations in 1936 even more explosive.

Considering its repercussions, the October insurrection could not but have an impact on the Spanish cultural environment too. Among those already committed to social struggle, reports of the atrocities served to strengthen their resolve, while many who had previously remained detached now felt compelled to add a social dimension to their work.[116] In the prologue to Emilio Prados' poetry collection, *Llanto en la Sangre* (1937), the poet and publisher Manuel Altolaguirre stated that it was 'necessary for the year of the bloody repression of Asturias to arrive for all of us, all poets, to feel an urgent duty [*imperioso deber*] to adapt our work, our lives, to the emancipatory

[112] Reports of Doval's abuse provoked horror in the international press and eventually forced his relocation on 8 December. Ibid., 88. See also Cruz, R. *En el nombre del pueblo*, 64-67.

[113] Ruy Renau was born on 5 May 1934. Regarding the arrest, see 1980 interview with Antonio Ballester in CDMH (Salamanca) Fuentes_Orales-Mexico, no 9, 42f. Fernando Bellón also claims, without explaining why, that Renau was already hiding from the police in August 1934. See *Josep Renau*, 182. For further, if inconclusive thoughts on this see also, Forment, A. *Josep Renau*, 107.

[114] In his 1976 interview with Inmaculada Julián, Renau claimed that the police were often fairly lenient with him since he was well-known and highly respected professionally. See Julián González, I. *El Cartel Republicano*, 186.

[115] See in interview with Renau in García, M. et al. *Josep Renau: Fotomontador*, 278-280. On references to Asturias in February election campaign, see also Cruz, R. *En el nombre del pueblo*, 69-82.

[116] See Aznar Soler, M. *Literatura española y antifascismo*, 62-65.

movement in Spain.'[117] In addition to the overall human cost of the rebellion, writers were also moved by specific cases like the extra-judicial assassination while in state custody of Luis de Sirval, a journalist who had travelled to Asturias to report for the Valencian daily *El Mercantil Valenciano*.[118] Further protests related to the imprisonment and torture of the journalist Javier Bueno, and the month-and-a-half-long imprisonment of writer Antonio Espina for writing an article against Hitler.[119] Such events, together with the knowledge of book burnings and even harsher repression against dissent in coercive states like Nazi Germany,[120] served as a wake-up call for progressive cultural producers in Spain, reminding them that their activities were by no means separate from broader social and political developments. Thus, when Álvarez del Vayo addressed delegates in Paris at the First International Congress of Writers for the Defence of Culture in June 1935, organised by the Association des Ècrivains et Artistes Révolutionaires, he could justifiably claim that he spoke 'in the name of a country that [had] experienced eight months of tense fighting for culture', and that 'for Spaniards' (as indeed progressives of many other nationalities), the question of defending culture went 'beyond the limits of the purely literary.'[121]

[117] Cited in Fuentes, V. *La marcha al pueblo*, 62.

[118] As well as the farcical trial held in Oviedo in Aug 1935, which made the most respected names of the intellectual elite (Miguel de Unamuno, Antonio Machado, 'Azorín', Juan Ramón Jiménez, Julian Besteiro, José Bergamín, Corpus Barga, José F Montesinos) to sign a letter protesting against the sentence. See *El Sol* (11 August 1935).

[119] Fuentes, V. *La marcha al pueblo*, 62. The editors of *Nueva Cultura* (including Renau) also published a note declaring their support for Espina. See 'Carta a Antonio Espina' *Nueva Cultura*, 10 (January 1936), 2.

[120] The importance of this knowledge to artists' increasing commitment was emphasised in the memoirs of Rafael Pérez Contel. See *Artistas en Valencia*, 39.

[121] Fuentes, V. *La marcha al pueblo*, 63.

5. CREATING A CULTURAL POPULAR FRONT: *NUEVA CULTURA* (1935-1936)

It would be in this very highly charged social and political environment in Spain that the most ambitious of Renau's cultural projects, *Nueva Cultura*, was launched. Although first appearing in January 1935,[1] the magazine had been discussed among Renau's closest collaborators in the UEAP since the end of 1933, when they had agreed to develop a publication based on a principle of active anti-fascism. It would be open to collaborators of various ideological backgrounds as long as they accepted its basic *raison d'etre*. It would also be independent not only of the UEAP[2] but of all other political organisations too, the PCE included.[3] That said, Renau did seek advice from the PCE during the preparations, especially after initial hopes to engage prominent cultural figures in Madrid came to nought. But Renau was told by PCE General Secretary José Díaz and Politburo member Antonio Mije that the Party had neither the means nor the expertise to aid their project anyway. Insofar as the PCE leadership had any opinions, they added, Renau and his colleagues would hear them after publication.[4] But judging from the account which we have from Juan Renau, the only misgivings ever expressed within PCE circles came from members of the Valencian Provincial Committee itself, who nonetheless later retracted their complaints after a meeting in which Josep Renau forcefully defended the magazine. (On this occasion, as so many others, wrote the admiring Juan, his brother's implacable arguments simply crushed all objections like a 'bulldozer.'[5]) Despite the limitations imposed on what would thus start as a self-financed and regional publication (whose first print was only 1000 copies[6]), rather than the national magazine envisaged, *Nueva Cultura* quickly grew in stature and

1 In his autobiographical notes Renau claimed that most of the material for the first issue was put together by himself, while Rafael Pérez Contel, also a member of the editorial team, insisted that the issue was the result of a group effort. See Renau, J. 'Notas al margen', 469, and Pérez Contel, R. *Artistas en Valencia*, 656ff.

2 Most, if not all, of the founding members were however part of this organisation, and the two initiatives would often operate in tandem. See Renau, J. 'Notas al margen', 479, and Pérez Contel, R. *Artistas en Valencia*, 653.

3 Ibid., 473f. Pérez Contel has also stressed that the the magazine was not tied to the PCE *Artistas en Valencia*, 651. A slight modification in its organisational structure occured in the civil war, when *Nueva Cultura* became the official magazine of the Valencian 'Aliança d'Intel·ltuals per á Defensa de la Cultura,' itself closely related to the Popular Front government. See chapter 6 below.

4 J. 'Notas al margen', 470f.

5 Renau, J. *Pasos y Sombras*, 347.

6 Pérez Contel, R. *Artistas en Valencia*, 658.

reach.[7] By summer 1936, contributions came from a wide range of collaborators, including some who had first rejected the idea.[8] Support groups, formed of volunteers who facilitated the magazine's distribution, were established in Alicante, Sevilla, Santiago, and Bilbao, and editorial committee members were located all over the country, as well as in Paris.[9]

Apart from Renau, who has been described as 'the life and soul' of the magazine, foundational figures in the formation of *Nueva Cultura* were Ángel Gaos, Rafael Pérez Contel, Francisco Badía, Francisco Carreño, Juan Serrano, Armado Bazán, Pascual Pla y Beltrán, Juan Renau, and Antonio and Manuela Ballester.[10] Ángel Gaos, also a member of UEAP and the PCE, was a powerful orator and one of the most erudite in the group.[11] He was moreover recognised as its best writer, as a result of which most editorials were penned by him.[12] Gaos also stood out ideologically, as he combined Marxist convictions with a deep religious sentiment.[13] Pérez Contel was a sculptor who would work with *Nueva Cultura* throughout its existence, and take command of its graphic design during the war years. Badía and Carreño were part of Renau's closest circle of friends since school days, while Serrano, a medic and writer, and Armado Bazán, appear to have been newer acquaintances. Bazán, a Peruvian essayist and

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7 Josep Renau tended to suggest that the magazine was funded by him only, while Pérez Contel insisted that all the editors contributed to the extent that they could. Either way, Renau was by far the highest earner (apart from his successful career in advertising, he had also taken up a part-time teaching position at the San Carlos School of Fine Arts in 1933), which no doubt meant the greater part of the cost was carried by him. See Julián González, I. *El Cartel Republicano*, 186, and Pérez Contel, R. *Artistas en Valencia*, 654, 658.

8 According to Renau he talked to Miguel Prieto and Arturo Serrano Plaja, who in turn had discussed the idea with the *Octubre* group in Madrid. See J. 'Notas al margen', 470.

9 There are no exact figures on later print runts, nor geographical spread, apart from the support groups mentioned in the magazine itself (see no 13 [July 1936], 23.) According to both Josep and Juan Renau it also had some presence in Latin America. See Ibid., 459, and Renau, J. *Pasos y Sombras*, 346f. For a list of editorial committee members, see *Nueva Cultura*, 6 (August-September 1935), 16.

10 The exact membership of the editorial board is not clear and may have changed over time. Juan Renau claimed the original group consisted of Josep Renau, Pérez Contel, Carreño, Francisco Badía, Serrano, Pla y Beltrán, Alonso, an administrator and himself (*Pasos y Sombras*, 345). Francisco Agramunt by contrast claims it also included Ángel Gaos, Antonio Deltoro, José Bueno, and Armado Bazán, but not Pla y Beltrán, Badía, and Alonso. (*La vanguardia artística*, 300-303). The list above represents the names present on both lists (Josep and Juan Renau, Pérez Contel, Serrano, Carreño), plus names that were elsewhere mentioned by either Renau (Manuela, Ángel Gaos) or Pérez Contel (Bazán, Antonio Ballester) as having played a significant part from the start, as well as names whose close personal or organisational ties to Renau mean they can be assumed to have been have played a part in the magazine's inception (Pla y Beltrán, Badía).

11 Gaos was inthe PCE from early 1936 at least. Nadal mentions him as part of the his PCE cell, though Nadal himself only joined the PCE around the time of the general elections in February 1936. *Gómez Andrés, A. & Pérez i Moragón, F. (Eds.) Emili Gómez Nadal*, 386. Juan Renau called him an 'orador de escandalo' *Pasos y Sombras*, 297.

12 J. 'Notas al margen', 481f.

13 Ibid. Renau claimed that he occasionally left editorial meetings because he was irritated by the materialist emphasis of his colleagues' social, political, and cultural analysis. See also Agramunt Lacruz, F. *La vanguardia artística*, 276, 299.

literary critic resident in Valencia, spoke a number of languages and would be the first to contribute with translations of foreign articles and documents.[14] Pla y Beltrán, the UEAP administrator and nominally 'President' of the Valencian PCE, was a self-taught poet. He was one of the few (if not the only one) in the group from a poor background, for which reason he had been obliged to turn to factory work from a young age. After discovering poetry, he had become a prolific and uncompromising writer – the *enfant terrible* of Valencian letters according to Juan Renau[15] – and would later impress observers with his ability to connect through his work with the most exploited sectors in Spanish society.[16] Juan Renau was also, as we've seen, active in both the UEAP and the PCE, and held positions of responsibility in the Valencian branch of the students' union, FUE, for which he was briefly the General Secretary (*Comisario General*).[17] He too wanted to go to art school, but as José Renau Montoro decided that two artists was enough for one family, he had to settle for law studies instead. The subject did not interest him and eventually he became a historian and writer. Antonio Ballester was a sculptor who was fully involved with local avant-garde circles and moreover had close family ties to Renau, who had married his elder sister, Manuela.

An extended mention needs to be made regarding Manuela Ballester, who played a pivotal role not only as a co-editor and contributor to *Nueva Cultura* but also as crucial support in Renau's political and artistic career generally. Manuela was herself an excellent painter, predicted in the late 1920s to achieve great success,[18] but would ultimately sacrifice a significant part of her own artistic ambitions for the career of her husband.[19] Indeed, as Fernando Bellón has suggested, it is difficult to imagine how Renau's phenomenal artistic output in the Republican years – encompassing, as it did, multiple forms of advertising commissions, magazine illustrations, and book covers, as well as regular and frequent contributions to political magazines like *Orto* and *Estudios*

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[14] Pérez Contel, R. *Artistas en Valencia*, 657. Pérez Contel did not specify which languages, but says that Bázan provided translations for the first issue, which means his language skills could have included French, German, Russian and Italian.

[15] Renau, J. *Pasos y Sombras*, 350f.

[16] Fuentes, V. *La marcha al pueblo en las letras españolas*, 223. See also Agramunt Lacruz, F. *La vanguardia artística*, 277.

[17] Agramunt Lacruz, F. *La vanguardia artística*, 279. Juan Renau also ran the visual arts section of its magazine, *FUE*.

[18] Ibid. 204-262. See also two articles in *Laberintos: revista de estudios sobre los exilios culturales españoles* No 10-11 (2008-2009): Bellón, F. 'Manuela Ballester, hija, hermana y esposa de artista' (pp. 148-164) and Escrivá Moscardó, C. 'Recordando a Manuela Ballester' (pp. 165-177). There also an exhibition catalogue, García García, M. (Ed.) *Homenaje a Manuela Ballester* (Valencia: Institut Valencià de la Dona, Generalitat Valenciana, 1995).

[19] See Bellón, F. 'Manuela Ballester, hija, hermana y esposa de artista', 159.

– could have been maintained without the assistance of his wife.[20] Even while providing help, Manuela had to restrain her husband's otherwise unbounded eagerness to take on new projects.[21] It also seems that the couple depended hugely on Manuela's mother, Rosa Vilaseca, to take care of all household duties while they worked.[22] Nonetheless, Manuela's own work would achieve some visibility through collaborations with publishers like Cenit,[23] as well as with magazines like *Orto* and *Nueva Cultura*.[24] During the war years she would take the lead in editing another publication, *Pasionaria*, as part of her work for the Committee of Anti-Fascist women (Comité de Mujeres Antifascistas).[25]

If these were Renau's key collaborators from the beginning, various prestigious names would be added to the list as *Nueva Cultura*'s stature grew. Among those who repeatedly contributed with articles and art work during its pre-war phase (during the civil war the list would expand even further, as it became the official publication of the main cultural organisation in Valencia. See chapter 7) we find the novelist and playwright Max Aub, the poet Juan Gil-Albert, and the writer César Arconada. Taking this array in conjunction with the political positions of the editors, the magazine thus represented a broad and varied ideological outlook which spanned the spectrum of the progressive left.[26]

In its efforts to co-ordinate the different political voices present in common opposition to fascism, *Nueva Cultura* offered a cultural parallel to the contemporary political developments which would culminate in the Popular Front coalition that fought the February 1936 elections. Materialising (and triumphing) largely as a result of the extraordinary campaigning of Manuel Azaña, the electoral coalition would include reformist republicans, socialists and communists, who sought to regain the political initiative and resume the reformist programme that had first defined the Republic in 1931-33.[27] Even the previously sectarian PCE had, as a result of grass roots pressure, begun to engage in cross-party collaboration in connection with the Asturian

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20 Ibid., 150.
21 Bellón, F. *Josep Renau*, 227.
22 See Bellón, F. 'Manuela Ballester, hija, hermana y esposa de artista', 151.
23 Escrivá Moscardó, C. 'Recordando a Manuela Ballester', 167.
24 Apart from articles mentioned in footnote 56 on page 53 above, see photomontages in *Orto*, 15 (September 1933) and *Nueva Cultura*, 9 (Decembre 1935), 10f.
25 Agramunt Lacruz, F. *La vanguardia artística*, 204-262.
26 Arconada was a communist, Aub a socialist, and Gil-Albert not affiliated to any political party.
27 For an account of Azaña's role in the creation of the 'Popular Front' coalition of 1936, see Preston, P. 'The Creation of the Popular Front in Spain' in Preston, P. and Graham, H. (Eds.) *The Popular Front in Europe* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1987), 84-106.

rebellion. It then, fortuitously, found its marginal participation in the electoral coalition officially sanctioned when, in July-August 1935, the Popular Front strategy was endorsed by the Comintern.[28]

Before considering how these political developments influenced *Nueva Cultura*, it should be mentioned that the Spanish Popular Front was not itself free of internal tensions. These can, in most cases, be traced to the fact that the coalition from the outset meant different things to its different component political parts. For reformist republicans and many parliamentary socialists, the ultimate goal was to recover parliamentary strength and thus defend Republican constitutionality and (especially for the socialists) the legislative power of parliament to enact social reform. For revolutionary socialists and communists, however, the Popular Front was primarily a pragmatic and temporary concession forced by the defeat of October 1934, a defeat that reminded the radical left once again of its limitations (as similar failed risings had across Europe since the Bolshevik revolution): the repressive apparatus of the modern state would always triumph in an open battle with revolutionary forces. It was this insight, plus the Soviet fear of expansionist Nazism, that finally prompted the Comintern to admit, at its Seventh Congress of 25 July-20 August 1935, that the sectarian tactic characterising its 'Third Period' needed to be abandoned for one emphasising collaboration with all progressive parties, at least until historical conditions were more favourable to radical change. Finally it must also be noted that many of the grass-roots constituencies that supported the Popular Front primarily saw it as a vehicle to resume the journey towards comprehensive social and political reform, however this was achieved. That this part of the Popular Front contained an element that was more radical than the coalition's electoral programme suggested became clear when the narrow electoral win of February 1936 gave rural and urban workers across Spain the confidence to stage a series of land occupations and other challenges to industrial management.[29] As in the first years of the Republic, then, there were different views within the progressive camp concerning the pace and scope of the change pursued. The difference was that after five years of escalating social conflict, such disagreements were potentially more explosive than ever before. Failure to co-operate would now

[28] Graham, H. *The Spanish Republic at War*, 59-62. See also Haywood, P. 'The development of Marxist theory in Spain and the Frente Popular' in Alexander, M. and Graham, H. (Eds.) *The French and Spanish Popular Fronts* (Cambridge: CUP, 1989)

[29] For an overview of the political dynamics of the Popular Front in Europe see editors introduction in *The Popular Front in Europe*, 1-20. For the cases of Spain and France, see also Alexander, M. and Graham, H. (Eds.) *The French and Spanish Popular Fronts*, 1-8.

come at a price that progressive Republicans could hardly afford to pay.

What kept the coalition together, despite internal tensions, was, as indicated, an overriding commitment to anti-fascism. The unifying effect of this commitment was particularly strong and even broader in cultural spheres, where confrontations between reformists and revolutionaries had never been as sharp as in politics proper. With a few reservations we can thus concur with cultural historian Manuel Aznar's comment that *Nueva Cultura* be first and foremost considered an attempt to form a 'cultural popular front.'[30] The term is useful as long as we see *Nueva Cultura* as the intellectual branch of a developing social movement rather than merely as a cultural project which found a symbolic counterpart in an electoral coalition. Moreover, it is important to note that it did not attract collaborators on the basis of any pre-determined agenda. Though its founding idea was to fortify anti-fascism in and through the arts, it basically operated as an open forum where the significance of anti-fascist commitment was constantly redefined through dialogue and interaction.

If *Nueva Cultura* was, as its subheading declared, primarily committed to the creation of a new 'intellectual current' (*orientación intelectual*), it also stressed to its readers the need to translate intellectual activity into concrete action. The first editorial stated that the magazine's aim was to overcome 'anxious' contemplation and that only action could generate 'authentic creation and reality.'[31] Similarly, in the October-November issue of 1935, commemorating both the Bolshevik Revolution and the Asturian rebellion, the editors asserted, with Marx, that the task was no longer 'to contemplate the world, but to transform it.' Aware that their efforts as 'revolutionary intellectuals' would add but 'a grain of sand' to 'the dynamism of these terrible and decisive times,' their labour would be 'in vain' if they could not make readers 'play an active role' in the process of contemporary history. Only by convincing a broader population to turn to action would progressives amass the force to overthrow 'imperialism' and create 'new forms of human co-existence.'[32]

The responsibility of the artist in this 'drama' was discussed in an open letter to the sculptor Alberto Sanchez, written by Renau and Carreño and published in *Nueva Cultura*'s second issue (February 1935). Entitled 'Situation and Horizons of Spanish Visual Arts: Letter from “Nueva Cultura” to the Sculptor Alberto' (Situación y

[30] Soler, M. A. ‘La revista Nueva Cultura y la construcción del Frente Popular cultural de la revolución española (1935-1937)’ (Faximil Edicions Digitals, 2006).
[31] *Nueva Cultura*, 1 (January 1935), 2.
[32] *Nueva Cultura*, 7-8 (October-November 1935), 2.

Horizontes de la Plástica Española: Carta de ”Nueva Cultura” al Escultor Alberto), the text starts with four 'objective facts' which, according to the authors, justify their intervention: first, the fact that an increasing number of artists supported the anti-fascist cause, which they understood to be about combating an ′anticulture′ resulting from 'the decomposition of capitalism'; second, that they grasped that the current system needed to be changed for one that was 'more just and rational' as well as conducive to the peace needed to create art; third, that they understood that only 'the true people – that composed of workers and peasants – may create this society'; and fourth, that despite these insights many artists had not understood the 'formidable role of culture' in maintaining the present system. After offering an extended analysis of the development of Spanish arts from the early twentieth century to their present day, the authors then criticized Alberto Sanchez, who, in spite of his commendable attempt to give tangible expression to life in the countryside, had failed to represent the reality of rural social relations. Even though his work sought to connect with the spirit of the Castilian landscape, it seemed oblivious, Renau and Carreño maintained, to the present revolt of its people. This was a consequence, in their view, of the fact that Sanchez had allowed himself to be influenced by the 'idealist' and abstract conceptions which unavailingly limited the social impact of contemporary art. These conceptions, rooted in the notion of 'art for art's sake,' diminished the content of the work and tied it to an individualist paradigm, which ultimately deprived it of the most important capacity granted art: its ability 'to establish spiritual contact between peoples.' The solipsistic decadence which took its place undermined, in other words, the possibility of art contributing to social mobilisation – a 'fact' which could only aid, in Renau and Carreño's view, the advance of fascism.[33]

In his short reply to *Nueva Cultura*, Alberto Sanchez declared himself to be prepared to join the revolutionary struggle, but suggested that to debate whether abstract art was 'bourgeois' or not was a waste of time. Certainly, Renau's art-theoretical argumentation may – not least from a present-day perspective – appear unproductively rigid,[34] but it should be reiterated that terms like abstraction and realism should not be understood too literally. The opposition was not one between non-figurative and figurative representation. Rather, as in the distinction between collage and photomontage, the former is concerned with the theoretical and practical limitations of

[33] *Nueva Cultura*, 2 (February 1935), 3-6.

[34] Renau himself later admitted that the argument presented in the letter may appear 'a bit naive and schematic' (un poco ingenua y esquématica). Pérez Contel, R. *Artistas en Valencia*, 137.

representation, whereas the latter refers to some kind of engagement with social reality.[35] What Renau and Carreño criticized was, in essence, an idea of art as self-referential experimentation or as a self-justifying pursuit of some timeless Beauty. Even if such art is not necessarily socially inconsequential in the long term,[36] Renau and Carreño's critique must again be understood in the context of contemporary political and cultural demands for immediate collective action. Realism, thus understood, was (and is) the only way to speak directly to 'peoples' – to use their own description of their audience – rather than 'individuals'.[37]

The 'Dark Testimonies of our Times' series

Renau's own answer to the challenge of formulating an innovative and politically effective response to his times had been found, as we've seen, in photomontage, a technique which he developed further in *Nueva Cultura*, and especially in the series 'Dark Testimonies of our Times' (Testigos Negros de Nuestros Tiempos).[38] 'Dark Testimonies' did not start out as a series of montages based on photography, but its core idea was from the beginning to use documents that would unmask the reality of fascism. The first couple of installments consisted of quotes from speeches, books, and other material, arranged as a textual unit and accompanied by commentary to make the significance of the excerpts plain to all.[39] The fourth issue of *Nueva Cultura* (May 1935) was conceived in its entirety as an installment of 'Dark Testimonies', highlighting the dangers of fascism through detailed analysis of statistics, tables, political documentation, as well as photographs taken from Germany and Italy.[40] Also anxious to point out the real danger of fascism rising to power in Spain, the introductory editorial offered a historical analysis of the emergence of European fascisms which highlighted similarities between the context of continental events and the contemporary Spanish situation (pointing broadly to a political and economic crisis that leads Capital to side to with anti-liberal forces, forming an alliance aiming primarily to defeat Marxism and

35 See pages 83f above.
36 See pages 32f above.
37 Renau later claimed that the letter had significant impact among cultural circles locally and even nationally. Pérez Contel, R. *Artistas en Valencia*, 137.
38 For an analysis covering every installment of this series, Revert Roldán, J.M. *Disseny gràfic en revistes valencianes: Gràfica i retòrica en Nueva Cultura (1935-1937)*, unpublished PhD thesis, University of Valencia, 211-238.
39 See number 1 (January 1935), 6f; number 2 (Febrauary 1935), 8f. The installment appearing in number 3, 8f, is the first to include photography.
40 Including some pictures previously used for the photo-series 'Dark Pages of War: what they concealed from the people' in *Estudios*, August to November 1933.

defend an order conducive to their material interests). It ended with a passage which later, against the reality of Francoist repression, would appear darkly prophetic to Renau and the other *Nueva Cultura* editors:[41]

> Just as in Italy, in Germany, and in Austria – just as in all fascist countries, incapable of saving their national bourgeoisie from the mortal decadence of capitalism – they will mount here, on top of the Spanish people, on top of its hunger, its misery and its toil, an absolutist state of military men, clergy, and adventurers at the service of capitalists and landowners. They will lock away Spanish culture in dark seminaries, and through this tragic Spanish night will burn yet again stakes of the Inquisition.[42]

Against this threat, *Nueva Cultura* reiterated its commitment to fight on the side of 'the people', to join the workers' militias to oppose those 'who carry in their hands the yoke of servitude and the arrows of martyrdom.'[43]

In the more image-rich instalment of 'Dark Testimonies' that followed, the focus would increasingly turn to Spain, and Renau would add to his ominous rhetoric a dose of bitter sarcasm. This was particularly evident in the sixth instalment of August-September 1935. Entitled 'Spain through the glasses of Don Salvador de Madariaga' (España a través de las gafas de Don Salvador de Madariaga), the montage combines excerpts from two books by Madariaga, then the Spanish representative in the League of Nations, with images from key events from the Republican period. The first pairing consists of a quote which states that the Spaniard is 'not a citizen of an egalitarian state like the French, nor is he a member of a national society like the English, nor a subject of an empire like the Italian or the German of today. He is a man.'[44] Below this quote we see an image of dead bodies scattered on the ground and a group of onlooking police officers, priests, and soldiers. In reference to the bloody repression of an anarchist rising in Casas Viejas (Cádiz) in January 1933, Renau's caption simply reads: 'The Human Condition: Casas Viejas.'[45] The conflict between intransigent conservatism and popular

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41 Cf. Pérez Contel, R. *Artistas en Valencia*, 656.

42 *Nueva Cultura*, 4 (May 1935), 5.

43 Ibid.

44 *Nueva Cultura*, 6 (August-September 1935), 8.

45 The nation-wide anarchist rising of 8 January 1933 was easily suppressed in most of Spain. Many government supporters as well as the right-wing press applauded the response of public order forces, but as the extreme brutality used to suppress the rising in Casas Viejas became known, the government – and especially the socialists, who formed part of the coalition – clearly felt events to be politically damaging. There are many accounts, including Ramón Sender's contemporary eyewitness reportage. For a concise and vivid historical account, see Preston, P. *The Spanish Holocaust...*, 27f.

revolutionary compulsion is similarly put in sharp relief throughout the composition. Another quote remarking on Spanish passivity before the vicissitudes of life is juxtaposed with an image from the Asturian rebellion, and Salvador de Madariaga's suggestion that Spanish society needed political institutions to have a religious base is placed next to an image of a burning church. Referring to a spate of church burnings that took place shortly after the proclamation of the Republic, the caption underneath states 'New catholicism: 11 May 1931'. Apart from the fact that Renau thus ridiculed the statesman's denial of Spanish workers' readiness to rebel, it is noteworthy that this montage also suggests a modification of his rhetorical strategy. In addition to the recurring reliance on photography being read as proof, Renau signals here a clear presumption that his audience shares his understanding of the meaning of the events portrayed. If not, his sarcasm would risk being misunderstood. In itself, this implies that didactism has here been replaced by an expression suggestive of a discursive community, a community where the artist addresses his audience less as a teacher than a fellow activist propagandising for a common cause.

A more elaborate example of this can be found in the October-November issue of 1935, where a four-page instalment of 'Dark Testimonies' appeared under the title 'Let's talk now about the good life in Spain' (Hablemos ahora del buen vivir en España) [Fig. 14]. The montage, which is made up of a long series of captioned images reading like a photographic comic strip, starts with a reference to a fortune-teller advert emphasising the importance of knowing the future. A narrator, whose commentary accompanies the images, takes this as a starting point for a presentation of Spain's key cultural institutions, which allegedly offer a sound base for future national development. The tone is again one of biting sarcasm, as a few extracts will show. The reader is advised not to 'fear' popular enfranchisement, as the 'distinguished clairvoyant' José Ortega y Gasset can be trusted to 'prophesize the failure of the masses in their attempt to direct the destinies of the world.' Should the reader be a sworn atheist, the narrator presents a child from the Basque village of Ezkioga who 'with the same naivety with which he would pick a number in the national lottery' will offer 'a true and disinterested testimony [...] of having seen God himself in a living image.'[46] Catholicism does not only represent the sole true creed, continues the narrator, but has also had a positive influence on modern culture and the mass media in Spain. A review of magazines then shows covers with anticommunist titles and pictures of workers behind bars, and behind

[46] The village of Ezkioga was famous as a site of Marian apparitions that began in June 1931.

the header of *Revista de Occidente*, praised for its 'elegant' propagation of the 'new conceptions' of 'western idealism', we see two-thirds of a swastika. The rest of the 'culture' on show is dominated by naked female models, cabarets, as well as images of heavy drinking, said to illustrate the interests of the 'gentlemen' of the fascist Falange Española. At the end of the narrative sequence, under an image of soldiers in Morocco, the narrator mentions how the Spanish state, as the 'moral tutor' of its population, sends its young to the colonies for a 'cultural exchange'. The next picture, taken in Asturias during the 1934 rising, shows a Moroccan mercenary taking aim with his rifle: the other side of that generous exchange.[47] Finally, the narrator asks, as the reader is faced with an image of a working-class woman sitting on the curbside is holding her head in her hands, 'is having been born Spanish not enough to bring a tear to one's eye?'[48]

As in 'Spain through the glasses of Don Salvador de Madariaga,' the images here are supposed to belie the captions, and thereby make apparent Renau's satire. Yet in this montage, the relation between image and text is less self-evident and can only be unambiguous if subjected to a predetermined reading (again suggesting Renau's trust in a like-minded reader). Indeed, should the relation be studied without any fixed predisposition, meaning seems to come apart, as its essential indeterminability produces a cognitive clash between different possible interpretations. Looking at the third and the fourth image [Fig. 15], for example, depicting seers from Ezkioga, it is impossible, on the sole basis of what is shown, to be certain whether the images confirm or undermine the claims made by the narrator. The 'reality' of the photograph is, in other words, caught in a tension, suspended between divergent truths, mutually exclusive and irreconcilable. One might even suggest the images do not so much stage a clash between interpretations as conjure manifestations of two possible worlds. Either way, this tension inevitably problematises the inherent discursive meaning elsewhere ascribed to the photograph. Yet considering that most of these pictures were presumably taken from mainstream media, this too may be understood as part of Renau's objective.[49] What is undermined, on such a reading, is first and foremost the truth of the photograph as it appears in the 'bourgeois' or 'reactionary' press. Needless to say, the distinction is

[47] This picture was a reproduction of the cover of *Crónica* 28 Octubre 1934.

[48] *Nueva Cultura*, 7-8 (October-November 1935), 12-15.

[49] Renau said in a 1978 interview that the 'Dark Testimonies of Our Times' series aimed to turn 'reproductive media' into 'productive media' – a statement which seems to have referred to a process whereby images that already in the public sphere are given new meaning by an artist who inserts them into a new context. See Tomás Ferré, F. 'Los carteles valencianos en la Guerra Civil Española' in Aguilera Cerni, V. (Ed.) *Arte Valenciano*, 189f.

purely ideological.

The quest for a cultural alternative

Nueva Cultura had from the outset sought to occupy a 'critical, polemical, and creative' position vis-a-vis Spanish mainstream media. An editorial column entitled 'Index of the Spanish press' (Índice de la prensa española), appearing in the inaugural issue, maintained that the lamentable 'material and political' situation (referring, in effect, to ownership structures) of national magazines had turned them into instruments of 'spiritual oppression.' This was doubly significant since the press, together with the cinema, constituted the 'primary indicator' of contemporary cultural life and a predominant 'pedagogical influence' on 'the masses.'[50] In order to clarify the pivotal justification and ambition of their own endeavour, then, *Nueva Cultura*'s editors offered an overview of its relationship to its main 'competitors'.

After a quick review of the dominant conservative, catholic, monarchist, and fascist magazines that constituted *Nueva Cultura*'s main adversaries, as well as 'pornographic' general interest magazines dismissed as true expressions of a 'decaying bourgeoisie,' the editors turned to publications which lay closer to its own ambition.[51] They commended the socialist paper *Leviatán*, while suggesting that its exclusively political content was too narrow to address their own interests, and also expressed a recognition of certain 'healthy' and 'authentic' elements in anarchist magazines like *Estudios* and *La Revista Blanca*, which otherwise suffered from a degree of 'disorientation' and 'anachronism.'

The two most important titles in *Nueva Cultura*'s overview were the well-established *Revista de Occidente* (1923-1936, 1963-present), founded by Ortega y Gasset, and the liberal catholic *Cruz y Raya (afirmación y negación*) (1933-1936), founded by the writer José Bergamín. These were deemed to constitute the only two Spanish publications representing a truly modern culture. *Revista de Occidente* – incidentally the first magazine that Renau had regularly read in his youth – was praised for the high standard of its literary and philosophical content, but was considered too liberal and germanophile in its political orientation. *Cruz y Raya*, described as a 'national response' to the 'cold occidentalism' of Ortega's magazine, was praised for having followed a broad and liberal path, despite the growing influence of fascism in

[50] *Nueva Cultura*, 1 (January 1935), 1f. The column was written by Ángel Gaos. Renau, J. 'Notas al margen', 469.

[51] The criticism was in one sense remarkable, since Renau was himself the creator of some of these 'pornographic' images. Bellón, F. *Josep Renau*, 189. Cf. photomontage entitled 'La Rosa', published in *Crónica* in April 1936. Cut out available in Archivo Josep Renau, 84/2.2.

conservative circles. The editors of *Nueva Cultura* shared its desire to take as their point of departure Spain's own realities and to create a 'national culture', but crucially did not want to suggest (as they implied *Cruz y Raya* did) that certain religious or political forms could be seen as consubstantial with what it meant to be Spanish.[52]

These comments, read in conjunction with Renau's retrospective ones on the magazine's birth, highlight not only *Nueva Cultura*'s critical role but also give an indication of how it conceived of its positive cultural contribution. Fundamentally, the aim of the magazine was to formulate a new cultural narrative, departing from the 'moral conservatism' and 'spiritual autarky' discernable, as Renau had pointed out, in Republican reincarnations of Golden Age art as well as in fascist manifestations appearing at the extreme end of the essentialist spectrum. It wanted to lay the basis of lasting change, influenced by international progressive ideas as well as healthy national traditions. Thus *Nueva Cultura* hoped to dismantle the rigid and discredited value hierarchies on which fascism too ultimately relied. Indeed, to its editors, anti-fascism did not only signify a combative stance against violent reaction, but a commitment to a different cultural order that would make the future resurgence of fascism a practical impossibility. Similar feelings among progressives elsewhere help to explain a Europe-wide concern with cultural renewal (seen not least in the work of the Frankfurt school and the writings of Antonio Gramsci) – a concern that took many forms in the interwar years. To achieve such radical renewal cultural producers needed to embark on an exploration of the unknown, to unfix the boundaries of collective and individual existence. New cultural possibilities had to be articulated for alternative cultural identities to be imagined. To such ends, *Nueva Cultura* advocated the creation of a new Spanish 'myth,'[53] incorporating what was useful from the past in a radically reformulated cultural self-perception. Constituting, in effect, a new 'social imaginary,'[54] this myth would serve as an ethical foundation for the 'just and rational' system posed to replace

[52] *Nueva Cultura*, 1 (January 1935), 1f.

[53] The use of the term 'myth' suggests the influence of the French syndicalist thinker George Sorel, who stressed the importance of myth in people's lives. However, there is no mention of Sorel anywhere in *Nueva Cultura*, and I know of no other indication that Renau might have read him.

[54] This term does not appear in *Nueva Cultura* but is useful as a clarification of what the editors sought to change. First elaborated by Lacan in the 1920s, the concept of the 'social imaginary' was taken up by theorists like Cornelius Castoriadis and Charles Taylor who described it as the way in which people imagine the society which they inhabit and sustain. By this none of them mean a visualising of an abstract representation of institutions and practices, but rather of significations (Castoriadis) which come to hold together shared meanings in society, or an underlying moral order (Taylor) which consciously or unconsciously informs behaviour and thought. Both Castoriadis and Taylor can be said to place the individual as a (trans)formative and/or reproductive agent of social institutions at the centre of their theoretical concerns.

the capitalist order in Spain, as well as a source of inspiration for future artistic creation.

The last installment of 'Dark Testimonies' to be published before the start of the civil war, an installment entitled 'Anathema', gave expression to a clearly millenarian dimension of this aspiration[55] [Fig.16]. Here an old myth is invoked to speak of the coming of a new one, as the prophet Isaiah emerges from the Old Testament to witness the cruelties and injustices of the modern day. The images consist of small photomontages depicting contemporary scenes of social misery while the captions are taken from the biblical original where the prophet speaks of a coming judgement – depicted as a popular revolution – against Judah. In the first instance, the montage thus provides another example of how Renau criticized a traditionally Christian society by using elements from its own cultural canon. Yet the historical overlap produced by the juxtaposition of Isaiah with contemporary events is arguably the composition's most salient feature, and emphasises how social injustice and violence have deep historical roots which can only be overcome – as the Clarté and UEAP manifestos also stated – through a complete break with history. According to this vision, true change will only come with what Juan Renau called the 'quotidian Final Judgement,' vindicating the powerless and signalling the dawn of a new world.[56]

Turning principles into practice

The values projected onto this new world are not only to be detected in *Nueva Cultura*'s textual and visual content, but also in its editorial practice. Relations between collaborators were, first of all, based on a clear principle of egalitarianism. Though Renau was a key figure in the founding of the magazine, there was no single voice standing above the rest at editorial meetings. All decisions were taken collectively.[57] As a result, these meetings, typically held in the old and run-down Ateneo Musical, which had the advantage of being visited by neither the police nor its own members, would often involve epic discussions and heated arguments.[58] All contributions were welcome, but nothing went into print without first being scrutinised by the group, and editorials were only written once divergent views had been synthesised into one. According to Juan Renau, the intensity of the effort often left the participants exhausted. 'We left those glorious and torrid meetings like convalescents after a devastating typhus: rickety,

[55] *Nueva Cultura*, 12 (May-June 1936), 12-14.
[56] Renau, J. *Pasos y Sombras*, 351.
[57] Ibid., 346. Cf. Pérez Contel, R. *Artistas en Valencia*, 654f.
[58] Agramunt Lacruz, F. *La vanguardia artística*, 299.

out of breath, beaten to a pulp,' he later wrote in his autobiography[59]

Around the time of the fourth issue (May 1935), editorial discussions were moved to a workers' café in the port.[60] Here all those present in the café were invited to contribute with questions and comments.[61] *Nueva Cultura* thus opened its editorial process to direct feedback from its intended readers, and allowed them to participate as cultural producers as well as consumers. While the latter may be said of other magazines too, especially where linked to efforts to create an alternative, 'proletarian' culture, such an immediate, and potentially risky, connection with the readership was unusual, if not unique.[62] It bespoke the editors' aspiration to a 'profound immersion in the community' and to create a 'popular' (though not 'populist') publication that would open up cultural debate to all. To what extent the magazine actually managed to appeal to working class constituencies nationwide may be indicated by the fact that the stated professions of its various support group members generally suggested a higher socio-economic position.[63] Considering that any real engagement with the magazine's content demanded a certain level of education, and that cultural concerns in general tend to be less pressing for the poorest, this should not be surprising. Nonetheless, in view of *Nueva Cultura*'s commitment to a multilateral process theoretically tied to the proletarian revolution, workers' contributions, where they could be secured, remained vital nourishment for their project.

Nearer to the time of the February 1936 elections, *Nueva Cultura* expanded on this idea and began to engage in an alternative version of the Misiones Pedagógicas, by visiting villages in the Valencian countryside.[64] There the editors read out and encouraged discussion around the magazine's editorials and illustrations – above all, it seems, the 'Dark Testimonies' series. In the immediate term, these sessions would have focused on building electoral support for the Popular Front. Like many progressives, the group behind *Nueva Cultura* was convinced that another victory for the conservative block risked irreparable damage to constitutional freedoms and worsening social

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59 Renau, J. *Pasos y Sombras*, 346.

60 J. 'Notas al margen', 478f. The café was called *El Polp* and was then Calle de la Reina.

61 Pérez Contel confirmed that *Nueva Cultura* also travelled around the countryside in order to engage villagers in their work (see below), so it would not be out of character if they adopted a similar *modus operandi* in the café. See *Artistas en Valencia*, 653.

62 Other Renau-related magazines that operated with some kind of feedback mechanism (mostly in the form of a section for readers' letters) were *Orto*, *Estudios*, *Octubre*, and *Nuestro Cinema.*

63 See *Nueva Cultura*, 10 (January 1936), 15, and *Nueva Cultura*, 11 (February 1936), 21. Members of these support groups were mainly doctors, skilled workers, journalists, teachers, students, writers and artists.

64 J. 'Notas al margen', 479. Pérez Contel, R. *Artistas en Valencia*, 653.

inequality, and in January 1936 the magazine even published a supplement containing photomontages, a poster, and an 'electoral manifesto' outlining in detail what it considered to be at stake in the upcoming elections.[65] At the same time, *Nueva Cultura*'s rural excursions also underscored the magazine's long-term goal. By actively interacting with their rural audiences, they addressed an immediate political challenge in ways which simultaneously sought to widen the dynamics of grass-roots democracy and to formulate a new cultural consensus.

Less interactive, but nonetheless worthy of mention in the context of *Nueva Cultura*'s extra-editorial activities, was the setting up in December 1935 of a 'popular cinema study club' (*Cine-Estudio Popular*). Renau and his colleagues saw the cinema as a powerful educational tool, and with this organisational initiative, which was part of an expanding and diversifying trend during the Republican years,[66] they aimed to support the dissemination of progressive films while also helping members to see the underlying ideological and economic reasons for what was in their view the regrettable content of mainstream, and above all Spanish, cinema.[67] They had already organised an earlier session on 17 February 1935 (then without the 'popular' in the club name), but this seems to have been a one-off event, and the initiative did not really develop a regular momentum until the end of the year.[68] However, beyond the two first two screenings, consisting of Rene Clair's *The Last Billionaire* (1934)[69] on 22 December and Mervin Leroy's American gangster story *Little Caesar* (1931)[70] on 5 January 1936 – the latter accompanied by a talk entitled 'On some fascist myths'[71] – no details are given in the magazine about further activities.[72] The last mention of the cinema club, emphasising

[65] The manifesto was divided into five sections: 'traditional culture', 'the university', 'primary education', 'the problem of artistic creation' and 'the national minorities'. In relation to each of these, the magazine argued for a politics that would guarantee equal access to education, a progressive approach to culture and science, and complete recognition of national minorities within Spain, preferably within a federal state structure or even through full independence.

[66] Pérez Merinero, C. & Pérez Merinero, D. *Del cinema como arma de clase: antología de Nuestro Cinema 1932-1935* Valencia: Fernando Torres, 1975, 25.

[67] Renau's/*Nueva Cultura*'s view was essentially that big capital's ownership of the film industry allowed it to use the medium to propagate its own values, or simply to sedate workers with mind-numbing entertainment. For a representative text here, see 'Manifesto de Amigos de Nuestro Cinema' in Pérez Merinero, C. & Pérez Merinero, D. *Del cinema como arma de clase*, 221-225.

[68] Judging from the lack of notices in *Nueva Cultura* between February 1935 and January 1936, as well as a note in the January issue (page 13) saying that the project had been long in the making.

[69] Original title: *Le dernier milliardaire.* Spanish title: *El último millonario*

[70] Spanish title: *Hampa dorada*

[71] One section of this talk was reproduced in *Nueva Cultura*, 10 (January 1936), 13f. Here Max Aub presented a few impressionistic thoughts highlighting how fascism opposed the natural plurality of 'Life'.

[72] The fact that no Soviet film is mentioned, despite Renau's stated admiration for Soviet film-making, may partly be due to Republican censorship. For a contemporary discussion around this, see, for example, *Nuestro Cinema*, 11 (April-May 1933), 146f. See also Pingree, G. B. 'Modern Anxiety and

only its general importance in the anti-fascist struggle and encouraging the creation of similar clubs where these did not already exist, appeared five months later (May-June, 1935).

Nueva Cultura and the USSR

The positive example and practical inspiration in *Nueva Cultura*'s pursuit of radical cultural change was, above all, the Soviet Union. Admiration for the socialist state was by no means restricted to communist circles in the interwar period, but would for various reasons be expressed by observers across the progressive spectrum – something true in Spain as well as in Europe more broadly.[73] The USSR was first of all an ally in the struggle against fascism, but many would also be impressed with the apparent success of the Five Year Plans in both rapidly industrialising an agrarian country and keeping it immune to the corrosive effects of the Great Depression. In this sense, then, the USSR also appeared to represent a superior model of economic development, a model which looked particularly powerful when contrasted to the malfunctioning economies of the US and much of Europe. While workers in advanced capitalist countries were left without the means to support their families, the Soviet economy maintained full employment. The optimism, dynamism, and vitality that in sympathetic accounts accompanied the construction of socialism added yet another dimension to such foreboding comparisons with a 'declining' west.[74]

Equally important, however, especially for *Nueva Cultura* and other cultural endeavours of its kind, was the perception that the USSR represented a revival of humanist values and a new model of social equality.[75] Such aspects of the Soviet project offered an interesting counterpoint for Spanish progressives who had seen their hopes for equality sparked by the Republic, just as they also underscored why the USSR was perceived as the antithesis of fascism.[76] A central expression of these values can be

Documentary Cinema in Republican Spain' in Larson, S. and Woods, E. (Eds.) *Visualizing Spanish Modernity* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2005), 301-328.

73 Most obviously, this led to the coinage of the term 'fellow-traveller', meaning (in this context) someone who sympathised with the goals of the Bolshevik Revolution but was not a card-carrying member of the Communist Party.

74 An interesting empirical study of this can be found in Erika Wolf's article on the reception of the glossy Soviet propaganda magazine *USSR in Construction.* See Wolf, E. 'When photographs speak, to whom do they talk? The origins and audience of *SSSR na Stroike* (USSR in Construction)' *Left History*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (2000), 53-82.

75 See *Nueva Cultura* special issue on the Bolshevik revolution (October-November 1935). See also, for example, Cruz, R. 'Como Cristo sobre las aguas', 189. To compare another national context, see Weitz, E. *Creating German Communism*, chapter 7.

76 Hence the Red Army could be referred to as the 'Army of Peace'. See *Nueva Cultura*, 7-8 (October-November 1935), 20f.

found in the idea that the socialist state had not only liberated workers from the dynamics of capitalism, but had granted them (as the Republican ultimately hoped to do) unprecedented opportunities to fulfil their individual potential.

A photo-series reproduced in the October-November 1935 issue of *Nueva Cultura*, originally taken from the multilingual propaganda magazine *SSSR na stroike* (*USSR in Construction*),[77] offered but one illustration of how such ambitions were put into practice. It followed the journey of illiterate peasant Viktor Kalmykov, who takes up work at the newly constructed Magnitogorsk steel plant. There he finds not only a secure income and comradeship, but also access to basic educational resources to help him develop his intellectual abilities. In the end he is elected member of the plant's 'industrial-revolutionary council' and nominated, in recognition of his achievements, for the 'Order of the Red Banner of Labour.' According to the accompanying text, the story of Kalmykov is representative of 'thousands' of rural and urban workers who have all been transformed in the process of socialist construction. His was a typical example of the 'the new man' emerging under communism, granted for the first time the profound rewards of civic association and individual growth.[78] Needless to say, the illustrated story does not give any indication of the extreme hardship and violence that the realisation of the Five Year Plans also entailed.

From a theoretical perspective, the question of the fate of the individual in a collectivist society was central to the editors of *Nueva Cultura*, who sought to counter all forms of individualism – revolutionary as well as reactionary – with a collectivist ethos respectful of pluralism. As indicated by the narrative of Kalmykov, the USSR offered potential guidance here, and on an ideological level the country seemed to have resolved the tension between collective obligation and individual freedom by means of the concept of 'socialist emulation.' This was presented to *Nueva Cultura* readers via an article by Maxim Gorky, published in the July issue of 1936.[79] The highest form of socialist emulation, said Gorky, drawing on a speech made by Stalin on the subject, could be found in the Stakhanovite movement. Named after the record-breaking miner who was officially celebrated as a communist role model, this movement represented

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[77] The series was originally entitled 'The Giant and the Builder' and appeared in *USSR in Construction*, 1, 1932.

[78] *Nueva Cultura*, 7-8 (October-November 1935), 22-25. The path-breaking reportage first delivering individual life stories from the Soviet Union appeared in *A-I-Z* (September 1931) under title '24 Hours in the Life of a Moscow Worker Family'. See Wolf, E. '"As at the Filippovs": The Foreign Origins of the Soviet Narrative Photographic Essay' in Ribalta, J. (Ed.) *The Worker Photography Movement*, 124-131.

[79] 'Sobre el Hombre Nuevo' *Nueva Cultura*, 13 (July 1936), 11.

'an explosion' of energy, a celebration of work, and, crucially, a voluntary unity of purpose.[80] These characteristics brought new impetus to socialist construction and would eventually make Soviet citizens, already 'socially equal,' equal as 'men' – that is, equal 'in force and value.' Yet, Gorky hastened to add, this development must not entail repression of the development of the individual. 'The more diverse the talents and gifts of men', he stated, 'the more abundant will be their work,' and the faster the world would be collectively reorganised along communist lines.[81]

Similar comments were made at the First International Congress of Writers for the Defence of Culture in 1935, an event which *Nueva Cultura* followed with great interest.[82] One of the principal speakers was French writer André Gide, who began his talk by stating that it was possible to support communism actively while remaining profoundly individualist. This assertion was based on his conviction – comparable to Gorky's – that 'being as distinct [*particular*] as possible is how each individual best serves the community.' Gide, like most delegates, expressed his admiration for the USSR, whose progress offered an 'unprecedented spectacle' of 'exemplary' importance. This admiration led him to add a collorary thesis to the first, namely that 'it is in a communist society that every individual, the distinctiveness [*particularidad*] of every individual, may develop most fully.'[83] Gide would later become disillusioned with the USSR, but considering *Nueva Cultura*'s determination to seek collective action in defence of pluralism, it is not difficult to see why these sentiments of Gide's were quoted in its June-July issue of 1935 as both inspiration and prestigious support.[84]

Formulations like those of Gorky and Gide would not only have been read as attempts to safeguard individual expression in a collectivist society, but would also have appealed to Renau and other *Nueva Cultura* editors because of their potential applicability to the problem of regional nationalism.[85] In his notes on the history and rationale behind the Valencian magazine (written at a time when Valencian regionalism

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[80] From a less biased and historical perspective, questions regarding voluntary self-sacrifice under Stalinism are, of course, very complex. For a sophisticated social and cultural history, see Kotkin, S. *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

[81] 'Sobre el Hombre Nuevo' *Nueva Cultura*, 13 (July 1936), 11.

[82] For a comments on the wider impact of the congress in Spain, see Anzar Soler, M. *I congreso internacional*, 77ff.

[83] Cited in *Nueva Cultura*, 5 (July-July 1935), 2.

[84] The centrality of Gide's intervention to the philosophical outlook of *Nueva Cultura* has also been emphasised by Manuel Aznar Soler. See 'La revista Nueva Cultura y la construcción del Frente Popular cultural.'

[85] The other regular contributor who had a strong interest in nationalism and its place within Marxist thinking was Emili Gómez Nadal.

was enjoying a resurgence[86]), Renau stressed that its battle against essentialisms was shaped by the fact that 'Spanishness' tended to be exclusively located within the geo-cultural co-ordinates of Castile and Andalusia. There was thus a certain sense of exclusion conditioning cultural relations with the capital, a sense which initially expressed itself as a 'provincial complex' but must later have been a significant factor informing the magazine's opposition to homogenising notions of cultural identity emerging from any centre.[87] Instead of enforced uniformity within the present Spanish state, *Nueva Cultura*'s approach to regional nationalism was consequently based on self-determination and coexistence via multinational fraternity.[88] Here Gide's comment at the Paris congress provided direct encouragement, as he prefaced his theses with the insistence that it was possible to be profoundly French and profoundly internationalist at the same.[89] Yet once again it was the USSR that offered the practical example to follow, as it had adopted a nationalities policy encouraging – at least on paper – the free expression of national difference within a multicultural union.[90] This policy was discussed on several occasions in *Nueva Cultura*, typically in articles published in Valencian,[91] but had interested Renau from an earlier date, as evinced by a photo feature in *Orto* entitled 'The liberation of oppressed nationalities in the USSR' (La liberación de las nacionales oprimidas en la URSS), published in August 1932.

The changes in the USSR were seen to affect not only work and politics but all spheres of life, however. According to *Nueva Cultura*'s October-November 1935 issue, dedicating eighteen pages to the achievements of the socialist state, the USSR had also made huge progress with regards to women's emancipation, child care, and the promotion of healthy sexual and marital relations.[92] Yet revolutionary aspirations went

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86 This is particularly notable in the recollections appearing in Doro Balaguer's 1994 book on Renau. That Renau's autobiographical texts should engage with such debates is of course not surprising, as they were written in the early stages of the transition to democracy (1977).

87 Renau even talks about a concentration camp logic in reverse. See Renau, J. 'Notas al margen', 477f. It should also be mentioned that the PCE had demanded greater recognition of cultural differences and even self-determination for minority nations since the early days of the Republic. *Nueva Cultura*'s approach in this regard can thus be seen as a more broadly accepted position on the radical left. Cruz, R. *El Partido Comunista de España*, 130.

88 The clearest editorial statement on this question is found in the election manifesto of February 1936. According to this, *Nueva Cultura* sees 20th century Spain as a product of an imperialist project and advocates full self-determination for all its constituent peoples. See 'Manifiesto electoral de *Nueva Cultura*' in *Nueva Cultura*, 10 bis. (February 1936), 8.

89 Cited in *Nueva Cultura*, 5 (July-July 1935), 2.

90 In reality, however, the nationalities policy of the Soviet Union was complex and in many cases extremely violent. See Martin, T. 'The Origins of Soviet Ethnic Cleansing' *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 70, No. 4 (December 1998), 813-861.

91 The author or translator of these were in all likelihood Emili Gómez Nadal.

92 See the articles entitled 'El amor al hombre: la comuna del Bolshevo' (26f), 'Dignificación de la mujer' (page 27), and 'Hombre+Mujer' (page 29).

further still. In the article quoted above, Gorky insisted that socialist 'emulation' must also come to mean mutual aid, helping one's neighbours in everyday life. Soviet workers had to create new socialist manners, new customs and morals, making words like 'comrade' signify more than an 'empty gesture.'[93] This, at heart, would lend substance to its democratic promise of equality, just as passionate dedication to work would ultimately realise its economic promise of prosperity. Taken together, such political visions combined with tangible technological and industrial advances to make the USSR more than a momentarily impressive example of economic administration. For many, especially in progressive intellectual circles, it represented a supreme model of modernity, and an attempt to realise the highest aspirations of humankind.

The influence of the USSR on Renau particularly was last but not least related to the arts. As most progressive artists would have expected, the gradual emergence of a new life in the USSR was accompanied by new artistic developments. Different formal trends had fought for influence since the Bolshevik Revolution, but generally, among different art forms, photography and, above all, cinema came to be considered the most characteristic media of Soviet culture.[94] Renau, as mentioned, was from an early stage inspired by the cinematographic theories of Pudovkin, and wrote on several occasions about the superiority of Soviet cinematography, especially compared to its American counterpart.[95] In the April 1932 issue of *Orto*, for example, he had argued that regardless of ideological injections, Hollywood productions made manifest the cold realities of American life – mechanisation and standardisation, subjugation of all 'pure' human values to the single-minded goal of material accumulation – and that it was up to European and Russian film makers to achieve a much needed 'humanisation' of film.[96] In a review of the Russian film *El Camino de la Vida* (1931),[97] directed by Nikolai Ekk,

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93 'Sobre el Hombre Nuevo' *Nueva Cultura*, 13 (July 1936), 11.

94 Lenin famously claimed that of all the arts, film was the most important to the Bolshevik regime. For a general analysis of why photography and film were presented as particularly relevant to Bolshevik Russia, see Hauser, A. *The Social History of Art (Vol. 4): Naturalism, Impressionism, The Film Age* (3rd Ed.) (London: Routledge, 1999) pp. 214-247. For a more detailed analysis of the debates within the Russian avant-garde, see, for example, Buchloh, B. H. D. 'From Faktura to Factography' *October*, Vol. 30 (Autumn 1984), 82-119. For an insight into the more prosaic reality of Soviet cinema, see Taylor, R. 'A "Cinema for the Millions": Soviet Socialist Realism and the Problem of Film Comedy' *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 18, No. 3, Historians and Movies: The State of the Art: Part 1 (July 1983), 439-461.

95 Again it may be noted that Renau's advertising work produced some contradictions in his creative life, as he was, between 1934 and 1936, the main designer of posters for the Valencian film production company CIFESA. In this capacity, he arguably served the very film industry he so severely criticised in his articles.

96 'Cinema. América y Europa' *Orto*, 2 (April 1932), 31-35.

97 Original title: *Putyovka v zhizn.* English title: *Road to Life*.

Renau further claimed that the superior quality of Russian cinema was ultimately a sign of the political and cultural superiority of the proletarian Soviet state.[98] Its unique conditions allowed for the production of a unique kind of film where form and content were perfectly fused.

Comparable ideas were expressed beyond the circles linked to *Nueva Cultura*. The April-May 1933 issue of *Nuestro Cinema* published an article taken from the American magazine *Experimental Cinema* (1930-1934), where the critic Somerset Logan argued that Russian film did not include any romanticised features or 'arrangements' of the facts of daily existence. Indeed, she claimed, Russia was 'the only country where film is made from the substance of life itself.'[99] Apart from the considerable romanticisation that such sentiments in themselves reveal, what is striking is the similarity between such understandings of the place and role of artistic creation in the USSR and the foundational artistic vision expressed in the nineteenth century by Schiller with regard to arts in ancient Greece. Here, too, art had become inseparable from life and politics and offered but an immediate expression of life's self-formation.

Such celebrations of perceived fusions between art, life and politics hid, however, a fundamental tension that affected progressive artists working in the USSR and elsewhere. If art only reflects the actually existing substance of life – being, in this sense, an exemplary form of realism – it deprives itself of any ability to influence the process by which life may change. Its transformational capacity is, in effect, ceded to politics.[100] This dynamic manifested itself with particular clarity in the USSR, where Stalin famously referred to writers as 'engineers of the human soul.' Literature, in this phrase, was thus just another tool of socialist construction, critical in the design of a new mode of being and living, but tied, like all other activities, to an overarching centralised plan. The direction of human development lay, in other words, solely and firmly with the Party. Yet such a scheme jarred, as we have seen, with the fundamental role ascribed to art in many progressive – and especially avant-garde – circles. André Malraux, as a participant at the Soviet Writers' Congress of August of 1934, where Stalin's phrase was extensively discussed, diplomatically remarked that 'if writers are the engineers of the human soul, then they should not forget that the highest function of

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98 'Cinema: El camino de la vida (Film ruso de Nicolaiekk)' *Orto*, 5 (July 1932).

99 *Nuestro Cinema*, 11 (April-May 1933), 152f. Cf. Comments made by Juan Piqueras: 'If at the present there is any cinema that can be said to be strong, it is Russian cinema. But that is because its images exist in perfect communion with the life it represents!' *Nuestro Cinema*, 4 (September 1932), 110f.

100 Cf. Jacques Rancière's distinction between the artistic and political avant-garde on page 17 above.

the engineer is to invent.'[101] To renounce artistic autonomy completely and instead simply translate political instructions into artistic form was, in this view, to deprive art of its fundamental mission. It signified an abandonment of its commitment to indicate new modes of life, and replaced innovation with a formula conducive to mechanical conformity, especially where artistic as well as other practices were tied to a singular revolutionary 'blueprint'.

Innovative realism

While Renau's artistic practice suggests he was mostly inspired by Soviet arts before the imposition of socialist realism, the tension between collective co-ordination and autonomous creation would apply to all socially committed artists and was clearly formative also in his own artistic development.[102] *Nueva Cultura*'s declaration that the role of art was to serve as a 'mediator and interpreter', 'clarifying' the social problems of the day, appeared to lie closer to a perspective emphasising the need for collective co-ordination.[103] His general adherence to realism and use of the photographic document were likewise rooted in a determination to address collective experiences. Indeed, documents, written as well as visual, constituted the critical device by which he anchored his art in the 'facts' of social life, and imparted to it a significance tied to co-existence and contemporaneity.[104] Renau too worked, to some extent, with 'unadorned' reality, if only to expose its contrast to hegemonic religious and political myths.[105]

Yet in content as well as form, his was an innovative rather than a conformist realism. Indeed, in the absence of a victorious – or even a particularly strong – revolutionary party to drive change and provide inspiration, it could hardly have been otherwise. Art had to lead the way in the quest to open up minds, prompt new attitudes, and formulate social alternatives. From this perspective, realism in its documentary mode may even have granted art enhanced transformational capacities: art made from the materials of life may well have been better equipped to shape life in its own image.

It should also be reiterated that, despite the use value of the USSR as a practical

[101] Anzar Soler, M. *I congreso internacional de escritores*, 63.

[102] Albert Forment and Facundo Tomás have also suggested that there was a tension in Renau's work between the theory, which tended towards socialist realist dogma, and the practice, which was formally experimental. See Forment, A. *Josep Renau*, 102, and Tomás Ferré, F. *Los Carteles Valencianos*, 90. See also the analysis of Renau's theory of the poster on pages 185-195 below.

[103] *Nueva Cultura*, 10 bis. (February 1936), 7.

[104] Cf. reply to Alberto Sanchez, where Renau and Carreño maintain that 'El arte tiene que ser un concepto de actualidad.' *Nueva Cultura*, 5 (June-July 1935), 14.

[105] Renau also expressed frustration with artists (e.g. certain 19th century realist painters, and, at times, Sorolla) who tried to cast a poetic gloss on poverty. See Bellón, F. *Josep Renau*, 139.

model, for Renau and the editors of *Nueva Cultura*, there was no ready revolutionary blueprint available for Spain. The aesthetic formula accompanying if not driving cultural renewal was yet to be discovered, and while stylistic choices may indicate what Renau himself saw as sound aesthetic principles at the time, the final answer would only be provided in democratic collaboration with those whom a new culture was meant to represent. That said, if utopian promises were to materialise, it is clear Renau envisioned some sort of 'rational' consensus – 'the peace needed to create art'[106] – to replace the plethora of voices. Here the influence of the USSR was significant. It suggested to contemporary progressives in Europe the realistic feasibility of a model where the multiple crises of the interwar years could find a radical solution in the implementation of a total life programme, by forging a collective unity that would ultimately render the conflicts of politics obsolete.

In Spain, by contrast, political conflicts were visibly intensifying, and the winter of 1935 and spring of 1936 were marked by frenetic political activity across the country. Renau first dedicated his energies to campaign, through the PCE as well as *Nueva Cultura*, for a Popular Front victory in the February elections, and, when this was narrowly achieved, extended his efforts to further cultural change through a revitalised progressive agenda.[107] The tumultuous months that followed the elections were marked by a continued obstruction of progressive measures by the conservative elite and increasingly desperate responses from the people affected. Social relations became increasingly conflictive and violent in the countryside, where land occupations, always brutally suppressed by the Civil Guard, were ultimately the only means for many destitute peasants to attempt to feed their families. One such event, which occurred in the Castilian town of Yeste on 28 May, leading to 18 deaths (including one civil guard) as well as scores of wounded and arrested, was held up by the editors of *Nueva Cultura* (July 1936) as paradigmatic of agrarian conflict across Spain and an occasion to reiterate their unwavering solidarity with the rural proletariat.[108] But violence was also seen to escalate in urban areas, where extreme right groups, most notably the Falange, were engaged in deliberate political destabilisation via deadly street battles with left-wing activists.[109] Fatefully, the all-republican government, formed after the Popular Front coalition had delivered the desired result at the polls, responded to the mounting

[106] *Nueva Cultura*, 2 (February 1935), 3.
[107] J. 'Notas al margen', 479. Cf. extract from the interview reproduced in Bellón, F. *Josep Renau*, 193f.
[108] *Nueva Cultura*, 2 (February 1935), 3. For a good account of the events at Yeste, see Preston, P. *The Spanish Holocaust*, 119f.
[109] Preston, P. *The Spanish Holocaust*, 110-127. See also Cruz, R. *En el nombre del pueblo.*

crisis with tense passivity. It felt itself to be trapped between two undesirable extremes: between on the one hand military reaction, widely rumoured to be imminent and in fact prepared in detail over the spring of 1936, on on the other some kind of popular revolution. For many among the middling classes and indeed for the majority of the Spanish population as a whole, the military option was by no means clearly perceived as the greater danger.[110]

Yet for radical progressives like Renau and his colleagues, it was evident that the task of formulating a new cultural matrix for the country had to be discussed in conjunction with increasingly urgent calls to action. Soon this urgency would reach a new pitch, as the descent into civil war, following from a failed military coup on 17-18 July 1936, meant that all progressive organisations, cultural and political, were forced to adopt new forms of self-defence.

[110] Graham, H. 'The Spanish Popular Front and the Civil War' in Graham, H and Preston, P. *The Popular Front in Europe*, 113.

6. MOBILISING FOR SURVIVAL: RENAU'S EARLY WAR POSTERS (1936)

The military rebellion proclaimed on 17 July 1936 in Spanish Morocco, across mainland Spain the following day, was intended as a swift coup d'etat to halt a revived Republican reform programme. Support for military intervention had grown in conservative sectors – civilian as well as military – since the February elections, spurred, not only by to the threat of reform, but also by a worsening spiral of political violence, to which its preferred political forces had, at the very least, contributed.[1] On its own terms, however, the rising failed. Working-class militia, together with loyal public order forces and incensed crowds, rapidly organised to subdue rebelling garrisons in key cities, especially Madrid and Barcelona. The situation in Valencia, where Renau joined those laying siege to the barracks in the neighbourhood of Font de Sant Lluís, took longer to settle, but was secured for the Republic at the end of July.[2] In the initial weeks, the rebels had managed to take about a third of the country – one area in the north-north-west and another in the south-west – and would have faced almost certain defeat had it not been for the intervention of Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy. Answering a petition for military aid, Hitler and Mussolini sent enough planes for General Francisco Franco – soon to emerge as the undisputed leader of the rebel side – to transport the Army of Africa swiftly from Morocco to Seville. With Spain's most ruthless and efficient fighting force thus poised to expand rebel territory in the south, the failed take-over escalated into full-scale civil war.

Not only could the central Republican government not neutralise the military threat posed by the rebels, but it was also facing, in some parts of the country, a serious challenge from the worker organisations that had rushed to oppose the rebels. As the rebellion disrupted official communication channels and deprived the government of any control over public order forces (which in some places melted away), armed workers took over control of local administration and policing. Across the Republican zone, above all in major urban centres like Barcelona and Valencia, but also in smaller towns, the centrifugal force unleashed by the military revolt placed trade unions and workers organisations in an unprecedented position of power – a fact which led some,

1 For violence as provocation, see Preston, P. *The Spanish Holocaust*, 110-127 (esp. 110).

2 Forment, A. *Josep Renau*, 144. See below for a more detailed account of Renau's participation. For a detailed account of events in Valencia, see Girona, A. *Guerra i Revolució al País Valencià* Valencia: Eliseu Climent, 1986.

especially but not exclusively in the CNT, to announce the start of a proletarian revolution.[3] There were widespread expropriations or collectivisation of industries, printing presses and agricultural land, especially where owners had fled the Republican zone. Confiscations of cultural buildings associated with the aristocratic establishment or bourgeois elite were widespread too.[4] (Renau himself served as main editor for a new newspaper, *Verdad*, which deployed the confiscated printing presses of the regional right-wing daily *Diario de Valencia*.[5]) So even though the Republican government had survived the rebellion, the virtual paralysis of state functions meant that it had lost the means to enforce its authority on the remaining Republican territory. As new worker-led entities consequently took the tools of change into their own hands, the political class previously charged with driving reform became only one of a number of actors exercising decisive influence on the organisation of Republican life.

Throughout Republican Spain, a reversal of hierarchies and redistribution of public and private space indicated that a new social order was in the making. The twin events of war and revolution had set new parameters for social and cultural change, and direct popular participation in politics had suddenly become a fact. The precise organisational character of this participation differed with each locality, but typically involved committees or other local micro-authorities subject to a substantial degree of grass-roots influence.[6] Such local self-governance was particularly crucial to the revolution as conceived by anarchist and other libertarian organisations. While ideologically predisposed to view any state with hostility regardless of the circumstances, the fact that the reactionary alliance responsible for the coup had been allowed to form within Republican state institutions only strengthened the libertarian belief that any meaningful revolution had to be based on an alternative model of social organisation.[7] When an unprecedented opportunity to dismantle state power presented

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3 For a vivid eyewitness account of the revolution in Barcelona, Valencia, and Madrid, see Borkenau, F. *The Spanish Cockpit: An eyewitness account of the Spanish Civil War* (London: Pheonix Press, 2000). See also Fraser, R. *Blood of Spain: an oral history of the Spanish Civil War* (New York: Pantheon, 1979). Bosch Sánchez, A. *Ugetistas y Libertarios: Guerra Civil y Revolución en el País Valenciano, 1936-1939* (Valencia: Alfonso el Magnánimo, 1983).

4 In Barcelona, for example, the revolutionary artists union Sindicat de Dibuixants Professionals installed itself in the 18th century palace of the Marquis of Barberá and Manresana (on Av de la Puerta del Ángel). See Termes, Josep, Miravitlles, Jaume, Fontseré, Carles. *Carteles de la República y de la Guerra Civil* (Barcelona: La Gaya Ciencia, 1978), 354. In Valencia the conservative Círculo de Bellas Artes became the new home of the progressive Popular Front organisation Cultura Popular. Pérez Contel, R. *Artistas en Valencia*, 482. Cf. Abella, R. *La vida quotidiana*, 16f.

5 Forment, A. *Josep Renau*, 144.

6 Graham, H. *The Spanish Republic at War*, 96.

7 Graham, H. '"Against the state": a genealogy of the Barcelona May Days (1937)' *European History Quarterly*, 29, 4 (1999), 485-542.

itself in the wake of the military rising, libertarian organisations took it, unsurprisingly, with tremendous zeal. Indeed, an almost carnival-like atmosphere – as jubilant for those who welcomed change as it was deadly for those who were deemed opposed to it – reigned in libertarian strongholds like Barcelona and, to a lesser extent, Valencia, where the safe distance from any active military fronts effectively meant that the revolution was initially the only tangible consequence of the coup.[8] Unlike in Madrid, where worker militias rapidly had to concentrate their energies into fighting rebel troops advancing across the Guadarrama mountains just north of the city, in cities such as Barcelona and Valencia, deep inside Republican territory, the fighting of July 1936 immediately gave way to the construction of a new society; decentralised and collectivist, and in which the watchword was 'egalitarian'.

Crucially, however, libertarians were not alone in believing that the defeat of the coup must be followed by radical social change. Many on the left of the socialist movement also participated in the re-ordering of social and political hierarchies, as did many relatively moderate progressives, who felt that the rising had effectively invalidated more cautious approaches to reform.[9] Additionally each locality would see a variety of non-politically-affiliated participants who felt that events could be shaped to their personal advantage.[10] What resulted was not simply the replacement of a liberal order with a libertarian one, then, but rather a hybrid political situation shaped by a multitude of actors. As was the case with the Popular Front coalition – which nominally remained in existence, at least as a term denoting a collection of progressive social groups – there was no overarching single motive driving this process, and much less a universally shared conception of a goal. Yet what was clear was that the rising had irrevocably altered the political landscape of Spain. For if similar attempts to abolish the democratic process were to be prevented in the future, real adjustments had to be made to the national distribution of political power. At the very least, such adjustments had properly to equip the constituencies legally granted beneficial reform with the capacity

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[8] For an overarching account of the revolutionary atmosphere in cities like Barcelona and Valencia, see, for example, Abella, R. *La vida quotidiana*, 24, 93ff. See also Girona Albuixech, A & Navarro Navarro, J. *Sufrir la guerra: La vida cotidiana* (Valencia: Prensa Valenciana, 2007), 33-39. Juan Renau included in his memoirs an evocative description of the fear that also haunted the inhabitants of Valencia at the time. See *Pasos y Sombras*, 372ff. For an account of revolutionary violence in the Republican zone, and especially Madrid, see Preston, P. *The Spanish Holocaust*, 221-303.

[9] A clear example can be found in the political composition of the revolutionary government in Valencia, the Popular Executive Committee (Comité Ejecutivo Popular). Virtually all progressive local parties and political organisations, from left-of-centre republicans to the anarcho-syndicalist CNT, were represented in some capacity. See Girona, A. *Guerra i Revolució*, 54f.

[10] Preston, P. *The Spanish Holocaust*, 221.

to defend their rights against intractable reaction.

Yet to defeat the rising, it was first of all necessary to meet the military rebels on the battlefield. What had started as an irregular struggle between opposing groups composed of worker militias, public order forces, and some soldiers, as well as heterogeneous constellations of paramilitary and civilian groups on both sides, was as a result of Axis aid to the rebel Generals rapidly turning into a total war. With this in mind, the fact that the coup seemed to have blown the political horizon wide open, making previously abstract proposals for greater democracy suddenly appear like concrete possibilities, would yet be of uncertain consequence. For as defenders of the beleaguered central government quickly saw, the equally undeniable fact that the Republic would be embroiled in a brutal war of survival would inescapably impose practical limitations on any emancipatory goals pursued. Before any lasting change could be achieved, then, all advocates of progressive politics had first to channel their energies towards the primary goal of overcoming the threat posed by the rebels and their international backers.

The left-wing organisation that saw this most clearly was the the PCE. Rather than supporting revolutionary celebrations of local self-governance, which had debilitated the Republican state from the outset of the conflict, the PCE established itself as a party of discipline and order defending central government authority.[11] The Republican war effort, in its view, had to be prioritised everywhere and be centrally co-ordinated so that all national resources could be used efficiently. In concrete terms, this meant that all industries had to be placed on a war footing, that the independently led worker militias had to be incorporated into a reconstructed Republican army operating under central command, and that all efforts be made to secure international support and war materiel to match the arsenal of the much better equipped enemy.[12] Britain and France avoided involvement, for a variety of motives including the fear of being dragged into a larger European conflict, and to this end sought to maintain a continent-wide Non-Intervention Agreement that only damaged the Republic further (as it greatly complicated Republican acquisitions and transport of arms, while doing nothing to stop German and Italian supplies from reaching the rebels). Eventually, in the nick of time in October 1936, a reluctant Soviet Union broke the Republic's isolation to send military aid, for fear that, otherwise, its looming defeat would free up German fire-power for

[11] For first hand account communist attitudes to the revolution in Valencia, see Borkenau, F. *The Spanish Cockpit*, 117f.

[12] See the poster-sized Manifesto published in the party newspaper, *Mundo Obrero*, 18 August 1936.

aggression against vulnerable Soviet frontiers. This Soviet intervention vastly increased the prestige of the Spanish Communist Party, which also for a variety of domestic reasons we will consider later, was now rapidly being transformed into one of the most potent political forces in Republican Spain. As such, it would become one of the main drivers of Republican war mobilisation, and its sudden centrality to Republican politics made the party one of the most decisive defenders of a reconstructed (and indeed expanded) Republican state.

The PCE's war strategy immediately put it at odds with libertarian and other revolutionary groups, who were determined to defend their local conquests of political and economic power. In response to communist attempts to restore central state authority, libertarians declared the PCE to be hostile to the revolution. The PCE, in turn, insisted that communists too were committed to the revolutionary cause, but that, according to the logic of the Popular Front strategy, this had to be furthered by the elected government. Hence the communist deputy Dolores Ibárruri stated, only days after the July rising, that 'the Communist Party, true to its revolutionary principles, respectful of the will of the people, places itself at the side of the government that is the expression of this will […].'[13] According to this position, the question was not whether or not to support the revolution but rather what form the revolution should take. Either way, libertarians would continue to see any defence of existing state structures as anathema, and suspected the PCE in particular of plotting a Stalinist take-over while paradoxically protecting Spanish middle-class and property-owning interests in the process.[14] In fact, the PCE's Popular Front commitment to a liberal public order – seeking above all to stop collectivisation, material destruction and uncontrolled violence – did earn it important backing from middling as well as working-class sectors.[15] It may furthermore be that progressive members of the middle classes felt that the statist policies of the PCE offered not only a superior strategy to mount a viable war effort but also a preferable means to implement the social change that the coup had seemed to precipitate. To the extent that such considerations constituted another factor contributing to the PCE's vertiginous war-time growth, they were no doubt particularly significant in securing support for the party among Republican cultural producers.

The initial engagement of cultural groups

[13] From a speech delivered on 29 July 1936. Text in AHPCE (Madrid) Carpeta 17, julio 1936.
[14] Cf. Fraser, R. *Blood of Spain*, 323-334.
[15] Graham, H. *The Spanish Republic at War*, 182-184.

Seeing the rebellion as an attempt to install a repressive reactionary regime, most writers and artists declared their support for the Republic shortly after the July days. At the end of the month, a Madrid-based group, representing the Alliance of Anti-Fascist Intellectuals (Alianza de Intelectules Antifascistas, hereafter AIA), published a note strongly condemning the 'criminal rising.'[16] The Spanish AIA was initially a product of the international networks forming around to the Paris Congress of 1935, but would become a significant cultural actor only after the military rebellion, when it was rapidly transformed into the most important association of artists and writers within the Republic.[17] The AIA statement of 31 July was indicative of its outlook: it highlighted that the rising clearly showed, through its 'militarism, clericalism, and aristocratic cast attitudes,' how old forms of conservatism had gained a new impetus by joining forces with 'fascism'. Below the statement, over fifty signatories of various political persuasions declared their 'full and active identification with the people,' who was 'gloriously fighting side by side with the Popular Front government.'[18]

Composed of a politically varied and broad progressive membership, the AIA was a hybrid cultural organisation defending the agenda of the Popular Front. The fact that several prominent members were linked to the Communist Party, among them the poet Rafael Alberti and the writer Maria Teresa León in Madrid, not to mention Renau in Valencia, did not compromise its broad Popular Front commitment – especially not when the Comintern had adopted a collaborative parliamentary strategy anyway. There seems to have been no direct involvement of the PCE leadership in the AIA's emergence or in its initial activities.[19] Yet, as we shall see, the AIA would come to collaborate closely with the party from September 1936, when, as a result of a change in the central government, the PCE was offered the culture and education portfolio and thus emerged rapidly at the forefront of a propaganda campaign to restore government authority. The involvement of the AIA in this campaign suggested that it too opposed a decentralising revolution. Like the PCE, the AIA supported calls for substantial social change – indeed, it would soon become a leading force in an expanded cultural reform programme – but defended structures allowing change to be implemented with a degree

[16] *El Sol* 31 July 1936, 6.

[17] Aznar Soler, M. *Literatura española y antifascismo*, 109f.

[18] *El Sol* 31 July 1936, 6. Among the well-know names were Luis Buñuel, Rafael Dieste, Rosa Chacel, Arturo Serrano Plaja, Luis Cernuda, Maria Zambrano, Manuel Altolaguirre. Rafael Alberti and Maria Teresa León would soon be prominent members of the organisation but were stuck in Ibiza at the beginning of the war.

[19] That is, as far as I am aware, no one has presented any evidence of this.

of centralised control. Beyond such generalities, however, the AIA did not formally attach itself to any specific political faction.[20] In this regard, the July declaration was doubly characteristic, both in its celebration of popular resistance against the coup and its silence on the complexity that consequently marked Republican political relations.

But if the AIA thus appeared disengaged from political debates, it did not wish to maintain a distance from social and military developments. This was highlighted by AIA's Valencian branch, which published as the Association of Intellectuals for the Defence of Culture (Asociación de Intelectuales para la Defensa de la Cultura, hereafter AIDC). It made a similar proclamation of loyalty in the new publication co-edited by Renau, *Verdad*, emphasising that the support offered by cultural groups in the aftermath of the coup should not only be moral, but practical too.[21] An early example of such engagement had already been provided by Renau during the first days of the rising. According the artist's own account, he had been daydreaming in his studio on 17 July when a call from a party comrade informed him of the rising in Morocco. After an emergency meeting with other party members, he had led a group of militants to observe and if possible attack the barracks of Font de Sant Lluis. Their weapons arsenal had amounted to a total of five automatic pistols and eleven hunting rifles – next to nothing considering the fire power of their adversary. While access to nearby buildings had allowed Renau to station the few militants that were armed in strategic places, the situation had remained extremely precarious until a call for support attracted hundreds of locals – virtually all women – to come and block off the barrack gates. To make this 'siege' more effective, and make the officers within aware of the feeling in the street, Renau had further instructed the crowd to make as much noise as possible – to sing, scream, and shout. The impressive ruckus that followed had finally convinced him he could safely leave the site to report back to party headquarters. By then night had fallen. The next morning, having received reinforcements and inside information from two soldiers who had escaped the barracks, the crowd had decided to storm the building.[22] Although the Valencian writers' association no doubt exaggerated when claiming that

[20] The AIA never published statements outlining a clear political vision. Indeed, considering its ideologically heterogeneous membership it is difficult to see how it could.

[21] *Verdad* 31 July 1936, 4. Given the coinciding dates there must have been some co-ordination with Madrid section in the publication of these statements. Manuel Aznar has pointed out that the Valencian AIDC was founded a few months before the war, on 24 April 1936. But like the Madrid section, it did not really come alive until after the rebellion. See Aznar Soler, M. (Ed.) *Valencia, capital cultural de la República*. (Vol 1-2) (Valencia: Generalitat Valenciana, 2007), 21ff.

[22] From Renau, J. 'Les dones donen valor' *Trellat*, no. 1 (1980). Cited at length in Bellón, F. *Josep Renau*, 193-196.

most of its members had experienced the rebellion in the streets or 'sites of danger,' and though that support was anyway only a very small part of why Valencia was held for the Republic, Renau's direct engagement and that of other cultural workers in the city does nonetheless indicate intellectuals' desire to participate directly and practically in the Republic's defence.

Artists' and writers' involvement with the fighting took more lasting forms too. Some, including the poet Miguel Hernández and the artist Helios Gómez, both committed to the PCE during the war,[23] went to fight at the front.[24] Others organised cultural events in order to raise funds for militias.[25] More unusually, *Nueva Cultura*, which temporarily suspended its normal publication, put together a military manual, carrying the title '*Nueva Cultura* makes its best offer to the combatants' (*Nueva Cultura* hace su ofrenda mejor a los combatientes). The manual provided 72 pages of detailed and clearly illustrated information on everything from trench construction to weapon maintenance – information which would have been of incalculable value as many militia members heading for the front had not handled a weapon before, much less engaged in regular military combat. According to Renau, the idea for the manual came from himself and was accepted by the *Nueva Cultura* group after some discussion. To assemble the content, they approached a high ranking officer who enthusiastically supported the project by providing technical information and the instructional text.[26] The drawings were done by Pérez Contel. It is unclear precisely how the manual was funded, yet it was a project of considerable scale, as the finished product eventually appeared in two editions, each with a print run between 20,000 and 40,000 copies.[27] On the front page of the first edition, published in October, the editorial team inserted a reproduction of John

[23] Miguel Hernández joined the party in 1936, Gómez in 1931.

[24] Hernández was a political commissar in the battalion of 'El Campesino' and stationed in Teruel, and various places on the southern fronts. Helios Gómez fought in Aragón, Madrid, Andalucía, and formed part of the Culture Militias in the Durruti División.

[25] See, for examples, notes in *Verdad* on 11 August (p. 4), 16 August (p. 4), 10 September (p. 2), all announcing AIDC exhibitions and fundraising events.

[26] See Pérez Contel, R. *Artistas en Valencia*, 634, and Renau, J. 'Notas al margen', 480. In his autobiographical account, Renau maintained there were two officers, while Pérez Contel claims there was only one. There is, however, an interview where Renau too suggests there was only one (page 186), which means that this is probably the truth. See Julián González, I. *El Cartel Republicano*, 186.

[27] In a 1980 interview Antonio Ballester claimed that the *Nueva Cultura* group expropriated a print shop only hours after the news of the rising, and it may be that the manual was printed with whatever resources available there. CDMH (Salamanca) Fuentes_Orales-Mexico, no 9, 45. If not, it is likely that other collectivised print shops, ultimately run by the same unions that sent militias to the front, would have shared if not entirely carried the financial burden. With regards to print runs, the lower fugure belongs to Pérez Contel (*Artistas en Valencia*, 634), the higher to Renau ('Notas al margen', 480).

Heartfield's 'Liberty Herself Fights in Their Ranks.'[28] Made up of a photograph of Republican militiamen superimposed on Delacroix's iconic painting of the 1830 revolution in France ('Liberty Leading the People'), the composition of the image – foregrounding a scene of contemporary fighting – could be said to mirror the editors' conviction that the practical struggle against reaction now had to take precedence over detached cultural theorising. This was a time when every progressive artist had to make a concrete contribution to the task of defeating a common enemy.

Within the first month of the rebellion, Renau and his colleagues also launched another special *Nueva Cultura* publication, entitled '*Nueva Cultura* for those who fight at the front' (Nueva Cultura para los que luchan en el frente).[29] This was more recognisably a cultural endeavour, combining visual art and poetry with descriptions of historical parallels to the conflict, as well as informative articles on the war work undertaken behind the lines. But if the front-line edition thus represented some continuity with the pre-war magazine, it was nonetheless clear that practical considerations figured among the primary motivations for this publication too. By highlighting the value of various contributions to the war effort and insisting that civilian tasks be carried out in the same 'combative spirit' as the fighting at the front, the magazine sought to create psychological links between the various fronts that had to be integrated to secure the Republic's survival in this new kind of war (another edition, of which more will be said below, was made for agricultural workers). In this sense, *Nueva Cultura* sought to instil in its readers a notion of totality which would inform and motivate individual action in the war.

Renau and the *Nueva Cultura* team thus produced a variety of publications to aid Republican war mobilisation. Among these, another brief mention needs to be made of the daily newspaper *Verdad*, which unlike the cultural initiatives mentioned above was tied to the Valencian PCE (and, to begin with, the PSOE) and became a regular outlet for many *Nueva Cultura* contributors in the first months of the conflict.[30] Until his nomination as General Director of Fine Arts on 9 September 1936, Renau formally

[28] The second edition had a cover designed by Rafael Pérez Contel. See Pérez Contel, R. *Artistas en Valencia*, 633.

[29] The first issue, distributed as a supplement to *Verdad*, appeared on 21 August 1936. Four issues were produced, each printed in 4 000 copies, according to a report published in *Nueva Cultura*, no. 1 (second phase), March 1937. Only two issues seem to have survived to this day and are incorporated into the facsimile version of the magazine (both printed and digital). In terms of size, they consist of only one large sheet (about A2 size) printed on both sides.

[30] *Nueva Cultura* would not resume independent regular publication until March 1937.

shared the editorial position with socialist writer Max Aub.[31] This arrangement no doubt reflected the newspaper's initial aspiration, also part of PCE policy between 1934 and 1937, to propagandise for unification of the socialist and communist parties.[32]

Yet the most widely acknowledged means through which Renau engaged with the mobilisation politics of the early war period was, without a doubt, posters. Indeed, having established himself as a prominent commercial poster designer, Renau would during the war become one of the Republic's most prominent creators of political poster propaganda. His work, nearly always made for the PCE, at least in the first half of the war, would in some cases be distributed across Republican territory and count among the most widely seen of the entire conflict.[33] His forceful images of popular resistance to the military coup, as well as dramatic exhortations to greater discipline, remain to this day Renau's most famous contribution to the Republic's battle for wartime victory.

The politics of poster production

Poster production was, in general terms, the most widespread form of artistic engagement with war and revolution in Spain after 1936.[34] Largely a Republican phenomenon, as most printing presses were located in loyalist territory, posters appeared in the streets of major urban centres almost immediately after popular resistance to the July rebellion had formed.[35] The fact that many print shops were collectivised and run by unions facilitated the proliferation of these posters.[36] So too did artists' rapid response to the rising. As for the *modus operandi* for producing posters,

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[31] According to Albert Forment, however, Aub was rarely present at the magazine. *Josep Renau*, 144.

[32] For a concise analysis of war-time debates around unification, see Hernández Sanchez, F. *Guerra o Revolución*, 183-191. *Verdad* later referred to itself as a publication of the PCE only.

[33] Jordi Carulla suggests that Renau was one of the very few to have his worked published Republic-wide. Carulla, J. & Carulla, A. *La Guerra Civil en 2000 carteles* (2 vols.) (Barcelona: Postermil, 1996), 41.

[34] There are now several studies and exhibition catalogues that include analytical articles on the posters. Grimau, C. *El cartel republicano en la guerra civil* (Madrid: Cátedra, 1979) is one of the earlier accounts of Republican posters but is still worth reading. For an extensive and at times more in-depth analysis of poster semiotics and communication strategies, see Julián González, I. *El Cartel Republicano.* The most extensive collection of reproductions is found in Carulla, J. & Carulla, A. *La Guerra Civil en 2000 carteles,* though Guerra, A. (Ed.) *Carteles de la guerra, 1936-1939: Colección Fundación Pablo Iglesias* (Barcelona: Fundación Pablo Iglesias, 2004) is also good. For a in-depth analysis of posters produced in Valencia, see Tomás Ferré, F. *Los Carteles Valencianos.* For an analysis of posters in their socio-political context, see also Basilio, M. M. *Visual Propaganda.*

[35] The Spanish printing industry was largely located in Barcelona, Valencia and Madrid. On the reaction of artists to the coup, see, for example, Termes, J., Miravitlles, J., & Fontseré, C. *Carteles de la República*, 354f.

[36] This included *Gráficas Valencia*, which published most of Renau's work throughout the conflict. Indeed, virtually all of the Valencian print industry was first run by the Popular Executive Committee, which also commissioned artists to produce recruitment posters for the militias. See Girona, A. *Guerra i Revolució*, 88, and Pérez Contel, R. *Artistas en Valencia*, 407f.

there was significant variation, however. Ideologically driven practitioners like Renau and his colleagues typically made posters on their own initiative – Antonio Ballester, a member of Renau's circle from the start, later claimed that they expropriated a print shop and were working on posters 'within hours' of hearing the news of the rising[37] – while others took commissions from the parties and unions that were now the main clients for publicity work. Large artists unions, like the Sindicat de Dibuixants Professionals in Barcelona or the Sindicato de Profesionales de Bellas Artes in Madrid, both with a membership running into the hundreds,[38] operated almost like commercial enterprises, albeit without any strict procedures for invoicing.[39] Although first-hand accounts are vague on this matter, such irregularities seem to be explained primarily by the fact that war needs still overrode strictly financial concerns, and that members were largely content with the daily union wage of ten pesetas – the same that was paid to militia men – that they were guaranteed regardless.[40] Another noteworthy feature of the commissioning processes, concerning artistic questions, was that it tended to decouple political and aesthetic aspects of poster design. Artists were, as a rule, free to complete commissions in whatever style they liked, which typically meant that they continued to paint just as they had done before the war. The majority were uninterested or not even fully aware of how politics could relate to specific visual traditions.[41] The same may perhaps be said of publishing organisations too: the Sindicat de Dibuixants Professionals even made pre-prepared poster designs to which the organisational name was simply added once a 'buyer' had been found.[42] Consequently Republican poster production as a whole showed no overarching patterns linking particular aesthetics with

[37] CDMH (Salamanca) Fuentes_Orales-Mexico, no 9, 45.

[38] Miguel Gamonal Torres has suggested that the *Sindicat de Dibuixants Professionals* had as many as 1,800 members. *Arte y Política*, 29. This would have included a significant level of war-time inflation, as previously unaffiliated people of all backgrounds sought union membership for protection and material benefits. Jordi Carulla doubts that the number of active members exceeded 1,000. Carulla, J. & Carulla, A. *La Guerra Civil en 2000 carteles,* 53.

[39] Madrigal Pascual, A. A. *Arte y Compromiso*, 279f. Cf. Julián González, I. *El Cartel Republicano*, 102f, 195f .

[40] The wage, in addition to the protection afforded by union membership at a time when accusations of being a counter-revolutionary could have deadly consequences, also explains such organisations' rapidly rising membership figures in the first stages of the war. Julián González, I. *El Cartel Republicano*, 100-103, 195.

[41] See, for example, Termes, J., Miravitlles, J., & Fontseré, C. *Carteles de la República*, 357. Lorenzo Goñi, a member of the *Sindicat* in Barcelona, claimed in a 1974 letter to Inmaculada Julián that Russian posters were not well known to them at the time. See *El Cartel Republicano*, 195. A similar statement was made by Fontseré in a 1978 interview, who furthermore insisted that artists in war-time Barcelona mainly copied each other. Renau, who participated in the same interview, interjected that this was not true of his case, as he was more conscious of international trends. See Ruipérez, M. 'Renau-Fontseré: Los carteles de la guerra civil' *Tiempos de Historia*, Vol. 5, No. 49 (Decembre, 1978), 19-21.

[42] Julián González, I. *El Cartel Republicano*, 102f.

particular political groups, and individual posters' formal qualities would only exceptionally serve as a guide to publishers' ideological orientation.[43] Yet by virtue of their content, posters would nonetheless offer a powerful, if impressionistic, sense of how the recent events had been internalised and meanings ascribed to them. Described by the Catalan poster artist Carles Fontseré as a 'multicoloured flood of revolutionary imagery,' they urged people to recognise the gravity of the moment, to join the workers' militias, and to embrace the ideals for which the militias were fighting.[44]

Posters were, from the very beginning, a constitutive part of the radicalised atmosphere and gave widespread representation to the iconographic myths that fuelled the revolutionary imagination.[45] 'Every union', Fontseré wrote, 'every little committee, published their own poster; every profession and trade – hairdressers, taxi drivers, tram operators – wanted to see themselves in a poster, breaking the chains that oppressed them.'[46] This desire to be *seen* to participate indicates the importance of the symbolic in revolutionary processes of transformation, and with regard the analysis that follows here, it is crucial to remember that such symbolic occupancy of public space was in itself a demonstration of power.[47] This demonstration could, of course, also enhance real power. Political posters speak a language of authority. In this way they foster a collective awareness of authority, and ultimately serve as a psychological instrument to enforce authority as it operates on various social and political levels. At the very least, then, the politicised alterations of the visual environment in Republican Spain would have alerted urban inhabitants to the fact that the established order was being forcefully challenged. Indeed, in Barcelona, claimed Fontseré, posters served as a revolutionary 'certificate', signalling to the local bourgeoisie that social changes were not simply part of some 'passing brawl', but the first steps towards the creation of a new society.[48]

But if this change was irreversible, posters also indicated that there was, as suggested above, no unified vision guiding revolutionary action. They formed no *singular* 'certificate', but rather a wildly heterogeneous mass of certificates, issued by a range of different self-proclaimed authorities wishing to shape a historical moment. The

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43 An assessment which is shared by Jordi Carulla. See *La Guerra Civil en 2000 carteles*, 71.

44 Termes, J., Miravitlles, J., & Fontseré, C. *Carteles de la República*, 356.

45 Cf. Ruipérez, M. 'Renau-Fontseré: Los carteles de la guerra civil', 12. Cf. Also Grimau, C. *El cartel republicano*, 9, and Gamonal Torres, M. *Arte y Política*, 34.

46 Termes, J., Miravitlles, J., & Fontseré, C. *Carteles de la República*, 361.

47 Cf. Susan Sontag's claim that a poster appearing in the context of other posters is always competitive and visually aggressive. Sontag, S. 'Posters: Advertisement, Art, Political Artefact, Commodity' in Beirut, M. *Looking Closer 3* (New York: Allworth Press, 1999), 196-218 (see esp. 196-198).

48 Termes, J., Miravitlles, J., & Fontseré, C. *Carteles de la República*, 356.

sheer profusion of signs competing for space on crammed city façades clearly signalled that the revolution was not one but multiple. Indeed, torn, overlapping, haphazardly arranged posters may well have given contemporary passers-by an overall impression of fragmentation and competition rather than unity and strength.[49] As an expression of a new symbolic order, then, posters did not only highlight the sudden dominance of revolutionary forces but also the problem of political disorganisation caused by this very change.

Communicating PCE strategy

As part of its campaign to centralise the Republican war effort, to overcome this disorganisation and to mobilise the Republican population around a unified war vision, the PCE made good use of various means of propaganda, among which posters were prominent. Organisations like Altavoz del Frente (Loudspeaker of the Front), operating under the auspices of the party's national newspaper, *Mundo Obrero*, orchestrated an impressive array of propaganda activities, including film screenings, theatre performances, and the playing of music from trucks moving along the front, to mention but a few.[50] Most notably, they organised prolific and multifaceted graphic propaganda campaigns, 'saturating' city streets with slogans and images in ways that would dramatically alter the face of urban environments – evident not least in Madrid, as both the capital and military front-line, in autumn 1936.[51] The aim was to create an atmosphere in which indifference to the war would be practically impossible and where a restricted number of slogans would be allowed to dominate. In pursuing this aim, the PCE propaganda teams displayed, as several historians have suggested, a particular dynamism and skill.[52] This has to be explained, first of all, with reference to the fact that the PCE understood, like no other Popular Front party, the crucial role of propaganda to

[49] This is particularly clear in images of urban environments in the photographic archive of the Junta de Defensa de Madrid. The archive can be consulted digitally as well as physically through the AGA (Madrid). See, for example, 33,F,04049,54121,001; 33,F,04049,54123,001; and 33,F,04049,54125,001.

[50] Alvarez Lopera, J. *La politica de bienies culturales del gobierno republicano durante la guerra civil española. Vo1*. (Ministerio de Cultura; Madrid, 1982), 118f. Fernández Soria, J. M. *Educación y cultura en la guerra civil (España 1936-1939)* (Valencia: Nau Llibres, 1984), 83-85. Hernández Sanchez, F. *Guerra o Revolución*, 298-300.

[51] The term 'saturate' is taken from the founder of the Altavoz, César Falcón. See Cobb, C. *Los Milicianos de la Cultura*, 40. For the organisation's own report on its activities, see the second and third issue of the magazine *Altavoz del Frente*. Relevant articles are reproduced in Gamonal Torres, M. *Arte y Política*, 100-104. Altavoz was particularly active in Madrid, where propaganda efforts were constantly intensified as Franco's troops approach the capital in late autumn of 1936. .

[52] Ibid. See also Hernández Sanchez, F. *Guerra o Revolución*, 300, and Alvarez Lopera, J. *La politica de bienies culturales*, 119.

a successful mobilisation campaign. But the efficacy of PCE propagandists would also have been due, as Jesús Hernández, communist Minister of Public Instruction between September 1936 and April 1938, indicated, to the party's general stress on discipline and organisation (about which more will be said later). It is also likely, that the party and affiliated organisations managed to recruit – partly because of the importance they granted visual propaganda production – a disproportionate number of the most talented artists.[53] Among these artists was, of course, Josep Renau.

In order to analyse further how the PCE sought to instil into the population a heightened level of war consciousness and attract the broadest possible support for the party, the remainder of this chapter will focus more closely on the early war posters made by Renau. If the efficiency of PCE propaganda is often commented on, little has been said, beyond the merely descriptive, about its symbolic content.[54] A close reading of Renau's work may thus complement the existing literature by offering a detailed study of the visual rhetoric employed by the PCE both to unite the Republican population and to strengthen its own position in the crystallising war effort. As indicated, Renau was by no means the only prominent poster artist working for the PCE, but in terms of content his work was representative of PCE propaganda as a whole, especially since he often addressed key points in the party's war programme.

In this task, Renau had to negotiate a number of war-related constraints which had a distinct impact on his artistic output and which must inform how we analyse his war posters. To begin with, war-time poster production was always, as he later remarked, a 'race against time', often forcing artists to settle for less than perfection. On one occasion Renau even had to run into a print shop and draw straight onto the printing blocks while a car was waiting with the engine running.[55] In Renau's particular case, it is also clear that additional time limitations obtained once he was appointed General Director of Fine Arts in September 1936. From this point onwards, he did most of his graphic work outside his official timetable of duties – usually in evenings or at

[53] Other examples would include José Bardasano, another nationally known artist who made posters for the unified socialist-communist youth movement JSU, and Parrilla, who also made posters for the JSU. The fact that communist organisations attracted the best poster artists is surely from the fact that they were typically the biggest 'clients' for such work. This is suggested both by the photo archive of the Junta de Defensa de Madrid, and Fontseré's account of poster production in Barcelona. With regard to the latter, see Termes, J., Miravitlles, J., & Fontseré, C. *Carteles de la República*, 374.

[54] Some analysis of this kind is found in Grimau, C. *El cartel republicano*. Close readings of some of Renau's work can also be found in Tomás Ferré, F. *Los Carteles Valencianos*, though the insights thus produced are only briefly related, if at all, to the socio-political context in which his posters appeared.

[55] Forment, A. *Josep Renau*, 167.

weekends, when he went back to Valencia from Madrid to spend time with his family.[56] Perhaps it was partly for these time-related reasons that Renau later claimed to dislike most of his artistic output from the war. Another problem making poster production particularly challenging in this period – a problem which became more decisive as the conflict dragged on – was material scarcity. Colour ranges were limited and the hues of final prints unpredictable throughout, and paper scarcity became a pressing issue less than a year after the war had begun.[57]

Most importantly, the war years meant that the relative artistic independence hitherto maintained by Renau was now sacrificed in favour of a stricter observance of party policy, at least in all matters relating to short-term political and military strategy. After September 1936, this change can no doubt be attributed to his elevation to a post where he represented both party and government at a national level, as well as to the greater discipline required in times of war. For Renau himself, however, a stricter adherence to the party line would not have created any dilemma. He always wished to conform to the content of party teachings, even if he insisted on his freedom to express that content through innovative forms. This he managed to achieve without any real fight. Indeed, aside from some disagreements with certain comrades in the Valencian party, *Nueva Cultura's* editorial independence was, as we have seen, as much guaranteed by the Central Committee's unwillingness and inability to engage with cultural matters as by any assertion of autonomy on Renau's part.[58] But if his (and the general) tendency to follow the party leadership became increasingly marked during the war, it was no doubt also because of the sheer scale of events now unfolding. Experiences of unseen levels of military aggression and violence must have engendered a greater sense of vulnerability, which would have enhanced the need for guidance and a sense of greater safety in collective responses. As Renau and his colleagues came to understand the war as a decisive world historical moment, the party, together with the Soviet backing associated with it, must have appeared the only force of sufficient magnitude to actually have an impact on its outcome.[59] Individual ideas, no matter how

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[56] This is highlighted by Renau in interview reproduced in Julián González, I. *El Cartel Republicano*, 190. However, as mentioned on page 159 below, Renau's personal secretary at the General Directorate of Fine Arts, Antonio Deltoro, later stated that Renau would periodically disappear from his office in order to focus on some poster commission. See Forment, A. *Josep Renau*, 164.

[57] See, for example, an article entitled 'Litografía de la guerra y la revolución', published in *Adelante* (16 february 1937). Reproduced in Gamonal Torres, M. *Arte y Política*,180f.

[58] See pages 97 above.

[59] Hence, no doubt, his insistence that artists must recognise the 'objective' facts of the conflict. These facts were often defined, of course, by the communist leadership.

grand, logically lost significance in such circumstances.

Either way, with regard to my forthcoming analysis, the particular conditions obtaining during the war meant that Renau's graphic propaganda was at once more one-dimensional in its politics and more variable in its aesthetic qualities, compared to his work of earlier periods. To address questions of artistic intent, then, as expressed in war posters, it is necessary to modify the analytical angle adopted in previous chapters and focus on symbolic content rather than form. The latter, as indicated, was often simply a result of practical restrictions, and could thus no longer serve as a signifier of Renau's long-term cultural project, which in any case was put on hold throughout autumn of 1936.[60] This analytical modification is also required by the fact that it is precisely the *content* of Renau's poster propaganda that offers the most significant clues to how the PCE positioned itself in the internal battles to shape Republican politics after the coup. As we shall see, in order to assist PCE efforts to attract mass support across class boundaries, Renau was careful to adopt a symbolic lexicon that could speak to progressive members of the middling classes as well as to revolutionary workers. The efficacy of his posters revolved, to a large degree, around the very ambiguity thus produced. Another ambiguity, similarly introduced to raise PCE's profile, resulted from Renau's tendency to blur the distinction between party and state policy. In combination they suggest an implicit strategy in Renau's early war poster production – a strategy whereby the revolution could be equated with the Republican war campaign and the PCE conflated with the war-time government.

Posters to mobilise the home front

The first poster Renau produced – and according to him one of the earliest produced during the conflict[61] – is noteworthy because it can be viewed as a prophetic illustration of what would be the changing organisational characteristics of the PCE during the war. It called on 'workers, peasants, soldiers, intellectuals' to 'strengthen the ranks of the Communist Party' and depicted four men, each a representative of these groups, contemplating the situation before them with determined expression [Fig. 17]. The realistically painted style, underscoring PCE's exaltation of strict discipline, is typical of

[60] Such an assertion would seem reasonable in light of the fact that *Nueva Cultura* temporarily stopped its regular publication and that all efforts were momentarily geared towards the immediate goal of mobilising the Republican defence. A return to long-term as well as short-term concerns can be seen in Renau's lecture on the social function of the poster in December 1936, as discussed later, and was also an intrinsic part of his work as General Director of Fine Arts, at least after the battle for Madrid.

[61] Julián González, I. *El Cartel Republicano*, 199.

Renau's war-poster aesthetic, which tended to rely heavily on air brush – largely because it was a faster technique than montage. In the background a large red flag is tied to the bayonet of a rifle; its hammer and sickle is dominating the left half of the picture, urging the men onwards.

With remarkable prescience, Renau's poster captures a number of important aspects of the war-time PCE. First of these is the fact, already mentioned, that the party managed to recruit people of different ages and socio-economic backgrounds to its ranks. The reasons for this are complex and related, as we have seen, to its disciplined response to the revolutionary events taking place in the Republic in the aftermath of the coup. But the party would also owe much of its success to its exceptional organisational abilities. Within its own structures, the PCE would pioneer different forms of integrated organisations which the Republic would need to develop across home as well as military fronts in order to survive the challenge posed by total war.[62] If the PCE experienced vertiginous growth after July 1936, it was to a large extent because the party simply seemed, in the eyes of many, to be the organisation best placed to lead the war effort.

Yet such assertions cannot be made without reference to the Soviet Union, which in October 1936 became, as mentioned, the first and only state to supply the Republic with significant amounts of war materiel. As a result, large parts of the Republican population primarily came to associate the flag on Renau's poster with the Soviet Union’s solidarity with the Republic, rather than communism *per se*. For this reason it, it could be used to garner support from people of a wide range of political persuasions.[63] A striking indication of this may be found in another poster, made for the moderate left republican party, Izquierda Republicana, in 1937.[64] Here a foregrounded statue representing the Republic is placed next to a giant profile of Stalin, under whose steady gaze Republican soldiers storm forward. Produced by an organisation that cannot in any sense be called Stalinist, the poster is a powerful testimony to the broad prestige enjoyed by the Soviet Union in the war-time Republic – at least until victory began to seem impossible. But if Soviet-related symbols could thus simply be associated with the Popular Front as a whole, the party that would derive the greatest benefit from their

[62] These incorporated also youth and women's sections, where the same membership hybridity could be observed. See Graham, H. *The Spanish Republic at War*, 180f.

[63] Ibid., 174, 181. For a contemporary reflection on the popularity of the Soviet Union in Republican Spain during the autumn of 1936, see, for example, Araceli, G. 'La Hora Rusa de Madrid' *Mundo Gráfico* 18 November 1936, 8-9.

[64] Made by Josep Espert.

proliferation in the Republican public sphere was undoubtedly the PCE.

A more complex use of ideologically charged yet semantically open-ended symbols can be observed in a Renau poster highlighting the importance of domestic war industries. For financial, geographical, and political reasons, Soviet aid could not compensate entirely for the asymmetries caused by Non-Intervention, which meant that it was essential for the Republic to be able to produce military materiel internally too. To highlight this need, Renau's poster, made at some point in autumn 1936, bore the slogan 'War Industry. Giving us a handle on victory' (Industria de guerra. Potente palanca de victoria)[Fig. 18]. Composed mainly of montage, it shows a large industrial wheel being turned by a powerful arm. Between the wheel and the arm appear the outlines of four bayonets. Just below the wheel is a red star, in the top left corner the text 'Partido Comunista'. The link between the visual elements, tying together industrial output with political as well as military goals, is evident, and so is the promise of peace implicit in the tranquil blue sky making up the background. In terms of its visual symbolism, the design celebrated both worker strength and a peaceful yet politically undecided Republican future.[65] The latter aspect was particularly important and stemmed from the fact that the visual language of the poster, regardless of its stated connection with the PCE, was, as we shall see, open to several political readings.

A key characteristic of Renau's war industry poster was, first of all, that it contained symbolic references to autonomous worker power as well as statist politics, and as such effectively served to link libertarian revolutionary imagery to the PCE's (in one sense anti-revolutionary) war programme. The most immediate symbol potentially giving rise to revolutionary associations is found in the arm, which by clutching the shaft is also greeting the viewer with a clenched fist salute. Although in Spain the salute came to represent adherence to the anti-fascist cause broadly understood, it was well-known to have its origins in revolutionary left-wing politics.[66] Further references in this regard could be derived from the celebration of industry – implicit in the elevated position of the wheel – which can be seen as linked to the emancipatory project of the worker movement as a whole. Yet if many Spanish workers were now pursuing emancipatory goals in opposition to the state, the visual language of Renau's poster also represented an endorsement of a state-led model of revolution. This is especially clear in

[65] Unfortunately it has not been possible to establish a date for when this poster might have been made.

[66] The clenched fist salute was first adopted in 1926 as the official salute of the German Communist Party's paramilitary organisation, the Red front Fighters League (Roter Frontkämpferbund) and from there spread to communist parties around the world. See Weitz, E. *Creating German Communism*, 3.

its visual references to the USSR. From an aesthetic point of view, Renau's poster exhibits unmistakable commonalities with the work of Soviet artists like Gustav Klucis, for example, a Constructivist who used photomontage to create some of the most of iconic images of the Bolshevik Revolution and Stalinism. Indeed, the inclusion of photography against a simple background, the monumental portrayal of worker strength, all directly connect Renau's design with the visual culture of the Soviet avant-garde. The implications of this were not merely stylistic. By 'quoting' (to borrow a term from Susan Sontag) Soviet precedents, Renau presented them as originators of an authoritative model that Spain should follow in her own construction of cultural as well as industrial modernity.[67] Such articulations of war strategy, above all when tied to definitions of the revolution, would clearly carry a political significance reaching beyond the war into a post-war future.

Even where purely aesthetic references were not readily appreciated by a general public largely unfamiliar with Soviet avant-garde art,[68] there was a sense in which the purely visual language of Renau's poster may have prompted associations to the Bolshevik revolution before any other. For the Soviet Union was, especially in the 1930s (that is, at the time of the first Five Year Plans), typically and probably more consistently than any other country represented by images of heavy industry.[69] Yet again, the propagandistic power of the poster lies in the fact that such associations could not be made unambiguously. Industry had long acted as a trope of progress in socialist iconography, and could furthermore be seen in anarchist war posters depicting a 'new Spain'.[70] The desire to further the process of industrialisation would have been shared by many reformist republicans too, who saw economic development as an integral part of the overall modernisation of the country. In this sense, then, industry provided a symbol of material wealth and universal well-being that spoke equally to all progressive ideologies. It allowed Renau to create a poster that stayed true to his ideological identity

67 Cf. Sontag, S. 'Posters: Advertisement, Art, Political Artefact, Commodity'.

68 If professional commercial artists had little knowledge of Soviet aesthetics (as suggested by Carles Fontseré and Lorenzo Goñi), it is safe to assume the general public did not have much knowledge of it either.

69 As seen in international propaganda magazines like *USSR in Construction*, this is clearly how Moscow wanted the country to be presented. More empirical work needs to be done on how images of the USSR were distributed in Spain, but one source used by the mainstream press was a picture agency run by one of the founders of the Spanish Association of Friends of the Soviet Union (Asociación de Amigos de la Unión Soviética, AUS), Mario Rawicz. This would presumably trade only in images approved by Moscow. See Horacio Fernández's introduction to Rawicz, M. *Confesionario de papel: memorias de un inconformista* (Valencia: Comares/IVAM, 1997), 25. Moreover, virtually all posters produced by the AUS during the war, including one by Renau, would include some representation of heavy industry.

70 De Luis, F. *Cincuenta años*, 51.

without necessarily alienating other groups on the left. Most importantly, it struck a balance between celebrating the dreams of revolutionary workers and acknowledging the realities of modern war.

Another attempt to strike a balance between revolutionary politics and centralised war mobilisation, this time with more immediate impact, was made with regard to collectivisation in the countryside. Much of the agrarian south, which had the greatest proportion of landless peasants, quickly fell to the rebels as they were advancing from Seville to Madrid. Where collectivisation had occurred in zones successfully held by the Republic, it was often a contentious issue that divided different sectors of the middling peasantry. In this context the PCE attracted broad support as a result of its robust defence of 'law and order' and small-scale private property, especially among small landowning farmers in Catalonia and Valencia, where a strong libertarian influence meant that forced collectivisation and confiscations, mostly carried out by anarchist groups, were more widespread than in the central zone.[71] Yet this was more than just an issue of local pragmatics or political opportunism, for the PCE's position on collectivisation was ambivalent to the core. At a time when the Soviet Union was realising a vast collectivisation programme, loyal communists could hardly oppose the concept as such. Yet the need to regain central control over food supplies and avoid any disruptions to Republican food production, critical when most grain producing areas lay in rebel-held territory, meant that the party had to reject any ideas of blanket collectivisation as unsuitable for wartime conditions in Spain.[72] This ambivalence was also present in the celebrated agricultural decree of 7 October, signed by communist Minister of Agriculture, Vicente Uribe. The decree stipulated that land belonging to active supporters of the rebellion could be confiscated for collective use.[73] This was, however, the only legally expropriable land, and as a whole the decree followed earlier governmental efforts to *limit* the impact of collectivisation.[74] Even so, the PCE was quick to make political capital from the reform among radicalised sectors of the peasantry, who were told that the decree represented a 'new era' in the Spanish

[71] Graham, H. *The Spanish Republic at War,*182. In Valencia, the circle gathered around Renau and *Nueva Cultura* saw almost immediately after the July rebellion how the sole threat of forced collectivisation could disrupt food production by discouraging peasants from working their lands, and promptly resolved to distribute posters defending the right toproperty among Valencian villages. From interview with Antonio Ballester, CDMH (Salamanca) Fuentes_Orales-Mexico, no 9, 46.

[72] For a concise summary of the PCE position, see Fraser, R. *Blood of Spain*, 291. See also Hernández, F. *Guerra o Revolución*, 160f.

[73] Published in *Gaceta de Madrid* 8 October 1936, 236f.

[74] Point emphasised by Helen Graham in *The Spanish Republic at War,* 230.

countryside. Thus highlighting the progressive content of a measure essentially designed to maintain the status quo, the party could also reinforce its standing among small and middling landowners who were protective of their private property while also courting support among rural workers who saw collectivisation as a progressive redistributive measure that should be officially sanctioned in the wake of the coup.

An official poster communicating the basic content of the decree was made by Renau at some point in October [Fig. 19].[75] The composition is made up of a peasant standing in a field, holding a rifle in his raised right arm, around which falls the wringing body of snake, stabbed by the rifle's bayonet. On the shoulder end of the rifle is written the word 'Decree' (Decreto), and on the body of the snake; 'Rebel owner' (Propietario faccioso). To the lower right corner we see the other hand of the peasant, holding a sickle. Above this are excerpts from the official text, and a heading which states: 'Peasant, defend with arms the government that gave you land' (Campesino, defiende con las armas al gobierno que te dió la tierra).

Renau later claimed that this poster was both the most widely distributed and the most poorly executed design he ever put his name to.[76] The whole process was done in in less than twelve hours, and the excerpts had to be added afterwards.[77] It appears the complaints of the artist referred mainly to the lack of integration between image and text. But there is also a sense in which the purely visual elements also fail to speak for themselves. Had it not been for the qualifications added to rifle and snake, the intended significance of these would have remained elusive. As it stands, the composition has to be read in a rather literal manner; the information becomes dictated, as opposed to felt, and the impact of the message reaches the spectator through an indirect and 'rationalised' route. The reliance on text – indeed the poster is one the most 'text-heavy' Renau ever did – would represent a double weakness since the intended audience included members of the poorest sections of the peasantry, many of whom were illiterate.

The information campaign surrounding the October decree did not stop with the poster, however. Renau also co-authored, together with graphic designer Mauricio Amster, an official leaflet entitled '7 October. A new era in the countryside' (7 de Octubre. Una nueva era en el campo).[78] Like the poster, this leaflet focused exclusively

[75] Again, we do not know the exact date, but according to the artist himself this was made immediately after the decree was passed in October.
[76] Julián González, I. *El Cartel Republicano*, 199.
[77] Ibid., 199.
[78] Published on 1 November 1936, according to the back page.

on the redistributive aspect of the measure, but it is noteworthy that Renau also added a series of references to the Communist Party which highlight its role in the formulation of the decree in such a way that party and ministry become virtually synonymous.[79] It was a mode of presenting government initiatives which would later be reproduced within the Ministry of Public Instruction and Fine Arts and clearly showed how the party used its governmental positions to gain new members.[80] Yet if the leaflet provided an opportunity for proselytism among day labouring peasants, another special *Nueva Cultura* edition, '*Nueva Cultura* for the countryside' (*Nueva Cultura para el campo*), would address the implications of the October decree from the opposite point of view.[81] Here the intended audience was almost certainly landholding peasants, or at any rate an audience of some level of education, as each issue contained detailed articles describing how to maximise production, as well as what foodstuffs, based on nutritional value, should be prioritised in times of war.[82] The feature discussing the October decree emphasised more clearly Uribe's stated conviction that forced collectivisation would be counterproductive in Spain – a conviction which, despite the magazine's recurring features on the Soviet precedent, was allegedly shared by members of the *Nueva Cultura* group.[83] In short, then, through different outlets Renau and his collaborators found ways simultaneously to highlight both sides of the symbolically loaded initiative and to outline suggested benefits to audiences of different political orientation and socio-economic status. Thus the government appeared to represent the interests of both middle and working class constituents, while the PCE presented itself – with questionable justification but notable success, as a result of their propaganda skills – as the driving force behind progressive change.

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79 For example: 'We are realising the slogans of the Communist Party: to expropriate the land from the idlers, the *caciques* [bosses of clientelist networks][...], to give it to the living soul of the Nation.'

'Communists, together with their socialist brothers, republicans, and all democratic men, have no other concerns in government than that of working for the happiness of our people.'

Ministerio de Agricultura *7 de Octubre: Una nueva era en el campo* (Madrid, 1936), 6.

80 The clearest examples, discussed by Álvarez Lopera, could be seen in the evacuation of the Prado museum and the opening of a free public museum in Valencia which made use of the private art collection of the Duke of Alba. See Álvarez Lopera, José. *La política de bienes culturales*, 37, 70, 103. See page 175 below.

81 This was visually and textually a much more elaborate publication than its *Nueva Cultura* counterpart for the front. Up to twelve pages long and printed in two colours, it looks more like the normal magazine, though filled with more practical content. According to the *Nueva Cultura* report in March 1937 three issues had been published and printed in 5000 copies each.

82 It seems safe to assume that this was mainly distributed to small-holders in the Valencia region, while the ministry leaflet was presumably distributed throughout Republican territory as a whole.

83 See Antonio Ballester interview, CDMH (Salamanca) Fuentes_Orales-Mexico, no 9, 46.

Propaganda to boost the army

In addition to these efforts to galvanise and unite the home front the PCE also used propaganda resources to capitalise on its prescience and efficiency in military matters. Here the initiative and innovative power of the party was in many ways real as well as projected, not least in relation to the task of reconstructing the Republican army. The Republican government soon recognised the need for a regular fighting force – a continuing series of militia defeats in the south in the summer and early autumn 1936 made the case for such a move unanswerable – and the PCE placed itself at the forefront of developments.[84] Immediately after the July rebellion taken place, it had created a prototype and training ground for a future army in its Fifth Regiment, based on an already existing party militia.[85] Apart from military training, the Fifth Regiment pioneered various integrating organisational models linking military units to auxiliary training facilities and civilian services (e.g. nurses' training, family support, etc.).[86] That this holistic approach to war mobilisation, crucial in the effort to maximise the utility of limited Republican resources, was furthermore a part of the image that the PCE tried to project to potential recruits can been seen in party posters highlighting how enlisted soldiers would be entitled to child care.[87] Another central feature boosting the credibility of the PCE as a war party was its constant stress, in propaganda as well as all practical activities preparing recruits for war, on the importance of hierarchy and discipline.[88] The association with discipline became a great source of pride, not only for the PCE leadership, but for communist rank-and-file too. As memoirs and contemporary letters show, it served as a cornerstone of communist group identity, and reinforced a sense of representing the vanguard, the most efficient and skilled, among Republican troops.[89]

In the wake of what had been a treasonous military coup, the task of legitimising

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84 Graham, H. *The Spanish Republic at War,* 138-148.

85 Ibid., 84. The Milicias Antifascistas Obreras y Campesinas was formed in 1933 to protect meetings and party premises. See also Alpert, M. *The Republican Army in the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939* (Cambridge: CUP, 2013), 15, 44-49.

86 Ibid. 147f, 180.

87 AGA (Madrid), 33,F,04061,55211,001. Poster designed by Parilla.

88 See, for example, the speech delivered by the General Secretary José Díaz in the Monumental Cinema in Madrid on 20 October 1936. Reproduced in Díaz, J. *Tres años de lucha* (Brenes: Muñoz Moya, 2005), 178-183.

89 Cf. Letters responding to the question 'Why have you joined the PCE?' held in the civil war archive in Salamanca (CDMH (Salamanca) PS-Madrid, 474, 20. These appear to be part of an internal survey and would no doubt conform to general party orthodoxy no matter what, but it is still instructive to see the number that in one way or another single out discipline and organisation as keys to the strength of the party. The emphasis on discipline isalso recurrent in later accounts on the conflict. See, for example, the interview with José Duque, a PCE militant stationed in Aragon during most of the war (CDMH (Salamanca) Fuentes_Orales-Mexico, no 38), and testaments by party members held in the PCE archive in Madrid (AHPCE 'Tesis, memorias, manuscritos' 38/3, 44/3, 44/8, 40/3).

to the broad Republican population an army currently under reconstruction was one of the most serious challenges facing the Republican authorities.[90] To address this challenge the PCE took inspiration from the Red Army and introduced, once again through the Fifth Regiment, the figure of the political commissar. The role of the commissar was diverse, involving all tasks concerning soldiers' welfare, but in the midst of fighting the commissar's responsibility was above all to explain and legitimise the rationale of orders and to maintain morale among the troops – many of whom would have been new to the searing experience of modern warfare.[91] They served as a link in the chain of command, representing soldiers' interests while at the same time enforcing discipline. This double function was crucial not least because a Republican Army had to incorporate both the professional officers who remained loyal after the July rising and the workers' militias that had fought it. While elements of the former tended to be disdainful of militia strategy, the latter, understandably, remained suspicious of the career officers' credibility and claim to loyalty.[92] Against this background the government of Largo Caballero created, in mid-October 1936, an officially instituted General Commissariat, which was to facilitate political and military co-ordination between the disparate forces making up the Republican Army under construction.[93]

Even within this new government-created commissariat, the political commissar remained closely associated with the Communist Party. The party keenly promoted its function within the armed forces, above all because it saw the crucial importance that commissars would have as the Republic sought to convert inexperienced and inadequately trained men into a robust and disciplined army.[94] The PCE had no executive influence over the formation of the new General Commissariat in October, but some officers, who at any rate disliked what they regarded as political interference in their sphere, would suspect the Commissariat of being mainly an instrument of

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90 Anti-militarism had formed part of the political consciousness of many segments of the population in Spain before July 1936, but the coup had invariably made it stronger among all Republican groups.

91 Alpert, M. *The Republican Army*, 174-201. See also Matthews, J. *Reluctant Warriors: Republican Popular Army and Nationalist Army Conscripts in the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939* (Oxford: OUP, 2012), 63-101. For an extensive autobiographical account attempting to evaluate the role of commissars in the civil war, see Álvarez, Santiago. *Los comisarios políticos en el Ejército Popular de la República. Aportaciones a la historia de la Guerra Civil Española* (La Coruña: Ediciós do Castro, 1989).

92 Ibid. The importance of commissars in ensuring loyalty also among the officer corps was emphasised by Federico Bonet, a commissar himself, interview held at CDMH (Salamanca) Fuentes_Orales-Mexico, no 15, 64f.

93 Published in *Gaceta de Madrid* 16 October 1936, 355.

94 Graham, H. *The Spanish Republic at War*, 147. Cf. article in *Mundo Obrero* 1 October 1936, entitled 'La dimensión de los comisarios políticos', which stated that 'the political commissar must know how to make is his men understand the necessity of a conscientious discipline of iron.'

communist aggrandisement.[95] Such impressions would have been strengthened by the presence of a high number of communist commissars in Republican army ranks. But rather than conspiracy, this was, again, due to the fact that the PCE understood their military importance and was the first to nominate qualified and experienced personnel to such posts.[96]

In connection with these developments, Renau was to create one of his most celebrated posters, bearing the slogan 'The Commissar, nerve of our popular army' (el Comisario, nervio del nuestro ejército popular)[Fig.20].[97] The design shows a large number of bayonets emerging from the right-hand side of the poster, and an arm in long sleeve uniform occupying a central place among them. The arm does not carry any weapon; it launches into battle solely with its clenched fist. In the background we see dark stormy skies; a red and yellow horizon under large black clouds. The background is made up of coloured and retouched photographs. So is the arm, presumably belonging to the commissar. The clenched fist represents the only human element in the composition; it is the soul, the nerve, of the resistance, the guide offering directions. Its tensed features signal determination and strength. Together with the sharpened steel and threatening sky, the overall impression of the image is violent, aggressive, even if the blades appear to fixed in their position. They form an impenetrable defence – a defence virtually piercing the gaze as it reads the image from left to right – beyond which, as the slogan in Madrid later prophesied, the enemy 'shall not pass'.[98]

This is how the poster most commonly appears in present day reproductions.[99] Here there is no explicit reference to the Communist Party, or any other political organisation. This is consistent with claims made by Renau towards the end of his career, stating that the poster was commissioned by the General Commissariat when it was created in October.[100] As the task would have been to represent the Republican Army, there could be no room for explicit proselytism. However, such claims are complicated by the fact that there is another version [Fig. 21], coloured differently (in the particular example seen here, but colour scheme could vary due to several factors) and exhibiting certain variations in terms of composition: the bayonet above the arm not

95 Ibid., 147.
96 Ibid., 147.
97 Undated, but in all likelihood made in October 1936.
98 See below. '*¡No pasarán!*' ('They shall not pass!') became the defining slogan during the battle for Madrid.
99 In all likelihood because this is the version held by the Josep Renau archive.
100 Julián González, I. *El Cartel Republicano*, 199. Cf. Forment, A. *Josep Renau*, 165.

reaching across the picture frame, the fist having a slightly different shape, the sky being visible across the entire background, the writing of the definite article in 'El Comisario' appearing in capitals, and so on.[101] But above all this version includes, in letters appearing above the arm of the commissar, the additional inscription 'Partido Comunista'. The letters are of the same colour as the uniform, leaving the political identity of the commissar beyond any doubt.

It may have been that Renau created the latter poster first, evidently published by the PCE, and then simply adapted its content once he received the commission from the government's General Commissariat.[102] Even so, the fact that there would thus have been two versions promoting the same initiative, one linked to the Communist Party and the other to the Republican Army, meant that the Commissar poster may stand as another example where Renau's work served to blur the boundaries between party and state policy. Provided the two versions could be seen in the same space and the initiative was received favourably, it is clear which political organisation would reap the rewards in terms of enhanced reputation and membership.

The association between commissars and the PCE would be further reinforced by an increasing popular awareness of the historical model provided by the Bolsheviks during the Russian Civil War.[103] This link was reinforced through all forms of PCE propaganda, as indeed were more general claims, often appearing in posters as well as speeches, regarding 'instructive' similarities between the Russian and Spanish conflicts.[104] (This provided a more recent alternative to the other historical parallel mentioned at the same time in non-communist Republican media: namely, the French

[101] This can be found in the poster collection of the University of Valencia, for example.

[102] It could also be that the version published by the PCE was the *only* one existing during the war, as the first version mentioned is – at least in the form available today – in all likelihood a reproduction from 1949. In a letter to art historian Inmaculada Julián, dated 13 November 1974, Renau explained that he had reproduced a number of his civil war posters in 1949. These reproductions can be identified by the signature 'renau 36' (whereas all other work was simply signed 'renau') and the fact that there is no text in the margin stating where the poster has been printed (which was the case with other civil war posters by Renau). Both these characteristics can be observed in the first version referred to above. What remains unclear, however, is why Renau should have made this reproduction significantly different from the original, when comparisons show that all the other 1949 reproductions mentioned in the letter to Julián are nearly identical to their originals. (Renau worked from black and white photographs of the originals when making the reproductions.) In the absence of any reasonable hypothesis explaining this alteration, it must be considered possible that there was an original version also without the 'Partido Comunista' inscription, even if I have not come across a surviving copy of this in any archive or poster catalogue.

[103] There were also precedents set during the French Revolution, which did not, however, receive much attention in Spain. See Álvarez, Santiago. *Los comisarios políticos*, 98.

[104] See speech delivered by José Díaz on 20 October 1936 in Madrid. *Tres años de lucha*, 178-183. See also plain-text posters by the Association of Friends of the Soviet Union in Madrid, highlighting the relevance of the Russian experience for the upcoming battle for Madrid. AGA (Madrid), 33,F,04062,55378,001).

invasion of Spain in 1808.[105]) Particularly important in terms of reinforcing the linkage between the Russian and Spanish civil wars were widespread screenings of Soviet films like 'Chapaev' (1934) and 'We are from Kronstadt' (1936),[106] where the heroism of the Bolshevik commissar was on full display.[107] Both productions claimed to retell real events – the first following World War I hero Chapaev and his commissar Fourmanov, as they led a group of peasants in the Russian Civil War, the second relating how a commissar inspired a group of undisciplined sailors to perform heroic deeds in the defence of Petrograd in 1919. Both films underscored the importance of inspirational individuals while emphasising that victory in battle ultimately lay with the collective. According to Santiago Álvarez, a communist commissar who would rise to a prominent position in Enrique Lister's 11th Division, there could be no doubt that Spanish commissars were greatly influenced by prototypes like Fourmanov, who, in his view, turned the 'uncut diamond' that was Chapaev into an exemplary military and revolutionary leader.[108]

The fearless advance of this leader, and his calls on the rest of the men to follow, are also captured in the poster Renau made for the film in spring 1936 [Fig. 22].[109] As in the Commissar poster, the main protagonist is the only human element represented in the composition, and appears lightly armed in contrast to the rifles and machine guns around him. His chief weapon is his bravery, rooted in a willingness to self-sacrifice – characteristics powerfully described in the final scene of the film, where he single-handedly holds off an ambush and perishes just before reinforcements come to win the day. In contrast to the 'Commissar', this poster offers a portrayal of attack. There is a strong forward movement; Chapaev himself at the helm, flanked by bayonets, guns, and the red flag of socialism.

While 'Chapaev' had been screened before the military rising in July, and had immediately become a reference point for some militia men going to the front,[110] 'We are from Kronstadt' would not premier in Madrid until 18 October, when it was shown

[105] The parallels with the French invasion in 1808 would figure much more prominently in communist propaganda in 1937, but these references were repeatedly used in the Republican papers like *ABC* (Madrid), already in the run-up to the defence of Madrid. See, for example, front pages on 6 and 7 November 1936.

[106] Original titles of the films are: Chapaev (Spanish title: Chapáiev) and My iz Kronshtadta (Spanish title: Los Marinos de Cronstadt).

[107] Álvarez, Santiago. *Los comisarios políticos*, 96.

[108] Ibid., 94.

[109] The poster is reproduced next to review of the film published in *Nueva Cultura*, 11 (March-April), 16.

[110] See the description of a truck carrying milicianos with the text 'los chapaiefs' written on the side in AHPCE (Madrid) 'Tesis, memorias, manuscritos' 38/3.

with the sole intention of boosting military morale ahead of the imminent attack on the capital city. Screenings were organised by the propaganda section of the Ministry of Public Instruction and Fine Arts, which had acquired the film from the Soviet embassy, and Renau was part of the team that would turn its promotion into a massive advertising campaign.[111] The correspondent for the British daily *News Chronicle*, Geoffrey Cox, later remembered how the huge number of placards produced for the film had turned the lamp posts in the central boulevards of Gran Vía and Alcalá into 'one winding column of red.'[112] The sheer fact that the film was a Soviet production would soon prove its strongest attraction, however, as the first appearance of Soviet tanks on the central front six days later marked the beginning of general enthusiasm for all things Soviet among the Republican population.[113] As for Renau's main contribution, it unsurprisingly took the form of another poster – one which he would later consider the best he ever made [Fig. 23].[114]

The fundamental elements making up this composition consist of several naval cannons, pointing at varying angles to the right, and a powerful arm – naked this time, coloured red – hitting out alongside these with a clenched fist. In the background of the upper part we see a red star, over which is written the title of the film. In the lower right corner is a text which states that this is a Soviet production, while an emblem in the top right corner makes clear that it is supplied by the Ministry of Public Instruction and Fine Arts. In terms of the symbolic message, we are again presented with a 'heroic' composition, though in this case there is no individual fearlessly rushing into battle. What is exalted, in the view of art historian Facundo Tomás Ferré, is not a specific romantic hero, but heroism as a concept. The aim is, in other words, not to facilitate identification with a specific person, but 'to provoke a sensation of acceptance and amity as well as implied participation, immediate awareness of the possibility that oneself, any self, may realise the described action.'[115] As the defence of Madrid would demand an extraordinary degree of courage/heroism from all parts of the population, such messages were in many ways a necessary response to the moment.

The film appeared to have a powerful impact on its audience. The PCE

[111] Renau, J. *La batalla per una nova cultura*, 142. See also the interview in García García, M et al. *Josep Renau*, 278-280.
[112] Cox, G. *Defence of Madrid: An Eyewitness Account from the Spanish Civil War.* (Wellington: Otago University Press, 2006 [1937]), 49.
[113] Graham, H. *The Spanish Republic at War*, 164, 174.
[114] García García, M et al. *Josep Renau*, 280.
[115] Tomás Ferré, Facundo. *Los Carteles Valencianos*, 30.

newspaper *Mundo Obrero* spoke of the 'unanimous and enthusiastic' applause following from the première.[116] Renau, who declared the film a 'masterpiece in the genre of agitation and propaganda', claimed people left the cinema 'electrified.'[117] After attending the opening night, the Russian correspondent for *Pravda*, Mikhail Koltsov, noted in his diary how the audience – mainly consisting of militia men and soldiers, but also including several political dignitaries – followed the drama intensely, looking for answers to their own situation on the screen.[118] Suggestions that 'We are from Kronstadt' made a forceful impression are moreover supported by testimonies where participants in the fateful battles around Madrid claim to have particular memories of seeing it along the front or in the city.[119] In a tense and emotionally charged atmosphere, the film no doubt hit a nerve among the Republic's young defenders. Still, the most palpable proof of its impact would be found in the various imitative acts it inspired – acts where inexperienced soldiers literally copied the behaviour of the film's characters once military operations in the capital reached their decisive stage.

The efficacy of propaganda in the defence of Madrid

By 6 November 1936, Franco's Army of Africa had reached the outskirts of Madrid. A relatively small force of 30,000 men, it had advanced some 400 km from Seville in three months and now looked ready to capture a city of over one million inhabitants.[120] Despite incessant calls from certain organisations – above all the PCE – to prepare the city for enemy attack, defence measures had been put in place relatively late.[121] Barricades were built and trenches dug as the enemy was already closing in on the outskirts. It took a great communal effort to fortify the city – a task which engaged women and children as well as working men and was driven by an indomitable (if overdue) sense of urgency and determination.[122] Once the gravity of the situation became patent to all, all mobilisation efforts were stepped up. Around this time Renau

[116] 'En presencia de las autoridades de la República es proyectado ”Los marinos de Cronstadt” film soviético, que presenta el ministerio de Instrucción Pública' *Mundo Obrero* 19 October 1936.
[117] García García, M et al. *Josep Renau*, 280.
[118] Koltsov, M. *Diario de la guerra de España* (Barcelona: Backlist, 2009), 178-181 (esp. 180).
[119] AHPCE (Madrid) 'Tesis, memorias, manuscritos' 44/8.
[120] Fraser, R. *Blood of Spain*, 259. Fraser states that the Francoist forces at Madrid consisted of 20,000 men but more recent figures has increased the number to 30,000. See Montoliú, P. *Madrid en la Guerra Civil* (Madrid: Silex, 1998) 191.
[121] For an overview of the preparations and the leading role played by the PCE, see Montoliú, P. *Madrid en la Guerra Civil*, 181-188. See also Vázquez, M. & Valero, J. *La Guerra Civil en Madrid* (Madrid: Tebas, 1978), 185-216. For a highly narrativised account, see also Reverte, J. M. *La Batalla de Madrid* (Barcelona: Crítica 2004).
[122] Contemporary newspaper reports and magazine features in, for example, *ABC* 4 November 1936 and *Estampa* 7 November 1936.

called his *Nueva Cultura* colleague Rafael Pérez Contel to demand he immediately travel from Valencia to Madrid with the originals of their military manual, so it could be printed and distributed over the capital. In the end they could not find anyone to print it, as all print shop staff had gone to the front.[123] On his return to Valencia, Pérez Contel was accompanied by Renau's wife, Manuela.[124] Manuela would not be alone in leaving Madrid; many evacuated the city, and in a dramatic decision, taken and put into effect on 6 November, the entire Republican government also left for Valencia. Despite continuous repetition of slogans like '*¡No pasarán!*' (They shall not pass!) and 'Madrid will be the tomb of fascism', the flight of the government appeared an open confession that the city could not be defended.[125] Yet after a period of uncertainty, news emerged of a local defence committee being set up, led by General José Miaja. Through this, the remaining military and political leaders – among whom the PCE would exercise a prominent influence – took up the task of rapidly organising defence operations and encouraging the population to participate in the resistance.[126]

The Francoist offensive was launched at dawn of 8 November. Attacking from south-south-west, the plan was to cross through the working class districts of Usera and Carabanchel, as well as the Casa de Campo, the huge scrub land to the west of the city.[127] Republican troops put up fierce resistance, and were aided later that day by crucial reinforcements in the form of the 11th International Brigade – volunteer units organised and trained by the Comintern.[128] First deployed in the Casa de Campo, their significance was not derived so much from numbers as from the morale boost and practical example they provided. Many inexperienced Spanish soldiers were impressed by their discipline when faced with danger at the front.[129] For the civilian population, too, the arrival of the International Brigades inspired a new sense of hope. As the troops marched down the Gran Vía in corduroy uniforms and steel helmets, singing the Internationale in various languages, many believed that Russia was 'finally intervening.'[130] Though the International Brigades were made up recruits from all over

123 Pérez Contel, R. *Artistas en Valencia*, 635.
124 Ibid.
125 For a description of the sense of panic that spread once the news of the government's departure was known, see Koltsov, M. *Diario de la guerra de España*, 241.
126 Graham, H. *The Spanish Republic at War*, 167-181. For the popular spirit that characterised the defence of Madrid, see Fraser, R. *Blood of Spain*, 255-271.
127 Thomas, H. *The Spanish Civil War*, 459.
128 Ibid., 465f.
129 Fraser, R. *Blood of Spain*, 263. As always there were exceptions to the rule, as related by Federico Bonet, who claimed to have been more scared of the undisciplined Italian brigaders he fought next to than the enemy. CDMH (Salamanca) Fuentes_Orales-Mexico, no 15, 73.
130 Thomas, H. *The Spanish Civil War*, 465.

Europe and beyond, and were not 'Russian' in any sense, significant Russian aid had, as mentioned, arrived shortly before the attack on Madrid, not least in the form of tanks and planes. Tanks were critical in combat against the rebels' Italian counterparts, while air support offered some protection from the German and Italian bombers. Whenever Russian *chatos* managed to take down an enemy plane, the civilian population would respond with loud cheers.[131]

Throughout the first week Republican and international troops succeeded in halting Franco's push on the capital. It was an achievement which demanded considerable sacrifice and bravery – as Renau had had a chance to observe first-hand near his lodgings on the Calle del Sacramento, a short walk from the Royal Palace – and soon new war heroes emerged within Republican ranks.[132] One of these was Antonio Coll, a naval orderly and communist youth member from Mallorca, who had been seen destroying two enemy tanks in the suburb of Usera by throwing himself to the ground and waiting for the vehicles to nearly run him over before throwing his grenades. It had been like a scene taken straight from 'We are from Kronstadt', where a Russian soldier had performed exactly the same feat.[133]

While Coll died shortly afterwards, his example was celebrated across Republican media.[134] Huge posters called on others to imitate the brave sailor.[135] He had proved that enemy tanks were not 'invincible juggernauts',[136] and news spread of how other soldiers did indeed follow in his footsteps. Renau later recalled a peasant from La Mancha, a 'real brute' called Carrasco, who allegedly single-handedly destroyed six tanks by a similar technique.[137] But the method also continued to claim new Republican victims. In another unit in Usera, party member Mariano Moya saw a young fighter lose both hand and eye as he tried to repeat his compatriot's heroic deed.[138] Such incidents did not, of course, halt efforts to make propagandistic use of these courageous displays. 'Anti-tank specialists' were invited to speak at public rallies, even interviewed by

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131 Fraser, R. *Blood of Spain*, 262. Bonet also emphasised importance of Russian planes, at least to the morale of the population. CDMH (Salamanca) Fuentes_Orales-Mexico, no 15, 81.

132 For Renau's address in Madrid, see Gómez Andrés, A. & Pérez i Moragón, F. (Eds.) *Emili Gómez Nadal*, 397. For Renau's brief witness account of the fighting on the Cuesta de San Vicente, see Julián González, I. *El Cartel Republicano*, 89.

133 Ibid., 268.

134 See, for example, *Mundo Obrero* 10 November 1936, *ABC* 14 November 1936, and *Mundo Gráfico* 18 November 1936.

135 See photo in AGA (Madrid) 33,F,04042,53543,001.

136 Fraser, R. *Blood of Spain*, 262.

137 Renau, J. *La batalla per una nova cultura*, 144. See also interview with Facundo Tomas Ferré in *Los Carteles Valencianos*, 108.

138 AHPCE (Madrid) 'Tesis, memorias, manuscritos' 44/8.

foreign journalists, and 'We are from Kronstadt' was shown with increasing frequency in and around Madrid in November and December.[139]

Eventually, on 23 November, the attack on Madrid was called off, though crucial battles in its vicinity continued as the rebels sought to cut off supply lines and complete their siege of the capital. Bloody hand-to-hand fighting had taken many lives in the University City, where rebels had managed to break though on 15 November.[140] From that day the rebels had also intensified aerial bombardment, giving substance to Franco's remark that he would rather destroy the capital than leave it to the 'Marxists.'[141] But the bombing had only reinforced the population's resolve to resist, and the front lines established towards the end of November would remain unchanged for the remaining 28 months of the war.[142]

The refusal to surrender to Franco's troops turned Madrid as a whole into a symbol of Republican heroism. From November onwards, artists and writers paid constant homage to the city and its inhabitants, hoping to inspire in the population of other Republican cities the same fortitude that the defenders of Petrograd inspired in Coll and his likes.[143] General Miaja was lauded as the saviour of the capital, despite the fact that his limitations as a military strategist and technician had by and large made him a figurehead for the defence committee.[144] But in this context, discrepancies between myth and reality mattered little. In a sense they echoed the fact that 'We are from Kronstadt,' a film which *Mundo Obrero* had insisted was historically accurate, included scenes that the director, Efim Dzigan, later admitted were 'poetic inventions', introduced to underscore metaphorically the spirit that characterised the defence of the Russian city.[145] One of these scenes was precisely that of a sailor allowing a tank to almost run him over before destroying it with a hand-grenade.[146] What mattered, in other words, was that 'poetic invention' could be – and had been – converted into action. It demonstrated that propaganda could reach its audience and make a decisive difference. Indeed, not only Coll and his followers but the whole of Madrid had amassed the very

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139 Fraser, R. *Blood of Spain*, 267f. Graham, H. *The Spanish Republic at War*, 174.
140 Ibid., 267.
141 Thomas, H. *The Spanish Civil War*, 471.
142 Fraser, R. *Blood of Spain*, 269, 271.
143 Apart from posters and other graphic propaganda there was the cultural magazine *Madrid*, appearing in spring 1937 and produced in part by the Ministry of Public Instruction and Fine Arts, as well as an art album of the same name, appearing at the same time and financed by the same ministry.
144 Graham, H. *The Spanish Republic at War*, 171.
145 *Mundo Obrero* 19 October 1936. Claim from film director in Renau, J. *La batalla per una nova cultura*, 143.
146 Renau, J. *La batalla per una nova cultura*, 143.

spirit of resistance which mobilisation campaigns had sought to inculcate.

A number of contemporary observers wrote about propaganda as if its positive impact on mobilisation efforts could be taken for granted. As Republican society was gradually put on a war footing, numerous articles were published describing art studios as 'trenches' where artists worked tirelessly to boost Republican morale and war readiness.[147] Some poster designers felt their labours constituted a direct war contribution. When Lorenzo Goñi, for example, had finished his classic poster showing a dying soldier pointing an accusing finger straight at the viewer, asking 'What have you done for victory?', Carles Fontseré, who shared studio with Goñi, heard the artist proudly answer his own creation, 'Well, I've done this!'[148] Comparable views on the efficacy of posters were expressed in the political press, with *El Socialista* stating on 29 October that 'the psychological value of [posters], when intelligently executed, is considerable'. In effect, these combatants of 'paper and ink' shaped, the editors claimed, those of 'flesh and bone.'[149] The Valencian poet Carles Salvador similarly wrote of the 'silent battle of lithographic sheets /, which provides a mirror image for the young / and turns them into brave soldiers.'[150] What these statements all point to, in other words, is a belief in the power of images to visualise certain values and communicate a heroic ideal to young inexperienced men going to the front. In an affirmation of mimesis and the instructive capability of art, they posited a link between the studio and the field of battle, making the pen and brush tools of war, guiding the bayonet and rifle.

Although this model of aesthetic efficacy seems simplistic, at least in the short formulations above, we have seen from the mobilisation campaigns of autumn 1936 that art can be used as a tool to direct action, especially when conditions *demand* action and there are no precedents from lived experience to follow. It should come as no surprise that the clearest example of this would relate to the most realistic of art forms; that is,

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147 See, for example, Otero Seco, A. 'Madrid. El Sindicato de Profesionales de la Bellas Artes, trinchera antifascista' *Mundo Gráfico* 13 October 1937, and Valle, N. 'Los artistas españoles en la defensa de Madrid' *Estampa* 26 December 1936. Both reproduced in Gamonal Torres, M. *Arte y Política*, 104-107, 111f. Cf. the fact that staff at the General Commissariat tended to refer to artists and writers who collaborated with this organisation as 'The Talent Battalion'. Álvarez, Santiago. *Los comisarios políticos*, 132f.

148 Termes, J., Miravitlles, J., Fontseré, C. *Carteles de la República*, 361. See also letter to Imnaculada Julián where Goñi emphasises how poster artists really felt they were making a valuable contribution to the war effort. Julián González, I. *El Cartel Republicano*, 195f. The idea behind the particular design referred to here has of course appeared in various versions in different countries throughout the 20th century. Before the Spanish Civil War, there was a British version and Russian version, for example. In the letter cited above, however, Goñi maintains that he did not know about these and believed he had thought of something original.

149 'El de papel y tinta hace al de carne y hueso' *El Socialista* 29 October 1936, 1.

150 Cited in Blasco, R. 'Vida quotidiana' in Aznar Soler, M. (Ed.) *Valencia, capital cultural*, 735.

film. In a situation where individuals had little choice but to turn to external references for guidance, film represented a particularly powerful means to simulate a missing precedent and provide viewers with a comparative framework by which their own situation could be interpreted and understood. The importance of such a framework is underscored by the wider use in Republican war propaganda of historical parallels, be they the popular defeat of the invading French in 1808 or the 'heroic' defence of Petrograd in the Russian civil war. Claims to veracity were no doubt important, yet images could clearly access and modify behavioural registers regardless of their status as artefact or document, as long as audience members saw in their content an edifying dimension.

Yet the impact of an image or film would also have been determined by the viewer's pre-existing relation with the groups or symbols represented therein. In this regard it is suggestive that the first to imitate the purported actions of Kronstadt sailors were members of the PCE or its youth organisation, and in all cases linked to the Fifth Regiment.[151] Of course, political creed is not the only imaginable source of identification – Coll might primarily have seen the film's characters as fellow members of the navy, his followers might have primarily seen him as a fellow defender of Madrid, among any number of psychological possibilities – but it does seem the most plausible link, especially if we remember the tendency among PCE recruits to associate their political identity with courage, disciple, and self-sacrifice. At any rate, in the light of this, it seems reasonable to hypothesise that images purporting to represent an instructive precedent would only be effective if audience members could find something in these images that indicated the precedent's specific relevance to them. For propaganda to work, that is, there had to be a symbolic bond mediating the message, a bond allowing the message truly to engage the audience, and thus create the fundamental conditions for it to be assimilated and acted upon.

To conclude, then, we should return to the domain of posters and the rhetorical strategies employed by Renau as he visualised the war programme of the PCE. With regard to slogans concerned with the home front, this chapter has emphasised the ambiguity or openness of most visual symbols used by Renau. This ambiguity is significant as it allowed him to merge a revolutionary register with one equally compatible with moderate Popular Front politics. By so doing, Renau effectively and

[151] See Archivo Histórico del Partido Comunista de España, Colección Digital Complutense (CDC), Guerra Civil – Propaganda, no 41 (available at http://www.ucm.es/BUCM/atencion/17952.php). (Last accessed 12 April 2014).

faithfully illustrated the PCE ambition to control the threat posed by a decentralising and collectivising revolution by fusing its symbolic significance with war victory – even if this victory would result from a state-led campaign. If we also acknowledge the importance of the symbolic bond between image and audience, the logic of Renau's rhetorical strategy becomes even clearer. Considering the ambition to strengthen both party and war effort through mass-recruitment, it was crucial that symbols were open to different readings, as this would allow them to attract different groups of people. Theoretically, that is to say, this ambiguity would have helped to secure for Renau's posters a heterogeneous but still *attentive* audience, which as a result of that attention would be receptive to the message that his posters sought to propagate. Finally, as a result of another set of rhetorical overlaps, that message blurred the boundaries between party initiative and government policy, which served to present the PCE as the engine of military mobilisation as well as progressive change. Still, it is, of course, impossible to state with any precision exactly how the posters studied here may actually have influenced public attitudes regarding the PCE and/or the war, nor can they be shown definitely to have contributed to increasing membership figures. But the work considered in this chapter does provide an instructive example of how the PCE communicated its image as a revolutionary party supporting the Popular Front. At the very least we have seen how Renau's visual imagination represented a clear expression of the PCE's desire to appeal to a wide constituency and present an inclusive vision of the war. As the following chapter will show, however, from September 1936, the PCE's attempt to consolidate its war vision would rely not only on its own artists and propaganda teams, but also on the party's ability to direct to this end the organisational and financial resources of the Ministry of Public Instruction and Fine Arts. As General Director of Fine Arts within this Ministry, Renau played an important role here too, not only in the urgent tasks relating to the psychological and military conscription of the Republican population at war, but also in the long-term modifications of the Republican cultural programme.

7. RADICAL NATION-BUILDING: 'POPULAR CULTURE' IN WAR (1936-1938)

The PCE gained two ministerial portfolios as a result of the reconfiguration of the Republican government on 4 September 1936. The Ministry of Agriculture went to Vicente Uribe, a metal worker from Bilbao and core party member since the 1920s, while the Ministry of Public Instruction and Fine Arts would be led by Jesús Hernández, a work shop painter who had also been active in the Bilbao section of the PCE since its early days and had been responsible for party propaganda and *Mundo Obrero*. The inclusion of communists in the new cabinet, presided by veteran socialist union leader Francisco Largo Caballero, was not a political given – indeed, Stalin had opposed such a move for fear it would damage the Republic's chances of negotiating an end to Non-Intervention – yet for his own political-tactical reasons Largo had made his acceptance of the premiership conditional on it.[1] Still, the communist presence in government was consonant with the fundamental aim of the cabinet change, namely to restore working-class confidence in the Republican leadership, which had been fatally discredited by the weak governmental reaction to the military rebellion and its aftermath. Even though Largo was essentially a cautious union bureaucrat, he had retained a workerist aura that meant that many radicalised workers saw in him a guarantee of their interests in the new revolutionary situation.[2] The nomination of Jesús Hernández as Minister of Public Instruction and Fine Arts was similarly greeted as a political victory for revolutionary workers. In December 1936, the Valencian journalist and writer Vicente Vidal Corella described Hernández as a 'proletarian fighter' who would break 'the traditional barrier that hinders the development of culture […].'[3] As this description suggests, the nomination of Hernández was seen to represent not simply an adjustment of political strategy, but also, if not primarily, a qualitative shift in the Republican cultural agenda.

It was, in fact, in the fields of education and arts, more than any other, that the Republic would respond positively to the revolutionary events triggered by the coup. On the one hand such changes were, as suggested, necessary to mobilise and secure the

1 Graham, H. *The Spanish Republic at War,*132. See also Hernández Sánchez, F. *Guerra o Revolución*, 107-112, for a detailed analysis of the negotiations taking place between Moscow and the PCE leadership over this issue.

2 Ibid., 129, 132.

3 'La magnífica labor que realiza en Valencia la Alianza de Intelectuales para la Defensa de Cultura' *Crónica* 13 Dec 1936, 11f.

loyalty of activist working-class constituencies. On the other, the changes reflected the fact that cultural relations in Republican Spain had already been irrevocably altered. The coup, and the revolution it triggered, had shattered certainties, delegitimised authorities, and opened up hitherto unimagined social and cultural possibilities. The social and cultural fabric had been violently torn and much had to be remade entirely. In the wake of such disruption, operating on multiple levels, education and the arts would immediately exercise a critical influence. Hernández, advised by his team, saw this clearly, and accordingly restructured virtually all operations under their command. The cultural policy pursued as a result did not only respond to the specific challenges posed by the war, but also accelerated, as an intrinsic and crucial part of the mobilisation effort, the process whereby a new Republican society would take shape.

The core ministerial team assembled by Hernández was young, dynamic, and ambitious. All were members of the PCE. As his undersecretary, Hernández appointed Wenceslao Roces, a professor of Roman Law, translator of Marx and key figure in various cultural initiatives throughout the party's history.[4] Remarkably, Roces was the only team member – not excepting Hernández himself – who was over thirty years old.[5] The post of General Director of Primary Education was taken up by César García Lombardía, an activist of lower middle-class background who had risen in the Spanish Federation of Educational Workers (Federación Española de Trabajadores de Enseñaza, hereafter FETE) and become known for advocating a greater politicisation of education.[6] Finally, the role of General Director of Fine Arts, normally reserved for an art historian, was, as we know, assumed by the twenty-nine-years-old Josep Renau. Before outlining in greater detail the work done by Renau in this capacity, it should be stressed that the three departmental heads had all criticised earlier Republican reforms as insufficient. While faithful to the Communist Party's Popular Front commitment, they nonetheless shared an desire to transform the ministry into an efficient instrument of more extensive change. Spurred by this desire, all three worked with immense youthful energy. Indeed, while Hernández was an effective propagandist, it was, in the view of historian Christopher Cobb, the trinity under him that represented the real power of his

[4] See Gómez, M. *El largo viaje*.

[5] Roces was 40, Hernandez 29, Renau 29, and García Lombardía 27. The fact that relatively young people were put in positions of great responsibility was not unheard of in the war-time Republic. The Communist Youth leader Santiago Carrillo was only twenty-one when he was appointed Councillor of Public Order of the Madrid Defence Committee.

[6] See Cobb, C. *Los Milicianos*, 35f.

ministry.[7]

The official nomination of Renau as General Director of Fine Arts came five days after the formation of the new government.[8] According to his own account of the event, he received a call in the afternoon of 6 September, urging him to report to Party headquarters as soon as possible the next day. He took the night train and was received by a PCE commission led by Pedro Checa, administrative secretary of the Politburo, first thing in the morning. After a short conversation, Renau was prompted to accept the post there and then.[9] The fact that he did so must primarily be seen as a sign of his strong sense of loyalty to the party. Renau later wrote that he felt there were better qualified candidates than him, and that the offer came as a complete surprise. The poet Rafael Alberti, who was equally close to the party but arguably had a higher artistic profile, would have been a less surprising choice. According to Renau, Alberti himself later admitted he had expected the party to approach him first in this regard.[10] But above all it seems Renau was reluctant to accept a position involving extensive administrative duties when the war provided an unprecedented opportunity to develop the transformative potential of his art. His retrospective meditations suggested that for this reason alone he would never have accepted an official post that required all his time.[11] Whether there was an actual agreement to that effect is unclear, but Renau did manage to combine his official duties with creative work, as is evident from the fact that his artistic output – although much less prolific than at any other point in his career – never came to a complete halt during the war period. Antonio Deltoro, Renau's personal secretary at the General Directorate of Fine Arts, even claimed in a 1983 interview that whenever Renau received a couple of poster commissions, he could be absent from the office for days.[12] While Renau would later be immensely proud of what he and his colleagues achieved at the General Directorate, his own artistic project remained, in other words, his real passion. Renau's decision to compromise its development at a key moment can only be explained with reference to his commitment to the party.

Renau's main responsibilities as General Director of Fine Arts would revolve around the organisation of heritage conservation, a task immeasurably complicated both

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7 Ibid., 34. See also 'The educational and cultural policy of the Popular Front government in Spain, 1936-1939' in Alexander, M. and Graham, H. (Eds.) *The French and Spanish Popular Fronts.*

8 *Gaceta de Madrid* 10 September 1936, 1730.

9 Renau, J. *Arte en Peligro*, 12f.

10 Julián González, I. *El Cartel Republicano*, 189f.

11 Renau, J. *Arte en Peligro*, 12f.

12 Forment, A. *Josep Renau*, 164.

by the widespread vandalisation of religious institutions and the material damage caused by indiscriminate bombs and mortar shells.[13] Renau had already participated with a local Valencian committee for the protection of cultural treasures and was not unfamiliar with the difficulties that such work involved.[14] Yet there was another aspect to Renau's role, one which corresponded more closely with his background as a pioneering vanguard artist. Hernández knew that the first challenge of his ministerial incumbency would be to instil a heightened level of war consciousness across many parts of the home front, thereby persuading all sectors of the Republican population to accept a broad war coalition. To do this he had to channel ministry resources to maximise the impact of official propaganda. In an interview published on 12 September 1936, the new culture and education minister stressed the importance of the General Directorate of Fine Arts in this task and expressed his ambition to turn it into 'a centre marked by vitality and creativity.'[15] As an innovative propagandist with organisational skills and access to large cultural networks, Renau was no doubt a perfect candidate to implement this vision.[16] Under his direction, the General Directorate of Fine Arts, having previously been characterised as a rather insular institution exuding an 'archaeological air',[17] quickly began to engage actively with contemporary artists and underwrite activities that responded to the radically altered realities of the war.

Organisational strategies

One of the first major organisational changes made by Renau, in response to Hernández's desire to disseminate the slogans of the Popular Front, was to equip the Misiones Pedagógicas, the travelling educational groups created by the Republic in 1931 that were now part of his brief, with a 'Cultural Propaganda Section.' Created on 8

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[13] For a selected bibliography on this topic, see footnote 51 in the Introduction. For an in-depth analysis of the social and cultural motivations driving the vandalisation of Church property, see Thomas, M. *The Faith and the Fury.*

[14] Renau, J. *Arte en Peligro*, 13. Here we should also add his childhood experiences working for his father's restoration business. See Forment, A. *Josep Renau*, Chapter 1.

[15] 'Entrevista con Jesús Hernández' *Mundo Obrero* 12 September 1936. Reproduced in Gamonal Torres, M. *Arte y Política*, 65-67. See also interview in *ABC* (Madrid) 13 September 1936, 9.

[16] Renau's former colleagues at *Verdad* similarly understood his nomination as a harbinger of change. According to an editorial note published on 9 September 1936, Renau was not only the Spanish artist with the most complete set of intellectual abilities needed for the role, but also represented a 'solid guarantee' that Spanish cultural life would finally emerge from half a century of 'incompetence' and favouritism. The General Directorate would certainly change under Renau's stewardship, but it would still face, as we shall see, accusations of favouritism.

[17] An expression used by the artist Gabriel García Maroto who shortly before the war published various articles in the Socialist newspaper *Claridad* criticising the General Directorate for perceived inactivity (see especially 3 June 1936). Quoted in Cabañas Bravo, M. *Josep Renau: Arte y Propaganda en Guerra*, 40.

October 1936, its official aim was to 'organise, direct, and control all cultural and artistic activities aimed to strengthen the combative spirit of the people.'[18] Immediate results could be seen in the form of large publicity boards in Madrid, and a spectacular installation in Valencia that which functioned as a combined information point, theatre stage, and outdoor cinema screen.[19] The design, inspired by Russian constructivist artist El Lissitzky's 1920-24 project for a tribune to Lenin, was made by the Valencian artists Regino Mas and Gori Muñoz [Fig. 24].[20] These initiatives did not simply aim to communicate vital war information but also, according to the official justification for the measure, served to enhance 'the social consciousness that must inspire the Spanish people in this decisive battle.'[21] Like all cultural institutions inherited from the Republican reform programme, Misiones Pedagógicas now had to dedicate part of its resources to the vital task of psychologically mobilising the home front.

Further organisational reform of the General Directorate of Fine Arts would similarly be justified with reference to war needs and efficiency. To improve efficiency in particular, Renau instituted a number of changes through 1936 and 1937 that amounted to a *de facto* process of centralisation. These reforms were partly intended to repair the directorate's 'broken structures' – another consequence of the coup – but also meant to give Renau and his closest team greater oversight and control, especially important with regards to the task of safeguarding the national artistic heritage.[22] Thus a Central Council of Archives, Libraries, and Artistic Heritage was created on 16 February 1937,[23] while the summer months saw the establishment of a Central Council of Music (24 June)[24] and a Central Council of Theatre (22 August).[25] But if such initiatives appeared to give the Renau, as the President of all these bodies, overwhelming power in most areas of cultural management, it must be remembered that there were real limitations to the amount of control that could be exercised on the ground. New macro-structures represented only an initial step in the process of organisational reconstruction, and war-related disruptions relating to military activities

[18] Initiative signed 8 October 1936. Published in *Gaceta de Madrid* 11 October 1936, 295.
[19] Madrid boards can be seen in *Mundo Gráfico* 18 November 1936, 8f. A description of the Valencian installation can be found in Cabañas Bravo, M. *Josep Renau: Arte y Propaganda en Guerra*, 137, 141 (see also picture of Valencian installation on 133).
[20] Gamonal Torres, M. *Arte y Política*, 36.
[21] *Gaceta de Madrid* 11 October 1936, 295.
[22] The role of the Central Council of Archives, Libraries, and Artistic Heritage was explicitly to co-ordinate and provide instructions with regard to all activities falling under these headings in the Republican zone as a whole. See *Gaceta de Madrid* 17 February 1937, 847f, and 19 April 1937, 282.
[23] See note above.
[24] *Gaceta de Madrid* 25 June 1937, 1365.
[25] *Gaceta de Madrid* 24 August 1937, 769.

or missing staff often undermined attempts to direct details from the top, at least in the Republic-wide operation to protect artistic heritage.[26]

Yet if the contingencies of war thus meant that Renau would not always achieve the level of managerial control he desired in some areas, there were other areas where he willingly let initiatives take shape without much top-down direction. This was particularly evident in creative and propagandistic work, which was often delegated, in terms of elaboration as well as implementation, to external organisations like the Alliance of Anti-Fascist Intellectuals (AIA).[27] On several occasions ideas for propaganda events were first formulated by these organisations, who then turned to the General Directorate of Fine Arts for financial and logistical support. One example of this can be found in the concluding parade of what was known as the Children's Week (*Semana del Niño*) of January 1937, a Christmas-related festival highlighting Republican efforts to protect children. The event as a whole was organised by the Ministry of Public Instruction and Fine Arts together with the local AIA and Valencia's CNT-affiliated artists' union, the Sindicato de Arte Popular de Valencia, while the concluding parade incorporated ideas originating in Valencia's *Ateneo Popular.*[28] Another example, which left clearer traces of Renau's personal involvement, can found in the planned celebrations of the Valencian *Fallas* in 1937. An annual spring festival where one of the highlights involves the burning of large effigies, the *Fallas* of 1937 was set to include several rebel statues that would be consigned to the flames at the end of the festivities. Again the statues were constructed by members of the AIA and sponsored by the Hernández's ministry. In the end, as a result of the risk of rebel bombardment, and amidst considerable public debate, the celebrations were cancelled on the orders of the local civil governor, though the political caricatures were exhibited in an indoor space in the city centre (the *lonja*).[29] The public could also observe the works in a special edition of *Nueva Cultura* which included related essays, poems, and photographs taken by Renau.[30] Here, then, the influence of members of the AIA and

[26] Alvarez Lopera, J. *La politica de bienies culturales*, 75-83.

[27] José Alvarez Lopera states that the AIA was effectively a 'para-official' organisation.

[28] Cabañas Bravo, M. *Josep Renau: Arte y Propaganda en Guerra*, 138-142. The ministry also produced a propaganda leaflet entitled *Luchamos por una infancia feliz* (Barcelona: Sociedad General de Publicaciónes, [1937]).

[29] For an extensive analysis of the debate and events surrounding the Fallas of 1937, see Hernández i Marti, G-M. 'Les falles antifeixistes del 1937' in Aznar Soler, M. (ed) *Valencia, capital cultural de la República*, 283-313. For a contemporary comment with images, see Lamata, F. 'Este año no ha habido Fallas' *Mundo Gráfico* 28 April 1937, 7.

[30] Renau also published an article in the regular *Nueva Cultura* calling on the population of Valencia to realise the progressive political potential inherent in the city's traditional festivities – a potential augmented by the fact that its form was a genuine product of popular expression. See 'Sentido popular

similar organisations was crucial to both the form and reception of initiatives launched with ministerial support. To the extent that Renau exercised any direct control over the mounting of events, it was essentially as a prominent member of a creative partnership. When it came to smaller projects, Renau was even prepared to entrust colleagues outside of the ministry with all aspects of planning and execution. Rafael Pérez Contel noted in his memoirs that Renau gave him full responsibility for an art album that would be published in 1937 as an homage to General Miaja, proclaimed as the hero of the defence of Madrid. Pérez Contel's brief was simply to take charge of the whole design as well as the list of contributors and present the results to Renau when he was done.[31]

Such instances are worth highlighting since they show that the PCE-led Ministry of Public Instruction did not simply dictate the content of Republican cultural policy from above. Despite a party preference for hierarchical organisation, and despite its recognition of the vital importance of a unified Republican war vision, most cultural initiatives were actually the results of shared authorship. Total control of the cultural environment may not have been a party priority anyway – such a suggestion would explain the fact that no Comintern or Central Committee leaders, other than Hernández, ever interfered (as far as I am aware) with the planning of cultural events.[32] It must be noted, too, that as a Popular Front organisation, the PCE had little to lose from making broad progressive associations like the AIA part of a coalition shaping cultural policy. If anything, it boosted the PCE's own Popular Front credentials, which in turn may have aided party kudos and, indirectly, recruitment.

But if Hernández and his team did not, in other words, adhere to pre-scripted plans that were narrow and exclusive in a political sense, its *modus operandi*, as indicated in Renau's delegating of the homage to General Miaja, was undeniably based on personal contacts and favouritism. Indeed, without reference to contacts established prior to the war we cannot understand the extensive war-time collaboration between the

y Revolucionario de la Fiesta de las Fallas' *Nueva Cultura*, 1 (second phase) (March 1937), 14.

31 Pérez Contel, R. *Artistas en Valencia*, 573.

32 Of course, we have also seen from Renau's preparations for *Nueva Cultura* that the PCE leadership were neither very interested nor confident about their abilities when it came to cultural matters. As for the Comintern, it is also worth noting that there was a marked antipathy between Hernández and the highest representative of the Comintern in Spain, Palmiro Togliatti, who complained in a 25 November 1937 report to Moscow that the education and culture minister did not maintain sufficiently close work relations with other party colleagues. Hernández Sánchez, F. *Comunistas sin partido. Jesús Hernández. Ministro en la Guerra Civil, Disidente en el Exilio* (Madrid: Raíces, 2007), 56. None of the recent studies discussing the Comintern's influence in the Spanish Civil War has presented clear evidence of direct Comintern involvement in cultural matters. See Elorza, A. and Bizcarrondo, M. *Queridos Camaradas*, Radosh, R., Habeck, M. R. and Sevastianov, S. *Spain Betrayed: The Soviet Union in the Spanish Civil War* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), and Hernández Sánchez, F. *Guerra o Revolución*.

AIA and the Ministry of Public Instruction and Fine Arts. Most prominent AIA members in both Madrid and Valencia had been part of Renau's artistic network since 1933-1934, and many had contributed to political magazines like *Octubre* and *Nueva Cultura*. Moreover, during the time he spent as General Director of Fine Arts, Renau remained a prominent member of AIA's Valencian branch, which in March 1937 adopted a relaunched *Nueva Cultura* as its official publication.[33]

The problem here was that even if heavy reliance on personal connections was not in any way unusual in Spain's traditionally clientelistic public sphere, such organisational approaches nonetheless sparked accusations of sectarianism, both by contemporaries (above all among anarchists) and later by historians.[34] In this regard, however, distinctions must be made between the behaviour of different members of the ministry's leading team. On the few occasions when exclusions were clearly politically motivated, the initiative appears to have come from Jesús Hernández and/or Wenceslao Roces.[35] The most striking examples would be the rejection of Rafael Dieste's contribution to a publication devoted to the 1937 Congress of Writers for the Defence of Culture (more details on this congress follow below) and Roces's decision to annul the jury's choice in the National Poetry Prize of 1938 (awarding the prize to Pedro Garfías, who was a member of the Communist Party, unlike the originally designated winner, Juan Gil-Albert).[36] Renau, by contrast, let his favouritism be guided by professional and artistic ties – not, as a rule, by politics. Indeed, Renau was on the very jury that had awarded the National Poetry Prize to Juan Gil-Albert, a long-standing contributor to *Nueva Cultura*. This difference matters because it should make us question any suggestion that Renau blindly obeyed Moscow-imposed communist dogma and used his influence to make Republican artists conform to the dictates of socialist realism.[37]

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[33] According to Renau, the Valencian 'Alliance of Anti-Fascist Intellectuals' incorporated about 70% of the local intelligentsia. See Renau, J. 'Notas al margen de una nueva cultura por Josep Renau' in Brihuega, J. (Ed.) *Josep Renau*, 481. In Madrid the organisation's official publication was *El Mono Azul* and in Barcelona *Meridiá*.

[34] See Fernández Soria, J. M. *Educación y cultura*, 58. See also Alvarez Lopera, J. *La politica de bienies culturales*, 29.

[35] To some extent this will have been because both Hernández and Roces were part of the 'old guard' of the PCE and thus more marked by the PCE's sectarian history. It may also be said that Hernández had few other criteria to work with, as his cultural education, according to Alvarez Lopera, was a late and relatively superficial aquisition. *La politica de bienies culturales*, 29.

[36] Dieste, R. *Testimonios y homenajes* (Barcelona: Laia, 1983), 76-79. For Roces' intervention, see Zambrano, M. *Los intelectuales en el drama de España* (Madrid: Trotta, 1998), 51f.

[37] Gamonal Torres and above all Trapiello come close to this position. However, any assessment of debates must first of clarify what is understood by socialist realism. While this thesis has primarily defined that term with reference to epistemology and the relation between the artistic and the political vanguard, it is more commonly understood in terms of the aesthetic qualities seen in painting under Stalin. There the intention was to underscore the 'monumental' and heroic characteristics of socialist

Although Renau was an advocate of realist art, broadly understood, such homogenising impositions would first of all run counter to the collaborative approach he had adopted for his cultural projects throughout the Republican period. Moreover, any claim that he exclusively sponsored a single aesthetic also ignores the creative diversity on display in magazines and posters published with ministerial subsidy.[38] Art production addressing war themes was naturally the first to receive state backing, but how exactly these themes were to be interpreted was evidently a matter for each artist or group to decide.

But if Republican cultural production under Hernández thus remained in many ways pluralistic, selective ministerial support for certain cultural entities could not but have an impact on the political content of the Republican cultural environment. As organisations like the Alliance of Anti-Fascist Intellectuals were granted much greater visibility than groups lacking official support, it would be their particular war vision that would come to dominate the public sphere. This was clearly part of Hernández's propaganda strategy, as the slogans that consequently became ubiquitous were those that had been approved – though not necessarily scripted – by the ministry. Although the Ministry of Public Instruction was not the only official body to co-ordinate Republican propaganda (this task was shared not least with a propaganda ministry created on 4 November 1936, and led by progressive republican Carlos Esplá[39]), the disjointed campaigns seen in the immediate aftermath of the coup were in this way gradually replaced by a more coherent set of messages, stressing the legitimacy of the Popular Front government and highlighting the mass participative nature of the Republican war effort.

The expansion and radicalisation of the cultural programme

The idea that the Popular Front government represented an expression of the popular will was not only significant as part of a governmental bid to legitimise central authority and the new government, but also allowed members of progressive cultural organisations to suggest that the government now occupied the role of the vanguard in a

subjects, and would typically contain, to take the view of Clement Greenberg, a significant element of kitsch. See 'Avant-Garde and Kitsch' *Partisan Review*, 6, 5 (1939), 34-49. For a paradigmatic study of the place of socialist realism in 20th century art history, see Golomstok, I. N. *Totalitarian Art: In the Soviet Union, the Third Reich, Fascist Italy and the People's Republic of China* (London: Overlook Duckworth, 2011).

[38] This can be seen most clearly in the variety of posters published by the General Directorate of Fine Arts, and magazine produced by the Valencian Casa de la Cultura: *Madrid. Cuadernos de la Casa de la Cultura.*

[39] On 27 May 1937, the Ministry of Propaganda was restructured and became a Subsecretariat of Propaganda belonging to the Ministry of the Interior.

process of social and cultural change. Renau, previously so critical of Republican reform, made his own position in this regard clear in the first issue of *Música* (January 1938), the magazine produced by the new Central Council of Music. In a short text justifying the creation of the Council, he highlighted that while the Spanish state had previously constituted an dam-like obstruction to all that was alive and 'healthy' in cultural production, the new popular Republic had opened a 'flood of possibilities for all innovative currents' and 'all forms of creative will.'[40] Similar opinions were expressed elsewhere, indicating that even well into the war, after so much wartime destruction, cultural producers (like many revolutionary segments of the population) still emphasised the critical importance of the constructive, transformative content of anti-fascism.[41] Indeed, this aspect of the struggle had, if anything, only gained in significance. For if one of the consequences of the coup had been radically to destabilise existing cultural models, those pursuing progressive politics in its wake had no choice but to rebuild cultural relations anew. In this sense, Republican intellectuals' anti-fascism, as it evolved after the rising, may be compared to the most far-reaching European responses formulated after the Great War – responses including, for example, the foundational manifesto of Clarté. But, as in the case of Clarté, radical cultural visions in Republican Spain were not easily converted into practice, even when the instruments of the state were in progressive hands. As we shall see, the very wartime circumstances in which Republican cultural initiatives were launched also sometimes set acute limits on the possibilities for innovation, while, at the same time, reservations among progressive intellectuals – evident not least in their ambivalent attitude to a perceived popular will – left important problems of cultural innovation unresolved.

Before turning to a more extensive analysis of specific Republican cultural initiatives and debates domestically, we should also note how very important was the international dimension of culture to the defenders of the Republic.[42] The clearest expression of this could be seen in the Second International Congress of Writers for the Defence of Culture, which in a show of solidarity with the besieged Republic was held

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40 'Misión del Consejo Central de la Música' *Música*, 1 (January 1938), 5.

41 See, for example, Vicente Vidal Corella's aforementioned comments in 'La magnífica labor que realiza en Valencia la Alianza de Intelectuales para la Defensa de Cultura' *Crónica* 13 Dec 1936, 11f. See also the collective statement delivered at the July 1937 Writers' Congress for the Defence of Culture (see following paragraph for more detail). Reproduced in Gamonal Torres, M. *Arte y Política*, 232-240.

42 In this regard, in a addition to the conference mentioned here, see for example the fund raising leaflet written by Nancy Bedford-Jon es for an American audience. *Students under arms. Education in Republican Spain* (New York: Youth division of Medical and North American Committee to aid Spanish democracy, 1938).

in Valencia, Madrid, and Barcelona on 4-12 July (with closing sessions in Paris on 16-17 July) 1937.[43] The congress was organised by the Spanish and French branches of the Alliance of Anti-Fascist Intellectuals and received support from several ministries, among them the Ministry of Public Instruction and Fine Arts.[44] It attracted writers and artists of a variety of political persuasions. Their common denominator was a conviction that fascism represented a mortal threat to pluralism and humanist values – here taken to stem from an overriding concern with human welfare and fulfilment – and that the Spanish war had to represent the first step towards the definitive defeat of fascism everywhere. With this in mind, the 66 speakers from 22 countries repeatedly highlighted the universal significance of the Republican cause, while the Spanish delegation (from which Renau was absent, as he was abroad on official duties[45]) proclaimed in a collective statement their absolute loyalty to both revolution and government – a political entity which had by then, as they expressed it, become 'something much more important than a government.'[46] Such sentiments identified the Republic as a leading force in a transcendental project for cultural renewal, a project that would not only redeem the traumatic sacrifices made in Spain, but inspire cultural transformations across the rest of the continent too.[47] From this perspective, the telegram sent to the congress by Albert Einstein struck a (melo)dramatic but characteristic note: hope in 'better times,' it stated, was for the moment kept alive only 'by the heroic fighting of the Spanish people for freedom and human dignity.'[48]

Crucial to the realisation of such lofty sentiments was the practical dimension of

[43] The main works on the congress are by Luis Mario Schneider, *Inteligencia y guerra civil española*, and Manuel Aznar Soler *Literatura española y antifascismo (1927-1939)*. These books constitute the first two of three volumes in a collective work entitled *II congreso internacional de escritores para la defensa de la cultura (1937)* (Valencia: Generalitat Valenciana, 1987). The third volume is a documentary compilation with speeches delivered during the conference.

[44] See Schneider, L. M. *Inteligencia y guerra civil española* and Aznar Soler, M. *Literatura española y antifascismo*, chapter 5. For a contemporary comment on the somewhat chaotic organisation of the congress, see Koltsov, M. *Diario de la guerra de España* (Madrid: Ruedo Ibérico, 1963), 429. For the view of one of the organisers, see Gil-Albert, J. *Memorabilia*, 176-182.

[45] At this time Renau was working on the Republican Pavilion at the International Paris Expo, which will be discussed later on in this chapter.

[46] Reproduction in Gamonal Torres, M. *Arte y Política*, 232-240. According to the introduction by Gamonal (page 58) the statement was signed by Arturo Serrano Plaja (who also read it on behalf of the group), Antonio Sánchez Barbudo, Angel Gaos, Antonio Aparicio, Arturo Souto, Emilio Prados, Eduardo Vicente, Juan Gil-Albert, José Herrera Petere, Lorenzo Varela, Miguel Hernández, Miguel Prieto, and Ramón Gaya.

[47] Galician vanguard writer Rafael Dieste, close colleague of many of the signatories of the collective statement and collaborator on one of the most important Republican cultural magazines during the war, *Hora de España*, would later describe how the progressive Republican intellectuals of the 1930s had a strong sense of rediscovering a transcendental value of Spanish culture. Dieste, R. *Testimonios y homenajes*, 18f.

[48] Cited in Vicente Aguilera Cerni's introduction to Renau, J. *Función Social del Cartel Publicitario* (Valencia, Fernando Torres, 1976), 16.

Republican cultural policy, and progressive artists and writers were certainly justified in highlighting that as a primary indicator of the wartime Republic's serious progressive intent. The cultural reform programme begun during the pre-war period of progressive republican government (1931-33) was not only resumed in wartime as soon as administrative structures could be set up, but was actually expanded within the first year of the conflict. This was made possible, firstly, by the record 1937 budget allocated to the Ministry of Public Instruction and Fine Arts. Not only was it a bigger than ever amount but it also constituted a significantly larger proportion of the overall state budget compared to the previous year.[49] That the Republic should significantly increase its spending on education and culture as a proportion of its total budget, even when it urgently needed to direct scarce funds to its military defence, is itself a powerful indicator of just how vital the Republican authorities considered the cultural dimension of the mobilisation effort, both in the immediate and the long term. Measures announcing progressive change were understood as crucial to boost civilian morale, while educational initiatives would further serve to promote a cohesive understanding of the conflict. In addition to signalling a commitment to a more egalitarian Spain, in itself important to shore up government legitimacy, the cultural programme offered a direct means of expanding its loyal base among wider segments of the Republican population.

In order to produce tangible returns on the budget allocated, culture minister Hernández and his team channelled the funds towards constructive and practical projects.[50] They directed 40 million pesetas towards the building of 10,000 new schools. Around 7 million was spent on canteens and evacuation colonies. This was another investment of combined humanitarian and military value, as the parents of evacuated children would thus be free to engage in war-related work. The minimum wage for teachers were raised, and the number of university grants increased from 1 to 5 million.[51] The budget also made possible the implementation of a series of new initiatives that showed with particular clarity how the immediate circumstances of the war, as well as ideological orientation of the ministerial team, would influence the content of the cultural programme in the long term. The most prominent among these

[49] The exact budget allocation was 496,6 million pesetas – 9.4% percent of the total – which can be compared with the previous year's allocation of 353,6 million pesetas (7.1%). The budget allocated to the Ministry of Public Instruction in 1938 was in fact even larger, both in terms of absolute figures and its relative size within the total state budget (562,5 million, 10.4%). In 1939 the relative size dropped markedly (7.6%). See Sánchez Asiaín, J. A. *La financiación de la guerra civil española. Una aproximación histórica* (Barcelona: Crítica, 2012).

[50] Less money was spent on perquisites for ministerial staff, for example. Cobb, C. *Los Milicianos*, 41.

[51] Alvarez Lopera, J. *La politica de bienies culturales*, 31f.

were the Worker Institutes (Institutos Obreros) and the Cultural Militias (Milicias de la Cultura).

The Worker Institutes were intended to facilitate access to further education for young people of working class background while also equipping the army with more recruits capable of receiving higher military training.[52] Enrolment was first opened to those aged 15-18 , then, from 28 June 1937, to those aged 15-35, entry being geared to a two-year secondary education diploma. The institutes were free, with grants also made available for those with dependants, especially if study entailed a loss of income. The first and biggest institute opened its doors in Valencia on 31 January 1937, with other schools following in Sabadell, Madrid, and Barcelona.[53] At the end of the war an estimated 873 students had been inducted to classes, some of which were delivered by visiting political, military, and literary dignitaries, as well as teachers of recognised professional distinction.[54] Insofar as the Institutes were intended to secure the loyalty of those who attended, the initiative achieved evident success.[55] In later interviews, former students of the Valencian worker institute remembered both their happy anticipation of a new education and their disappointment, sadness and frustration at realising that the defeat of the Republic also meant they would not have the time or opportunity to complete their studies.[56]

The Cultural Militias, established by decree on 30 January 1937, can be seen as a militarised version of the Misiones Pedagógicas, although they also drew on educational initiatives developed in the Red Army.[57] The militias offered literacy and other classes to soldiers stationed at the front. Its staff, mostly recruited from university students but also including some qualified teachers and various other professionals, was

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[52] For a monograph drawing on interviews with former students as well as archival research, see Escrivá Moscardó, C. *Los institutos para obreros: un hermoso sueño republicano* (Valencia: L'Eixam, 2008). See also Fernández Soria, J. M. *Educación y cultura.*

[53] Foundational decrees dated 10 March 1937 for Sabadell and 11 May 1937 for Madrid and Barcelona. For a more detailed chronology of the beginning and end of courses at the Worker Institutes, see Escrivá Moscardó, C. *Los institutos para obreros*, 15-23.

[54] Among those visiting were the socialist minister Indalecio Prieto, the renowned poet Antonio Machado, and the military commander Valentín Gonzaléz ('El Campesino').

[55] Azaña explicitly spoke of the Worker Institutes as a means of securing the loyalty of working class youth. Escrivá Moscardó, C. *Los institutos para obreros*, 26.

[56] See former students' one-sentence descriptions of their experiences at the Valencian Worker Institiute, printed on the inside of Cristina Escrivá's *Los institutos para obreros.* Typical assessments and/or recollections included: 'Espíritu de superación que nos inculcaron me ayudo en mi vida,' and 'Soñabamos con abrir nuestras fronteras a la cultura.' Cf. Bedford-Jones, N. *Students under arms*, 24.

[57] The teachers' union, FETE, had already laid the ground work for the Cultural Militias before January 1937. They were established by ministerial decree which also underwrote their efforts with a generous budget. Even so, the real 'take-off' came in May. See Cobb, C. *Los Milicianos*, especially chapter 4.

assigned to specific military units where they shared with the soldiers the privations and routines of front-line life. This helped not only to establish a rapport between teachers and students, but also meant that the Cultural Militias were *in situ* and thus able to maximise use of the soldiers' free time when they were not required for military tasks. This in turn contributed a great deal, along with the enthusiasm of the teachers and the high value placed on culture within the Republican army, to the initiative's tangible success. For the results were impressive – especially considering the organisational and material obstacles, not to mention the constant relocations caused by military deployments, which the teachers had to negotiate.[58] Between May 1937 and October 1938 about 25,000 soldiers achieved some degree of literacy in the Army of the Centre alone.[59] In a similar period, the Cultural Militias had also organised, in the Republican Army as a whole, hundreds of cinema screenings, radio broadcasts, and trench newspapers, as well as 1,418 functioning front-line libraries to support soldiers' continued learning.[60] Such figures include only part of their activities, yet in themselves they suggest that the Cultural Militias achieved a greater reach than any other single initiative in terms of expanding adult education. More than any other piece of reform, this initiative justified writer Maria Teresa León's later claim that during the war, Republican Spain was, in effect, turned into 'one immense school.'[61]

The educational opportunities provided by the Cultural Militias were, by numerous accounts, gratefully received by those who had previously been denied any realistic chance to study. Teachers' and observers' descriptions of front-line classes, while obviously biased to some degree, repeatedly stressed how illiterate soldiers applied themselves diligently to the task of learning the alphabet, and how already literate soldiers devoured all the books available in trench 'libraries.'[62] As with the students attending the Worker Institutes, many soldiers saw the classes provided by the Culture Militias as proof of the Republic's progressive intentions, and many recognised the initiative's empowering potential.[63] Isidro Martínez, a 42-years-old agricultural

[58] For a more extensive evaluation of the factors that helped or hindered the militias' work, see Cobb, C. *Los Milicianos*, 109f, 169f.

[59] Cobb, C. *Los Milicianos*, 108f. An impressive statistic, however one defines literacy, although this is of course a complicated question. For a discussion, see Cobb's discussion on page 94.

[60] The period referred to here is May 1937-August 1938. Fernández Soria, J. M. *Educación y cultura*, 57f. Figures also appear in Salaün, S. *La poesía de la guerra de España* (Madrid: Castalia, 1985), 274.

[61] León, M. T. *La Historia Tiene la Palabra (Noticias Sobre el Salvamiento del Tesoro Artístico)*(2nd Ed.) (Madrid: Hispamerica, 1977 [1944]), 30.

[62] See for example Fraser, R. *Blood of Spain*, 292. See also the war diaries of composer and writer Vicente Salas Viu *Diario de guerra de un soldado* (Madrid: Hispamerica, 1977), 29f, 38f, 78. Cf. Bedford-Jones, N. *Students under arms*, 13-16.

[63] For particularly clear examples, see Salas Viu, V. *Diario de guerra*, 29f, 38f. See also articles

worker serving in the same unit as composer and writer Vicente Salas Viu, had told Salas Viu, according the writer's diary entry for 25 November 1937, that he had always known he could have aspired to more in life, but that he had hitherto been lacking the means. Now, he said, as a result of the Republican Army's educational provision, he had the means and only asked for more time.[64]

Primary education for both adults and children would not only change quantitatively, but also qualitatively. First of all, education, especially in the form delivered by the Cultural Militias, was geared towards the immediate task of legitimising the war effort, which in turn led to increased politicisation. This tendency was accentuated by the fact that the Militias operated under the direct authority of the political commissar, whose task was, in part, to remind the troops of the rationale of the war and thus maintain morale.[65] The politicised nature of primary education, especially in the army, was also evident in the teaching materials distributed by the Ministry of Public Instruction and Fine Arts. Significant ministerial investment – 100,000 pesetas, which may be compared to the 121,000 pesetas spent on school equipment – was reserved in the ministerial budget for 'press and propaganda.'[66] The most notable item used in this regard, designed specifically for the Cultural Militias, was a Republican 'anti-fascist' literacy primer, the *Cartilla Escolar Antifascista*. Written by Fernando Sainz and *Mundo Obrero* editor Eusebio Cimorra, and lavishly designed, with some assistance from Renau, by Polish-born graphic designer Mauricio Amster, the primer was produced in two slightly different editions with estimated print runs ranging between 70,000 and 150,000 copies.[67] Using the primer, soldiers would learn the construction of phrases by breaking down a given sentence into words, syllables and letters, which could then be used to assemble other appropriate sentences on the same

published in the front-line press, reproduced in Fernández Soria, J. M. and Mayordomo, A. *Educación, Guerra y Revolución. Valencia, 1936-1939* (Valencia: PUV, 2007), 165, 169.

64 Salas Viu, V. *Diario de guerra*, 78.

65 Still, the principal priorities of these two (i.e. commissar and teacher) diverged, which sometimes caused noticeable tensions. See Cobb, C. *Los Milicianos*, 111-125.

66 Ibid., 56.

67 The authors are indicated in Cobb, C. 'The educational and cultural policy of the Popular Front government in Spain, 1936-1939' in Alexander, M. and Graham, H. (Eds.) *The French and Spanish Popular Fronts*, 251. The lower of the estimated print-run figures comes from Santiago Álvarez (*Los comisarios políticos*, 147), the higher from Rafael Pérez Contel (*Artistas en Valencia*, 594). In addition to minor visual alterations, the most important difference between the two editions was that the second edition substituted a montage centred on the founder of the Spanish Socialist Party, Pablo Iglesias, for the earlier one focusing on Largo Caballero, who at that point had been forced to step down as Prime Minister. Although I have not been able to find exact publishing dates, this change, and the fact that the first edition contains images from the preparations of the 1937 *Fallas*, indicate that the first edition must have been produced sometime between late March and early May, and the second sometime after the government change of 17 May 1937.

theme. The sentences provided by the reader also communicated important war-related messages: for example, 'Obedience to the legitimate government', 'War of national independence', and 'Produce more and better on the home front', are a few of the slogans given as the instructional starter phrases. Others related to political leaders and included a homage to the anarchist Buenaventura Durruti, (now transmuted and incarnated as a Republican war hero) and another to the founding father of Spanish socialism, Pablo Iglesias; yet another was for 'Lenin, our great teacher.'[68] In this relatively ecumenical way, the composers of the primer sought to consolidate a new national political imaginary as the same time as strengthening army discipline. The primer also reminded soldiers why wartime sacrifices were ultimately worthwhile: 'We are fighting for our culture', stated one spread, while the final image was accompanied by the sentence 'A happy and prosperous Spain.' As a publication serving both as a propaganda medium and a learning and teaching aid, the 'anti-fascist' primer stands as a major example demonstrating how the imperatives of Republican war mobilisation shaped initiatives that were also key components of the Republic's vision for a post-war future.

As the final image in the primer indicates, war-time education was not only about maintaining front-line morale, or even offering a means of individual empowerment, but also about reviving a more ambitious Republican nation-building project. This aspect of the cultural programme was seen as intrinsically linked to literacy teaching, especially where political ignorance was deemed part of the very definition of illiteracy itself. Hence the magazine *Cultura Popular* stated in June 1937:

> To raise the cultural level of the soldier is to strengthen his political consciousness. It is obvious that our army has to be composed of men conscious of an ideal, for which they are prepared to die. Down with illiteracy! Bear in mind that illiteracy does not simply mean the inability to read or write, but rather a lack of clear concepts and indifference to the great moral and social conflicts facing us.[69]

In addition to the inclusion of political and military slogans in the 'anti-fascist' primer, the importance that militia teachers and the education ministry accorded broad political instruction was furthermore evident in the teaching of geography and history, which was to include comparative historical studies of revolutionary societies like Mexico and the

[68] These examples are taken from the second edition.

[69] *Cultura Popular*, 2 (June 1937). The translation is taken from Cobb, C. 'The educational and cultural policy', 247.

USSR.[70] The ambition to forge a new Republican nation, based on progressive values and a commitment to social justice, became particularly clear in this connection. Yet what such teaching also demonstrates is how, under the leadership of Hernández's ministerial team, the curriculum as a whole adopted a distinctive tone – one that had emerged from the new radical discourses shaping wartime Republican politics. But it did so, crucially, in ways that ensured that the political content of the teaching remained compatible with general Popular Front policy. The inclusive strategy bespoke once again the central role occupied by the cultural programme in a broad Republican mobilisation effort.[71]

The politics of cultural heritage

The cultural programme's shift in tone did not only affect educational material but also articulations of the relationship between the 'people' and Spain's cultural heritage. Instead of 'high' culture made available to the 'popular' classes, all cultural treasures were now to be regarded as part of an undivided popular legacy. This view was accepted and often propagated by the progressive cultural establishment, which in many cases had arrived at this way of thinking prior to the war anyway. The 'people' had long been identified as a source of authentic cultural value, not least among Romantics and prominent representatives of the Generation of '98 (especially Miguel de Unamuno). Moreover, those known as the Generation of '27, and above all the influential poet and playwright Federico García Lorca, had often appropriated popular art forms for their own creative and experimental purposes.[72] As we have seen, from 1931, the same writers wholeheartedly supported Republican attempts to disseminate, through initiatives like the Misiones Pedagógicas, the resulting fruits among the 'people' that had provided their inspiration. Left-wing critics like Renau similarly conceived of a future Spanish culture as one with clear popular – if not necessarily traditional folkloric – roots. 'Culture' was thus typically regarded within progressive intellectual circles as inextricably tied to the 'people.' It was only logical, then, when the Republican cultural programme had to respond to the political disruptions of the war period, that official

[70] Cobb, C. *Los Milicianos*, 117. Cf. Fraser, R. *Blood of Spain*, 292.

[71] See also the assessment of Cobb, who states that there were few accusations of sectarianism in relation to the political content of teaching materials, since these drew on values and objectives that were common to all Popular Front parties. Cobb, C. *Los Milicianos*, 133.

[72] For an analysis of the role of the 'people' in Spanish cultural production, see Sinclair, A. 'Elitism and the cult of the popular in Spain' in Timms, E. and Collier, P. *Visions and Blueprints: Avant-garde culture and radical politics in early twentieth-century Europe* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), 221-235.

proclamations influenced by the progressive cultural elite should go beyond the ambition of making cultural treasures accessible to the 'people' to declare that these treasures in fact belonged to the 'people' as an inalienable right.[73] Still, in order to convert cultural reforms into political capital, ministerial policy in this regard had to be presented as a extraordinary transfer of cultural ownership, initiated and overseen by the progressive Republican state.

Particularly important in bolstering, or indeed spinning, this interpretation was Josep Renau's work, part of his brief as General Director of Fine Arts, to protect national artistic treasures. Expropriations in the initial revolutionary period of the war had already given the 'people' *de facto* control over many valuable cultural artefacts. This included scores of religious objects, some of which were threatened with destruction as a result of accumulated anti-clerical hatred. Other art works risked damage from ignorance or neglect, or loss to the black market.[74] So apart from protecting artistic heritage from actual war damage, the General Directorate of Fine Arts (hereafter GDFA) and collaborating organisations – above all the Alliance of Anti-Fascist Intellectuals, whose members had been the first to engage with the issue – had to use a variety of strategies to prevent further deterioration at the hands of the popular militias. To begin with, there was a publicity campaign in which the national heritage was presented as a part of working-class history. 'Workers of today: respect the labour of our companions of yesterday,' proclaimed a characteristic GDFA poster, showing an image of ornamental details above a church door. Where persuasion failed, a combination of juridical and police/military force (at first often involving the Fifth Regiment) was deployed to enable the authorities to confiscate valuable objects at risk. Still the conservation task was difficult, as for many in the militia the acquisition of valuable objects did not only mean potential income, but also the symbolic conquest of luxury (whether objects or properties) and as such constituted tangible proof of the revolution's success.[75] Thus the government had to persuade the militias that

[73] See the speech delivered by Jesús Hernández at the inaugural ceremony of the first Worker Institute, 31 January 1937. Entitled 'La Cultura para el Pueblo', it is reproduced in the party publication *El Partido Comunista por la libertad y la independencia de España (Llamamientos y discursos)* (Valencia: Ediciones del P.C. de E., 1937), 131-152. For a comparable view, see Maria Teresa León's reflection that the hoarding of valuable art treasures in private collections may one day be considered a 'social crime'. León, M. T. *La Historia Tiene la Palabra*, 45.

[74] See Alvarez Lopera, J. *La politica de bienies culturales*, especially chapters 1.2 and 1.9. See also the literature listed in footnote 51 in this Introduction.

[75] Ibid., chapters 1.2 and 1.9. See also description of the excitement with which artists of the Catalan *Sindicat de Dibuixants Professionals* rummaged through content of the aristocratic palace they had confiscated after the July 1936 coup. Termes, Josep, Miravitlles, Jaume, Fontseré, Carles. *Carteles de la República*, 355.

relinquishing part of their material conquests did not signify a rolling back of revolutionary power, but rather its consolidation by the new representative government. The state had to be presented as the legitimate custodian of a heritage ultimately owned by the polity it served.

A practical expression of this idea can be found in the arts exhibition held in Valencia, in a former Roman Catholic seminary, the Colegio del Patriarca, towards the end of December 1936. Made up of works taken from the Duke of Alba's Madrid residence, which, like the Prado Museum, had been emptied of its most valuable objects to protect them from rebel bombs, the exhibition sought to demonstrate how the cultural treasures previously in the hands of the privileged few were now available to the public.[76] The proposal to turn the evacuated works into an exhibition was Renau's own, in his official capacity.[77] But it also had earlier precedents in Madrid, where communist militia occupying the Duke of Alba's residence in the immediate aftermath of the coup had spontaneously transformed this into a 'Museum of Capitalism' which they opened to the public.[78] Co-opting this idea officially, Hernández and Renau also took the opportunity to turn the inaugural ceremony for the Valencia exhibition into a public relations coup for the PCE, where the Republic's achievements blended yet again with self-praise of the party and attempts to highlight, as especially revolutionary, the credentials of the Ministry of Public Instruction and Fine Arts. In the presence of an international delegation, speeches praised the Madrid militia men's respect for art and the Fifth Regiment's efforts in bringing the collection to a relatively safe home in Valencia.[79] At the centre of the seminary's inner courtyard were positioned four blackboards, placed against each other at square angles, where visitors could read messages such as:

> *The Communist Party* gives to the people, through the *Ministry of Public Instruction*, the art treasure of the Duke of Alba, saved by our brave militia men from the fire and shrapnel unleashed on the people of *Madrid* by fascist barbarity (The Central Committee of the CP).[80]

This particular blurring of party and government activity may well have prompted a

[76] This was also readily understood by journalists reporting on the exhibition. See, for example, Vicente Vidal Corella's review in *Crónica* 3 January 1937, 12f.

[77] Cabañas Bravo, M. *Josep Renau*, 131-137.

[78] Koltsov, M. *Diario de la guerra de España*, 187. For a good analysis of the politics of the exhibitions in both Madrid and Valencia, see Basilio, M. M. *Visual Propaganda*, chapter 2.

[79] For a contemporary report on the proceedings, see *Verdad* 26 December 1936, 1f.

[80] Photographs of the inner yard in Cabañas Bravo, M. *Josep Renau*, 131.

cabinet order, signed nine days after the exhibition opening, which strictly prohibited the making of party propaganda through governmental bodies.[81] Beyond such conflicts, however, and regardless of the grandiloquent statements on display, the real public benefits of the exhibition must have been limited, as it was only open for three days (26-28 December).[82] This was, furthermore, one of the few examples (if not the only example) where confiscated art works were exhibited to the general public. Again, what it sought to demonstrate, over and above practice, was the principle that art would no longer be exclusive. Embracing this principle, the culture ministry had effectively set as its ultimate goal the redefining of all culture as popular culture.[83]

Encouraging popular cultural production

Realising the idea of a new and truly popular culture did not only involve facilitating access to existing cultural resources (that is, democratising the consumption of culture) but also encouraging popular cultural production itself. Indeed, herein lay the greatest difference between war-time policy and the progressive yet largely top-directed cultural initiatives of the pre-war years. As had been advocated by *Nueva Cultura* and various cultural critics from the revolutionary left before the war, people were now granted the means to participate actively in cultural activities and shape the outcome of these according to their own needs and disposition. While obviously important as a political principle, the recognition and cultivation of creative abilities where these had previously been neglected could also, on an individual level, be profoundly psychologically transformative in itself. If literacy programmes had opened up the horizon to some extent, reading and creative writing, regardless of proficiency, allowed students to explore further the intellectual possibilities this revealed and acquire new knowledge according to their own lights and capacity. Creative work of all types also opened doors to new interests and talents. In some cases, as witnessed by Vicente Salas Viu when meeting an ordinary soldier who felt that the war had revealed a true vocation in him as a poet, the discovery of new talent, of which this was but one example, could (and did) even prompt a new sense of self.[84] Far from being a matter of a superficial change of

[81] *Gaceta* 6 January 1937, 91.

[82] As in an advert on front page of *Verdad* 26 December 1936.

[83] See also the short propaganda leaflet *Protección del Tesoro Artístico Nacional* (Valencia: Ministerio de Instrucción Pública y Bellas Artes, 1937) which stated that artistic works produced by past generations had often been reserved for the (privileged) few but would now be 'of the people and for the people' (page 7).

[84] Salas Viu, V. *Diario de guerra*, 78.

subjective identity, such shifts in self-perception arguably represented an immediate form – in the strictest sense – of individual emancipation.

One of the most important examples of popular participation in cultural production can be found in the war ballad. In purely quantitative terms, the explosion of this form of amateur poetry dwarfed all other cultural phenomena during the war. The cultural historian Serge Salaün has counted between 15-20,000 individual compositions, of which roughly three quarters were written in the Republican zone. These belonged to around 5,000 different authors, whose work was published in approximately 75% of the military press and 50% of the magazines printed on the home front.[85] Some established literary magazines – the Alliance of Anti-Fascist Intellectuals' *El Mono Azul* being the most famous example – also published, if only for a time, amateur compositions next to work by recognised poets.[86] By so doing they clearly signalled the comparable if not equal importance of established and amateur writers in the elaboration of a new Spanish culture. Many progressive intellectuals saw the war ballad as a genuinely revolutionary form. Even though the war-ballad did not, as a rule, show any signs of formal experimentation – being essentially a re-invented medieval tradition – it could still be seen as revolutionary as a result of its sheer popularity (in both senses of the word). So even though this popularity was related to its deep traditional roots, recognisable structure, and often epic if not elegiac qualities, the form was deemed an instrument of change precisely because of the socio-cultural impact that its vast proliferation would consequently entail.[87] In order to build on this potential, the writing of ballads was strongly encouraged by the teachers of the Culture Militias, as well as the political commissars, who recognised in such initiatives a powerful means of boosting troop morale.

In terms of form and content, ballads thus offered perhaps the most accessible medium through which soldiers could participate actively in a collective effort to invest the war with meaning. It must be noted, however, that although poems were written by

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85 Figures cited in Fernández Soria, J. M. *Educación y cultura*, 144f. The key work on war-time poetry is Salaün, S. *La poesía.*

86 El Mono Azul seems only to have lasted until May 1937, when there was a break in the magazine's already irregular publishing pattern. When it returned, itfilled simply a page in the Madrid daily *La Voz*, which meant that it had been downsized considerably. As a result the content became more orientated towards politics. See Monleón, J. *"El Mono Azul" Teatro de urgencia y Romancero de la guerra civil* (Madrid: Ayuso, 1979), 19.

87 See, for example, Maria Teresa León's 'La cultura, patrimonio del pueblo' in León, M. T. (Ed.) *Crónica general de la guerra civil* (Sevilla: Renacimiento, 2007 [1937]), 90. See also *Verdad* 8 Septembre 1936, 1, where the student theatre company El Búho describes their work as 'classical' and 'popular' and therefore 'eminently revolutionary'.

men across the military hierarchy, the message they communicated did not necessarily depart from official rhetoric.[88] At one level, this is unsurprising. Dissidence in print was prevented by censorship, and the frontline atmosphere would no doubt have generated a degree of conformity regardless. Yet no one was forced write verses in aid of battle morale, so neither is there any reason to think that the words did not reflect genuine feelings. At any rate, the phenomenon of ballad writing would certainly have responded to a genuine need, as soldiers tried to make sense of their motives for fighting and psychologically survive the searing experience of industrialised warfare. This fact was clear also to Republican intellectuals, who generally supported attempts to stimulate amateur production. Moved by the verses sent to the editorial board of *El Mono Azul*, Maria Teresa León saw in them lyrical proof that 'the epic is reborn when heroes need songs.'[89]

Still, regardless of motivation, soldiers' own cultural work became an important factor reinforcing the dominant narrative of the war.[90] This was particularly clear in relation to another major form of popular self-expression: the wall-newspaper.[91] Building on precedents from the Soviet Union, but also from revolutionary Mexico, the wall-newspaper typically consisted of a large paper sheet or board onto which printed or handwritten contributions were attached and replaced on a revolving basis. It was an essentially hybrid form, where quotes by leadership figures and pictures by professional artists mingled with comments and thoughts formulated by the ordinary soldiers working to produce the newspaper.[92] In its most developed form, the wall-newspaper was promoted as a collective art work, and various aesthetic criteria were highlighted in officially sponsored competitions organised to encourage greater participation and experimentation with the war-newspaper form.[93] Yet it was the integrating function of

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88 War ballads often celebrated Republic's cultural reform programme, for example. See Salaün, S. *La poesía*, 269-282.

89 León, M. T. *La Historia Tiene la Palabra*, 29f.

90 That is, a narrative declaring, in various ways, the rising an attempt to perpetuate the oppressive quasi-feudal rule of a corrupt aristocracy, who in return for military aid had sold Spain's independence to the fascist powers of Europe.

91 According to the General Commissariat, there were over 4,000 wall-newspapers in Republican Spain during the war. Salaün, S. *La poesía*, 34.

92 For a good analysis of the wall-newspaper, see Mendelson, J. 'Propaganda Laboratories: Artists and Magazines during the Spanish Civil War' in *Revistas y Guerra 1936-1939* (Madrid: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, 2007), 355-359 (English version). Cf. Salas Viu, V. *Diario de guerra*, 29f.

93 Ibid. Mendelson highlights a 1938 article by Renau's close colleague and *Nueva Cultura* collaborator Francisco Carreño, who unsurprisingly, considering the cultural ambitions of *Nueva Cultura*, was one of the commentators stressing that the wall-newspaper must be a popular and collective effort. Similar sentiments were expressed in connection with a review of a wall-newspaper competition held in Madrid in summer 1938. See *Mundo Gráfico* 1 June 1938, 2.

the wall newspaper that provided the key to its military and political importance. Hence commissars and cultural commentators addressing the phenomenon demanded that wall-newspapers reflect a truly communal project, strengthening ties between contributors and readers while also linking individual units to a larger popular army constituency.[94] As with published ballads, the wall-newspapers' political content was no doubt a product of local group dynamics as well as of different forms of censorship. Indeed, if commissars as a rule placed great weight on wall-newspapers, then, it was because they offered not only a means of maintaining morale, but also a means of enforcing among soldiers a certain degree of self-regulation.[95]

Yet we must not overstate the restrictive implications of the political function imposed on popular cultural production. In some ways, in addition to the overall re-distribution of manpower that the war entailed, it was precisely the fact that text and image production was primarily geared towards the clearly defined goal of war-mobilisation that opened the door for many who may have had the passion but perhaps not the experience or outstanding talents that would allow them to work as artists and writers in normal conditions. This is evidently true in relation to the production of wall-newspapers, but also applied to poster design, since many studios operated during wartime with a team of amateurs guided by one or two professionals.[96] Frontline magazines furthermore offered opportunities for soldiers with no or little artistic experience to have their drawings as well as articles and poetry published, and a selection of such work would even be compiled in a 1938 series of leaflets published by the General Commissariat of the Republican Army, with the likely intention of distributing them nation-wide.[97] And again, as with more traditional schooling (e.g. the literacy classes of the Cultural Militias), the expectation of political conformity did not necessarily prevent these initiatives containing the potential for genuine empowerment too, especially considering the ways in which they encouraged the development of new

[94] Ibid. Documents from the General Commissariat, held in the military archive of Ávila, show that political commissars were concerned to maximise the potential of wall-newspapers, especially in terms of raising morale and awareness of the political ramifications of the war. See, for example, Comisariado General, Caja 697, Carpeta 13 (especially docs 2 and 3).

[95] This conclusion draws more on the archival evidence mentioned in the previous footnote than on Mendelson's mostly art historical analysis, although there are passages in this too that would support such a reading (especially on 358f).

[96] Mendelson, J. 'Propaganda laboratories', 353. The involvement of non-professionals was also highlighted by Renau in an interview with Facundo Tomás Ferré. Renau suggested that the 'democratic' aspect of poster production to some extent compensated for the poor quality of many posters. See Tomás Ferré, F. *Los Carteles Valencianos*, 108f.

[97] The three leaflets were entitled *Poesía en las trincheras, Escritos de Soldados,* and *Los dibujantes soldados*, All were edited by Gabriel García Maroto and published by the Subcomisariado de Agitación, Prensa y Propaganda del Comisariado General de Guerra in 1938.

skills and abilities.

Another significant way in which popular cultural production was both encouraged and controlled can be found in competitions. These events were, as Serge Salaün has pointed out, an intrinsic part of the organisational support necessary to make soldiers' poetry a tangible aspect of wider cultural change.[98] Practical arrangements were made by a wide variety of military and civilian entities: in relation to wall-newspapers, one of the biggest organisers of competitions was Cultura Popular, a Popular Front organisation that worked closely with GDFA during Renau's incumbency.[99] Yet if competitions were conceived as a means of celebrating the democratisation of culture, they also served as a reminder that hierarchical cultural divisions were still present in the Republican zone. Although competition winners were at times decided by popular vote, it was common for participating work to be judged by panels of professional writers and artists.[100] Sometimes their critical authority was used to brutal effect. When the GDFA organised a competition for war songs in 1937, for example, they proposed to select and publish, as Renau's *Nueva Cultura* colleague Pérez Contel later recalled, 'those that had, in addition to a popular character, a certain literary and musical dignity.' But of the 117 entries recorded, only six were included in the final compendium.[101] While competitions attested to an official desire to encourage popular participation in cultural production, they also indicated how the cultural elite perceived there to be clear limits to amateur producers' ability to evaluate their own work.

There was more at stake here than a simple divergence of taste. If, on the one hand, the immediate circumstances meant that popular participation in cultural production had to strike a balance between individual autonomy and the unity needed for war, it also revealed a tension between the actual results obtained in the process and progressive intellectuals' hopes for a future revolutionary art. This constituted a problem that was rarely made explicit and only troubled a certain group of artists (including Renau), but is nonetheless key to the cultural debates examined here. For if the

98 Salaün, S. *La poesía*, 78.

99 For wall-newspaper competition, see Mendelson, J. 'Propaganda laboratories', 359. See also article in *Mundo Gráfico* 1 June 1938, 2. In general terms, Cultura Popular worked mostly with the supply of books and publications to hospitals and the front. For an overview, see Fernández Soria, J. M. *Educación y cultura*, 69-79. A report (dated 18 October 1937) highlighting the close relationship between Cultura Popular and the General Directorate of Fine Arts during the war can be found in AGA (Madrid), Legajo 13054, Caja 4656, 14.

100 For more on competitions, see Salaün, S. *La poesía*, 73-78.

101 Pérez Contel, R. *Artistas en Valencia*, 580. The selected songs were 'U.H.P.', 'Canto de la flota republicana', 'Venguemos a los caídos', 'Himno', 'Canto nocturno en las trincheras' and 'Nueva humanidad.'

'revolution' of the immediate post-coup period momentarily seemed to vindicate romanticised beliefs in the 'people' as a progressive force destined to announce the beginning of a new era, the prosaic nature – not to mention the uneven quality – of many of the amateur art works later produced as its corollary suggested that this new era would be little different in artistic terms unless the 'people' could be guided in their efforts by an appropriate authority. As artists and writers began to take a longer view, then, it became necessary to debate, in greater detail, what the 'revolution' actually meant for artistic production. And this, first of all, necessitated a more precise definition of the relationship between the artist and the 'people'.

The artist and the people

General proclamations of loyalty to the 'people' and the 'revolution' became a staple of Republican cultural life soon after the defeat of the military rising. We have already seen how the Madrid and Valencian groups linked to the Alliance of Anti-Fascist Intellectuals published statements of support for the militias before the end of July. Similar pronouncements would be made, in a seemingly endless stream, throughout the conflict.[102] Indeed, they appeared regardless of the fact that intensifying war pressures and reinforced state authority made the 'revolution' – at least beyond its articulation in cultural spheres – little more than an aestheticised intellectual construction from the summer of 1937 onwards. By then the libertarian and dissident communist organisations defending a decentralised and collectivising order had been defeated in violent confrontations with regional and central government forces in Barcelona (the May Days of 1937).[103] Then, in August 1937, the government issued a decree by which the last bastion of libertarian union power – the Council of Aragon – was forcibly dissolved. Such curtailment of local political autonomy was not solely motivated, as we have seen, by a desire to dismantle libertarian revolution, but responded to the need for centralised co-ordination in the face of the ever worsening dislocations and pressures (economic, demographic, and military) caused by the war. Cultural politics generated fewer power struggles of this kind, but the accumulating crises on both home and military fronts could not but drain the utopian colour from cultural initiatives too. 'Plenty of heroic signing, plenty of beautiful literature: but what is there to eat?', asked the Madrid daily

[102] A selection of these were gathered in a leaflet published, with a prologue by Carles Pi i Sunyer, during the war. See *La voz de la inteligencia y la lucha del pueblo español* (Barcelona: Comisariado de Propaganda de la Generalidad de Cataluña, 1937).

[103] For a concise analysis of the events, see Graham, H. '"Against the state": a genealogy of the Barcelona May Days (1937)' *European History Quarterly*, vol 29, no. 4, 485-542.

La Voz in November 1937.[104] Even so, the notion of a radically democratic cultural regeneration remained influential in intellectual circles. As an increasingly abstract ideal, it is perhaps unsurprising that it became predominantly a preoccupation of intellectuals, who in their hope for a revitalised Spanish society continued to posit the 'people' and the 'popular' above all other social values.

Statements expressing collective subordination to the fact of revolution as well as unity with the 'people' – the one read on behalf of the Spanish delegation at the Second International Congress of Writers for the Defence of Culture in July 1937 may stand as a representative example[105] – have been described as opportunist rhetoric of little real significance.[106] But, if we take them seriously and think about what they could have meant had the Republic been given more time, they were not without deeper import. As the anarchist-turned-communist writer Ramón Sender had already suggested, the solidarity engendered by the war also had to produce a new relationship between artists, writers and their popular audiences. In an article entitled 'The new voice', written in December 1936, Sender insisted that artists seek a creative position outside of themselves, a position where they 'dissolve' themselves in the popular community and absorb its pain and joy as their own. Following from this he envisioned a creative 'miracle', where the artistic self is then 'reconstructed' to give expression to the collective truth he or she embodied.[107] Sender's vision may seem radical but it was not unique, nor confined to Marxist thinkers. In his individual contribution to the writers' congress, Catholic writer and Alliance of Anti-Fascist Intellectuals founder José Bergamín spoke of the desire and indeed moral obligation to be one with the popular in Spanish culture,[108] and the poet-turned-commissar Miguel Hernández introduced his seminal war-time poetry collection with a letter to Vicente Aleixandre (the surrealist writer – later Nobel Prize winner – of the generation of ’27), stating that as poets, they

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[104] Monleón, J. *“El Mono Azul”*, 118.

[105] E.g. '...declaramos aquí […] que como escritores y artistas y como hombres jóvenes, luchamos, disciplinada, serena y altivamente […], allí donde el pueblo español, del que lo esperamos todo, nos diga...' and '...somos distintos y aspiramos a serlo cada vez más, en función de nuestra condición de escritores y artistas, pero tenemos de antemano algo en común: la Revolución española que […] nace y desarrolla simultáneamente con nuestra propia vida. O mejor: nacemos y nos desarrollamos simultáneamente con el nacimiento y desarrollo de esa Revolución.' Gamonal Torres, M. *Arte y Política*, 239, 233.

[106] The anarchist intellectual José Peirats claimed in 1938 that the 'revolution' had been ruined by the 'nonsense' and empty talk of intellectuals. See Gamonal Torres, M. *Arte y Política*, 22. Gamonal himself stresses that most artists would have adopted the language and codes of the moments mainly for pragmatic reasons (28).

[107] Sender, R. 'La nueva voz' in León, M. T. (ed.) *Crónica general*, 107f.

[108] Reproduced in *Nueva Cultura*, 4-5 (June-July 1937), 17f.

were but *Viento del Pueblo*.[109] Here then, the deep-rooted national preoccupation with the popular essence of culture meshed with the symbolic (if often not real) post-coup elevation of popular power to generate a logic whereby artists and writers were simply spiritual aides of a historical agent carrying Spain on its path to cultural salvation. The primacy of the people appeared, from this perspective, to be a supreme principle guiding not only radical politics but artistic endeavours too.

Accusations of opportunism also suggest insincerity, but again it would be wrong simply to dismiss the tone of wartime cultural debates as either cynical or empty. For beyond questions of ideological commitment, intellectuals' relationship to their environment was deeply conditioned by the psychological impact of the war (something that was true, of course, for most people). By visiting trenches, military hospitals, and other places along the front, or when volunteering, as some did, to fight in regular units, artists and writers got first-hand knowledge of life in extreme conditions and many were impressed by the camaraderie and fortitude that soldiers often displayed.[110] Those who volunteered or were conscripted often found, like Vicente Salas Viu, a new sense of belonging among their frontline companions.[111] Like many observers of modern wars, they noted how shared exposure to violence and life-threatening situations created powerful interpersonal bonds – bonds that would in turn become central to their understanding of the war as a profoundly transformative experience.[112]

Shared experiences of life-threatening danger were not exclusive to the military front, however. The war in Spain was the first modern conflict where the civilian population was deliberately targeted *en masse*, and massive and sustained bombardment of urban centres had a similar effect on relationships between the people exposed to this overwhelming danger. In a 1979 interview, Rosa Ballester, Manuela Ballester's younger sister, described how she was convinced that the first bomb to fall on Valencia would fall on her, and when this did not happen, her fear was transformed into a new sense of community with others around her, even though she did not know them individually. The war, she said,

> made me feel a strong love for people; it made me see that there are

[109] *Viento del Pueblo* (Wind of the people) was also the title of the collection, published in 1937. Cf. Vicente Salas Viu suggesting that his war diaries were written by a collective author. *Diario de guerra*, 20.

[110] See Zambrano, M. *Los intelectuales en el drama de España* (Madrid: Trotta, 1998), 148f. Cf. León, M. T. *La Historia Tiene la Palabra*, 37-39.

[111] Salas Viu, V. *Diario de guerra*.

[112] For a good description and analysis of this phenomenon during the First World War, see Eksteins, M. *Rites of Spring*, esp. 180, 229f.

> values... For example, if you have money or not, it does not matter; if you have a house or not, it does not matter; because there is something above all this, which is death.[113]

Naturally enough, reactions would often be directed against the perpetrators of indiscriminate violence. We have already seen how rebel air raids on Madrid stiffened the resolve to resist. The destruction unleashed on civilian populations would affect intellectuals too, and in some cases strengthen their active support and willingness to sacrifice for the Republic. In June 1938 the philosopher Maria Zambrano, in a letter to writer Rosa Chacel, stressed how the war, and above all the suffering caused by indiscriminate bombing, had made her more 'patriotic' (i.e. Republican) than ever. Every air raid only increased her desire to see Spain freed from the foreign 'invasion' orchestrated by the rebels.[114] To be sure, Zambrano may be an unusual example among Republican Spain's more privileged circles. In contrast to those, like Chacel, who left the Republic as the situation got worse, Zambrano and her husband returned from a diplomatic assignment to Chile on 19 June 1937, a day when the chances of outright Republican victory were drastically reduced as a result of the fall of Bilbao and soon of the industrial north in its entirety. Asked why they went back when the war seemed all but lost, Zambrano had simply replied, 'That's why...'[115] While this was an extraordinary declaration of solidarity with the Republican cause, it did not, of course, in itself entail support for a popular revolution. However, from her posting in Chile, Zambrano had already published a long pamphlet stressing how the struggle in Spain was ultimately about the creation of a 'new morality' and a 'new man', opposed to fascism and a stagnant bourgeoisie.[116] Just like many of her colleagues, then, Zambrano saw the war as an opportunity to lay the foundations of a new life, a life that would be shaped not only by abstract ideals but above all by the concrete example of those fighting to defend the Republic.

But even if sympathy and solidarity with the radicalised defenders of the Republic was in many cases deeply felt and genuine, intellectuals' proclamations placing the people at the centre of cultural development did not necessarily amount to a willingness to abandon the cultural establishment's privileged position. Rather, by identifying the 'people' with 'Will' and intellectuals with 'Reason', statements like the

[113] CDMH (Salamanca) Fuentes_Orales-Mexico, no 10, 16.
[114] Zambrano, M. *Los intelectuales*, 210-212.
[115] See José Luis Arco's 'estudio preliminar' in Zambrano, M. *Islas* (Madrid: Verbum, 2007), L.
[116] Zambrano, M. *Los intelectuales*, 96f, 180-183.

one made collectively at the writers' congress in July 1937 would reinforce a categorical division that in turn compromised the democratic potential of a cultural environment open to popular participation.[117] The authors of the collective congress statement were even explicit on this point; they did not want to 'monopolise' the will of those fighting for the Republic, but they did see it as their 'duty' to interpret those fighters' thoughts and feelings. In fact, José Bergamín had given poignant expression to this idea already in the opening lines of the inaugural issue of *El Mono Azul* (27 August 1936); the magazine presented itself before its readership, Bergamín had suggested, 'ready to clothe its body like the word does the thought: in order to give it reason [*razón*] and meaning.'[118] *El Mono Azul*, named after the blue boiler suit that virtually became a revolutionary uniform in the immediate aftermath of the July rebellion, was a literary magazine devoted to egalitarian politics, yet in an important sense – and despite its short spell as an outlet for amateur wall ballads – it was still the product of a structure that underlined the interpretative authority of a cultural elite. Seen from this point of view, it is undeniable that intellectuals' proclaimed unity *with* the 'people' was also a strategy to legitimize their speaking *for* the 'people'. But again it would be unfair to point to cynicism by way of explanation. Rather, at work here was a deep-seated paternalism, present, as we have seen, throughout the Republican period as a whole and consistently serving as a counter-weight to the emancipatory implications of progressive cultural reform. They wanted to democratise culture, but were, again, reluctant to relinquish control.[119] The 'people' were granted a voice, but intellectuals retained the last word.

Defining revolutionary art

If established artists and writers ultimately perceived themselves, rather the 'people', as occupying a leading position in the cultural revolution triggered by the military rebellion, what demands did they place on their own artistic production? How did they envision, more concretely, their own responsibilities in the elaboration of a new art for Spain?

A useful place to start an analysis of this question would be a lecture that Josep Renau delivered in the Aula Magna of Valencia University in December 1936 (later

[117] Gamonal Torres, M. *Arte y Política*, 232-239 (esp. 236.).

[118] 'Presencia del Mono Azul' *El Mono Azul*, 1 (August 1936), 3. The first issue did not show the date of publication, which is taken from Monleón, J. '"*El Mono Azul*"', 17.

[119] Cf. Labanyi, J. 'Propaganda Art: Culture by the People or for the People' in Graham, H. and Labanyi, J. (Eds.) *Spanish Cultural Studies*, 165f.

published both in article and book form through *Nueva Cultura*).[120] Entitled 'The Social Function of the Publicity Poster', the lecture was concerned, in the first instance, with the history and future potential of poster art, but commented, *en route,* on virtually every issue that preoccupied progressive artists and writers at the time. That the poster should stand at the centre of an analysis of this kind may also be seen as indicative of its ambiguous status in the wartime Republic. For a number of reasons the poster was considered by many, among them Renau, as central not only to immediate mobilisation campaigns but also to the long-term development of a revolutionary popular culture.[121] By its very form it challenged a number of romantic bourgeois conventions concerning fine art (i.e. the value of the unique original, the importance of individual genius, etc.) and offered great potential as a cultural medium in an age of mass-politics. Still, the fact that Renau, speaking in his capacity as General Director of Fine Arts, chose to commence his lecture with a quote from French poster designer Cassandre, effectively calling on lifeless traditional easel painting to be 'cast into the sea', must have raised a few eyebrows, to say the least.[122] It is a statement that on the one hand reminds us of Renau's youthful reaction to the Levante exhibition in 1929, in response to which he penned his 'Yellow Manifesto,' but on the other highlights how new expectations entertained in relation to poster design more generally came to reflect a series of conflicting demands placed on art as a whole. As Renau's lecture illustrated, art was variously, and often simultaneously, required to be utilitarian yet universal, topical yet transcendental, while still synthesising, in form as well as content, the essential living spirit of a profoundly transformative era. How art was to accomplish this remained an open question, yet tentative answers may be glimpsed in Renau's theoretical exploration of the poster and the reactions it provoked from his colleagues.

Renau began his analysis by focusing on the historical development of the commercial poster, but soon addressed the broader question, touched on above, of the role and responsibility of the artist. In this regard, Renau was anxious to dismiss any *a priori* or socially disconnected notion of artistic autonomy. The artistic dream of

[120] The lecture was delivered before a big audience and was, according to Pérez Contel, very well received. *Artistas en Valencia*, 471,473. The lecture text was published in two *Nueva Cultura* installments, no.2 (April 1937), 6-9, 18f, and no.3 (May 1937), 6-11, 16f. The book was originally printed by Ediciones *Nueva Cultura* but also exists in a 1976 edition published by Fernando Torres (Valencia). References below will primarily cite the 1976 edition.

[121] An observation also borne out by the numerous public poster exhibitions organised more or less throughout the war period in galleries and squares by organisations like AIA, Altavoz del Frente, Cultural Popular, and various regional authorities (e.g. the Comissariat de Propaganda of the Catalan government). See, for example, Cabañas Bravo, M. *Josep Renau*, chapter 3.

[122] Renau, Josep. *Función Social del Cartel* (Valencia: Fernando Torres, 1976), 29.

unconditional liberty was, he maintained, an idealistic myth. Artists had always been dependent on patronage and worked to satisfy a specific need. (Even attempts to create 'pure' art entailed a form of servitude to the 'select minority' that could appreciate such works.) Yet if all artists were in some sense restricted by their circumstances, poster artists (serving, by contrast, the broad majority) were even more so. Poster artists were typically called upon to solve concrete problems. They were given specific missions and responded to particular and immediate, even urgent, needs. More than any other artist, they worked in what Renau called 'disciplined liberty.'[123] There was, that is to say, a difference between the creator of 'fine art' and the creator of posters, yet this was a difference of degree rather than kind. All art, in Renau's view, is tied to the social conditions in which it is created.

The lecture's emphasis on discipline was one of the factors provoking a prompt and subsequently much discussed response from Ramón Gaya, a painter who had previously been active with the travelling museum of the Misiones Pedagógicas.[124] In an open letter to Renau, published in the January 1937 issue of *Hora de España*, a prestigious cultural magazine, Gaya first of all argued that the Republican poster had to take inspiration from the great artists of the nineteenth century – Daumier, Delacroix, and above all Goya – if it was to succeed in inspiring the Spanish people.[125] But, Gaya also stated, in what was effectively a defence of the artistic philosophy of the Institución Libre de Enseñanza, whose influence had been foundational in the creation of the Misiones Pedagógicas, Gaya also stated that no art could offer a valuable contribution to the Republican struggle unless it were 'free, authentic y spontaneous, without shackles or demands, without worries regarding practical value or efficacy[...].'[126] The latter statement in particular drew a strong reply from Renau, who in the following issue of the same magazine insisted once more on the poster artist's limitations and stressed that Gaya's approach was dangerous, if not downright irresponsible, considering the

[123] Ibid., 60f.

[124] The ensuing letter exchange between Renau and Ramón Gaya is discussed to some extent in virtually every exhibition catalogue included in the thesis bibliography. For an extensive analysis, see, for example, Tomás Ferré, F. *Los Carteles Valencianos*, 96-101. See also Gómez, M. *El largo viaje*, 267. For Gaya's own account of the debate, as well as comments on his work with the Misiones Pedagógicas, see Dennis, N. (Ed.) *Ramón Gaya de viva voz: entrevistas, (1977-1998)* (Valencia: Pre-Textos, 2007).

[125] 'Carta de un pintor a un cartelista' *Hora de España*, 1 (January 1937), 56-58. Also in Gamonal Torres, M. *Arte y Política*, 174-176. In later interviews Gaya suggested that this open letter was never directed to Renau but to the painter José Gutiérrez Solana. This is a highly implausible post-hoc construction, however, especially since no one – especially not Gaya, who deeply admired Solana – would call Solana a 'cartelista.' Moreover, Solana is, in fact, mentioned in the letter as a potential (but ultimately rejected) contemporary Spanish painter from whom the imagined addressee might learn.

[126] Ibid.

concrete challenges – military, economic, and political – facing the Republic as a result of the war. Poster creation, he stated, must start with the recognition of an 'objective' problem, not individual whim, and proceed to solve this problem methodically.[127] At one level, then, the disagreement between Gaya and Renau clearly concerned urgent questions of practice, critical when Republican artists had to contribute to the dissemination of a single coherent mobilisation programme. Yet beyond such considerations, the position outlined by Renau was equally founded on a matter of principle. Even if Renau did not say so explicitly, his argument suggested that for 'objective' problems to be correctly understood at all, the work of the artist had to be informed by politics.

If the exchange between Renau and Gaya has been widely commented on in the historical literature, it is precisely because their disagreement went deeper than specific recipes for effective propaganda and posed bigger questions about the role of politics in art.[128] To begin with, it seems correct to suggest, as historian Mayte Gómez does, that Gaya wanted above all to distinguish the social from the political and thus maintain a space for art of more lasting value, while Renau, by contrast, insisted that this distinction had collapsed as a result of the war.[129] Yet beyond the immediate context of the Spanish conflict, it also appears that Renau and Gaya set out from incompatible conceptions of artistic creation as such. Gaya's rejection of politics may be traced to an Idealist notion stating that artistic creation of real value is only possible by adopting a position of disinterest. It can only emanate from an individual who suspends any desire for domination in his or her confrontation with the world.[130] Although such disinterest had been ascribed an indirect socio-political value by foundational Idealist thinkers like Hegel and Schiller, who glimpsed in the suspension of dominance an absolute form of freedom, it could hardly constitute, in the minds of activists like Renau, a progressive force in the ideologically charged twentieth century.[131] The 'free play' between subject and object had to be abolished, as we have seen, for a more resolute way to interact with the world. Hence Renau adopts Malraux's view that art is born as a response to a

[127] 'Contestación a Ramón Gaya' *Hora de España*, 2 (February 1937), 59-62. Gamonal Torres, M. *Arte y Política*, 176-179.

[128] See footnote 125 above.

[129] Gómez, M. *El largo viaje*, 267. This interpretation is clearly borne out by the rest of the exchange, as well as later interviews with Gaya (see Dennis, N. (Ed.) *Ramón Gaya*).

[130] For a particularly clear explanation of this position, where Gaya talks about creation as coming out of nothingness, see 'Cartas bajo un mismo techo a J. G.-A. *Hora de España*, 6 (June 1937). Also in Gamonal Torres, M. *Arte y Política*, 217-223 (see esp. 220).

[131] See also Rancière, J. *Aisthesis: Scenes from the Aesthetic Regime of Art* (London, Verso, 2013), chapter 2.

collective need, which is to say that art is first and foremost an intervention and a means to shape collective experiences of reality.[132] The war may thus have generated especially urgent needs, in the sense that it demanded immediate unity in action, but it did not fundamentally change Renau's view on the conditions for artistic creation in Spain. The fundamental paradigm explaining the function of art remained intact across the divide that was the military rising of July 1936, as a discourse of national war simply substituted – where it did not overlap with – a discourse of class war. In both cases art sought to mobilise people around an integrated vision and shared plan of action addressing a collective desire or deficiency, and in both cases politics was an inescapable component of its mission.

The idea that distinctions between the social and the political had collapsed as a result of war was shared also by an increasing number of artists and writers outside of radical political circles. In contrast to French writer Julien Benda's assertion, made in 1927, that explicit political commitment had resulted in a 'treason of the intellectuals,'[133] María Zambrano, for example, former FUE activist and one of the most noted philosophical students of José Ortega y Gasset, saw direct engagement in social and political battles as a return to the Greek origins of western philosophical tradition which had involved 'intellectuals' using their faculties to improve the life of the community.[134] Even Gaya's close friend and colleague Juan Gil-Albert, a poet who rarely included overt political statements in his writing, found it hard to accept a categorical division between the social and the political. In an open letter exchange with Gaya, published in the June 1937 issue of *Hora de España*, Gil-Albert suggested that the the social and the political must rather be seen as inextricably interlinked in a dynamic developmental process.[135] Thus understood, politics could be a positive and unifying element benefiting artistic creation as much as society as a whole. For how, Gil-Albert asks in the same exchange, may future peoples achieve the collaboration that is expressed in the Gothic Cathedrals or the Parthenon – works not so much of 'collective art' as a form of 'spiritual

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[132] Renau, Josep. *Función Social*, 57f. Malraux thesis was presented at the First International Congress of Writers for the Defence of Culture in Paris in June 1935, and cited in *Nueva Cultura*, 5 (June-July 1935), 3.

[133] See Timms, E. 'Treason of the Intellectuals? Benda, Benn, and Brecht.' in Timms, E. and Collier, P. *Visions and Blueprints*, 18-33. Benda's position came to represent a camp opposing 'propaganda art' but Benda himself would not remain completely aloof from socially engaged debates and was present at the Second International Congress of Writers for the Defence of Culture in war-time Spain.

[134] Zambrano, M. *Los intelectuales*, 109.

[135] 'Cartas bajo un mismo techo a J. G.-A. *Hora de España*, 6 (June 1937). Also in Gamonal Torres, M. *Arte y Política*, 217-223 (see esp. 221)

unity' – if not through politics?[136] Art too needed a new social order, conducive to the creation of harmony and beauty. To Gil-Albert's mind, this order was 'undoubtedly' socialism.[137] Such comments, coming from someone who was still excluded from the *Hora de España* group for 'excessive aestheticism' in 1938,[138] indicate the extent to which progressive Spanish artists and writers accepted, at least on paper, the idea that politics was an inescapable part of war-time artistic production.

If the ideas presented by Renau and Gaya in relation to poster production drew on two different conceptions of artistic creation, they were, however, entirely united in their critique of the quality of posters produced in Spain at this time. In his December 1936 lecture, Renau commended Spanish artists for quickly adapting to the new conditions obtaining after the July rebellion. Although the majority had, according to Renau, been caught unawares by events, city walls had 'vibrated' with colour within only a few days. But from there on progress had stopped, if not reversed as a result of the work of 'amateurs' of all kinds.[139] What was particularly grating – and here Renau would be seconded by Gaya – was that the style used for revolutionary posters was effectively the same as that seen in commercial advertising.[140] As noted in the previous chapter, virtually all poster artists were free to portray their subject matter any way they choose, and many professionals did, in fact, continue to use a style first elaborated in advertising. In Renau's view, such overlaps between commercial and political practices severely limited political posters' efficacy. War was not a car brand or a luxurious perfume, he said, and to use sterile marketing conventions associated with such products to portray a heroic historical moment was to deprive it of all human drama. Moreover, the plethora of symbolisms seen in early poster production threatened to 'asphyxiate' the living memory of this moment, thus further reducing its lasting psychological impact.[141] What was needed, then, was a new direction for poster production, and above all a new form, capable of adequately representing the reality of the 'popular' revolution.

Similar observations were later made at the aforementioned International Congress of Writers for the Defence of Culture in July 1937, where the collective

[136] Ibid., 221.
[137] Ibid.
[138] Salaün, S. *La poesía*, 364. Salaün does not give a more precise idea of the timing or circumstances of this exclusion. He only say that it happened when *Hora de España* moved to Barcelona, which was in January 1938.
[139] This comment is in itself indicative of the tension inherent in progressive intellectuals' – or at least Renau's – endorsement of amateur art production as a progressive phenomenon in principle.
[140] Renau, Josep. *Función Social*, 66-69. See also Gaya, R. 'Carta de un pintor a un cartelista'.
[141] Ibid.

statement presented by the Spanish delegation maintained that it was not enough for artists simply to include a particular set of political symbols for their work to qualify as revolutionary. New works of art had to reflect the deepest essence of the moment, capture its inner meaning, and achieve in both content and form a vivid correspondence with the values that guided the popular energy now released.[142] How exactly this would be achieved was not explained. In his lecture on the poster, Renau had pointed to what he believed to be a magisterial example in this regard: the poster art of the Soviet Union. Using innovative designs by the Stenberg brothers and montage artist Gustav Klucis as reference points, he suggested that Soviet posters had superseded their commercial past and played a central role in the construction of a new society.[143] Renau furthermore – if somewhat dubiously – credited Soviet poster artists with the invention of the 'photographic poster,' which may have been imitated, he said, in commercial contexts but 'proved' that the political poster could develop independently of capitalism.[144] Soviet poster design certainly offers an empirical basis for such a claim, but then there is never, regardless of what society we consider, a simple determining correspondence between aesthetic innovation and socio-economic development. As Renau recognised elsewhere in his talk, more or less independent factors relating to culture and technology invariably come into play too. At any rate, the importance of new technology was stressed again in Renau's exchange with Gaya, who had remarked that photomontage as a rule was too 'cold' to stir the feelings of fighters defending the Republic.[145] In his reply Renau suggested that the masters of the art form clearly demonstrated how it offered expressive potential comparable to the paintings admired by Gaya, and that artists needed to update the form as well as content of their work if they were to remain relevant to their own times. 'Yesterday Goya, today John Heartfield', he declared to sum up his position on the matter, returning once more to the modernist dictum that a new life must be accompanied by a new art.[146]

Regardless of technique used, the only aesthetic appropriate to revolutionary art was, Renau affirmed once more, a form of realism. He also made more explicit than

[142] Gamonal Torres, M. *Arte y Política*, 232-239, esp. 234f.

[143] Renau, Josep. *Función Social*, 62-65. The examples of Soviet posters are taken from the second of the *Nueva Cultura* instalment (May 1937, 16f), since a note accompanying the 1976 book edition states that the posters appearing in the book are not the same as those originally used to illustrate the argument (whereas it is reasonable to assume that the one appearing in *Nueva Cultura* are).

[144] Ibid. The claim that Soviet artists were definitely the first to incorporate photography in posters seems difficult to verify, since photomontage was developed by different but unconnected groups in Europe at the same time. See Ades, D. *Photomontage.*

[145] Gaya, R. 'Carta de un pintor a un cartelista'.

[146] Renau, J. 'Contestación a Ramón Gaya'. Cf. Rancière, J. 'The Aesthetic Revolution and its Outcomes'.

before that the realism he had in mind did not signify superficial fidelity to visual reality or a return to nineteenth-century schools of painting. Drawing on ideas which had been prevalent in progressive European debates throughout the interwar period, and in the 1930s became associated above all with modernist Marxist writers like Bertholt Brecht, Renau stated instead that realism, deriving from an 'impulse to analyse reality', essentially meant adopting an 'active position before the world'.[147] Again, as discussed in relation to the documentary photograph and photomontage, the task was to transform the world as much as to know it. And it was only within a realist aesthetic, Renau continued, that art could actually meet the multiple demands now placed on it; 'authentic' realism operates within the constraints of historical necessity but within those constraints achieves a 'cosmic eloquence' carrying a value beyond the momentary satisfaction of specific needs.[148]

This was not the language of exclusionary Stalinist dogma, nor was Renau's lecture unrepresentative of the attitudes informing the work of other artists and writers supporting the Popular Front. The importance of realism – at least in the general sense of adhering to an 'objective' concept of reality – was underscored by non-Marxist authors too. In Zambrano's view, outlined in the pamphlet published in Chile in early 1937 and later echoed in the collective statement made at the International Congress of Writers that summer, a disregard for reality was precisely the critical ideological factor making the alliance between the bourgeoisie and fascism possible in the first place. This alliance, she maintained, was a product of the frustration and anxiety felt as the bourgeoisie failed to realise the untenable ideals it had claimed to embody. The idealisation of life, which had eventually led to 'man' proclaiming himself identical with his ideal (the masculine pronoun is undeniably an accurate reflection of the historical conception referred to here), had begun with the Renaissance but taken on particular importance for the bourgeoisie, which considered itself an unrivalled force of progress. For this reason the inevitable clash between ideals and reality – that is, between ideals and the 'contradictory wealth of life', as Zambrano puts it – produced in the bourgeoisie acute dissatisfaction. Once this tension became unbearable, the stage was set for fascism to emerge. To its followers, fascism presented itself as a new beginning, but in reality, Zambrano maintained, it was merely an expression of bourgeois impotence to address an unsustainable social situation. Indeed, as a solution relying on authoritarian control,

[147] Renau, Josep. *Función Social*, 52. Cf. Bertolt Brecht's response to literary conceptions of Georg Lukács in Various authors. *Aesthetics and Politics*, 68-86 (esp. 82).
[148] Ibid., 60.

fascism only highlighted the ruling classes' historical limitations. Even so, the effect was that the bourgeoisie's inability to develop as class now halted the development of all.[149] To escape this ideological trap, anti-fascist politics had to replace myth with fact, and roundly accept, as Zambrano insisted, that only through a recognition of the constraints of reality can humanity find its freedom.[150]

The wider currency of the ideas that Renau was disseminating may also be detected in his description of the place of tradition in revolutionary art. Elaborating further on 'new realism,' Renau departed from his critical pre-war stance on the Spanish cultural heritage and suggested that national precedents must exert a central formative influence in the development of a new aesthetic. This represented perhaps the greatest shift in Renau's cultural vision during the 1930s, and meant that the revolutionary ambition to elaborate entirely new cultural values was replaced by a more moderate vision allowing for greater preservation of tradition in coming cultural transformations. In his retrospective account of his work as General Director of Fine Arts, published in 1980, Renau suggested that his wartime endorsement of a canon that he and his *Nueva Cultura* colleagues had previously rejected was a direct consequence of the attacks launched on Spain by the rebels and their international backers. Just as one can have a heated discussion with a friend but feel strong affection for the same friend should he or she be found bleeding in the street, he said, so did the threat of physical destruction, evident not least in the bomb damage suffered by the Prado Museum, produce in him a greater sense of appreciation for that artistic heritage.[151] And if the situation forced a re-evaluation of these works, it also generated a new awareness of their relevance to contemporary culture.[152] Unsurprisingly, considering the nature of pre-war reforms, such comments harmonized with the predominant mood in progressive cultural circles. The collective statement at the International Congress of Writers, again, seconded the view that an art of the new must build on tradition. There was, the authors hastened to add, much in the past that was contaminated with 'utopianism', 'pacifism', and 'puerile idealism,' yet the bourgeois humanist heritage could still, in large parts, be appropriated for a progressive cause and serve as a component in a dynamic process fomenting a new

[149] Indeed, the actual fascist salute is in itself 'a sign to order a halt', she observed. Zambrano, M. *Los intelectuales*, 98.
[150] Zambrano, M. 'Los intelectuales en el drama de España' in *Los intelectuales*, 88-108 (see especially 90-95, 98).
[151] Renau, J. *Arte en Peligro*, 15f.
[152] Ibid.

humanism in Spain.[153]

To Renau, it was the Golden Age painters, and Velázquez above all, who could teach an important humanist lesson to contemporary artists. In Velázquez's portraits of jesters and court servants, painting departed from idealised conceptions of classical beauty to offer in their place a realistic image affirming the inviolable value of the individual.[154] Here was Spanish realism in its most 'heroic' form, disregarding convention and daring to 'paint and live without dreaming, but with eyes open to the faintest palpitation, to the most profound meaning of reality.'[155] It was a 'naked foot' treading the 'rough and concrete terrain' of the real world. Crucially, this art was powerful enough to transcend the decadence of subsequent centuries to teach artists of the twentieth.[156] In the view of Renau and his creative colleagues, the revival of such painting would be incompatible with the fantasies that underpinned fascism. Moreover, although Renau does not himself emphasise the distinction, we should note that as an aesthetic this also contrasts significantly with other doctrines of representation in other 'revolutionary' societies. Renau's realism would celebrate a 'new man' emerging from the trenches, but rather than presenting an ideal celebrating super-human abilities (as seen in the Soviet Union as well as under various forms of fascism), it sought to foster solidarity and compassion through a holistic portrayal of human characteristics, including imperfections and flaws.

As the debates highlighted above show, Renau's analysis of the poster contained several ideas that were broadly representative of progressive Republican conceptions of art in war-time Spain. First of all, such art could not be divorced from politics. To work towards a social goal, art had to engage with politics in a process of constructive collaboration. This did not mean that Republican cultural producers suddenly adhered to prescriptive programmes deriving from political dogma. Rather, what guided their work was a greater degree of political awareness, an abstract vision, and a sense of the values that had to underpin a future Republican society.[157] Second, to communicate these

[153] Gamonal Torres, M. *Arte y Política*, 232-239, esp. 237f.

[154] Renau, Josep. *Función Social*, 70-75. Renau stated that much of his reading of Spanish Golden Age painting was taken from the Spanish art historian Enrique Lafuente, who was an expert on Velázquez, above all. If the stress on the individual seems to break with the otherwise dominant concern in Renau's writing with the collective, see page 115 above for André Gide's thesis concerning the relation between the collective and the individual, as explained at the Paris congress of 1935.

[155] Ibid., 73.

[156] Ibid., 74.

[157] Serge Salaün has also emphasised, with further reference to the literary scholar Juan Cano Ballesta, that the majority of Spanish artists and writers engaging with progressive politics during the Republican years were primarily moved by humanist and humanitarian sentiments, not ideological doctrine. See Salaün, S. 'Las vanguardias políticas: la cuestión estética' in Pérez Bazo, J. (Ed.) *La*

values, artists had to adopt some form of realism. Again, the ambition was not to produce reductive accounts of contemporary life, but to give adequate expression to the many complexities of historical reality. Realism was moreover perceived to counter the mysticism underpinning reaction and to represent, in its portrayal of the 'richness' of life, a 'humanist' aesthetic. Both aspects carried critical weight during the war, when the Spanish civil population was the target of military attacks of unprecedented brutality and inhumanity. In such circumstances, artists and writers were naturally moved by a desire to bear witness, to denounce the perpetrators of violence, and to foster sympathy for the victims. To adopt a realist language in the face of tragedy was, in other words, itself an act of resistance. As such, realist art conveyed hope, too; it constituted a recognition of human values in defiance of faceless power. And if the redemptive vision outlined was in some cases (as in Renau and Zambrano) recognisably modernist, especially in its celebration of a 'new man' making new forms of living conceivable, it did not, like modernist cultural projects pursued in totalitarian states, subordinate this 'new man' to any supreme doctrinal categories of History or Nation. Rather than preaching conformity as a means of overcoming the discontents of modernity, they advocated solidarity in response to an imperfect reality and envisioned an art sensitive to the irreducible value of human diversity.

Depictions of a modern and progressive Republic

The art form arguably best placed to encapsulate Renau's conception of 'new realism', not least because its indexical qualities rendered it uniquely faithful to unadorned visual reality, was photography. It is significant, then, that where Renau did have a direct influence on state-sponsored graphic production, he favoured photo-based visual work above others. As most state-sponsored cultural initiatives were shaped by external organisations operating with a great degree of creative freedom, however, the specific instances where his preferences are consistently visible are restricted to leaflets and posters produced in the name of the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Public Instruction and Fine Arts, as well as the elaborate photomurals that were included in the Republican pavilion at the important *Exposition Internationale des Arts et Techniques dans la Vie Moderne*, held in Paris in 1937. This exposition was fundamentally conceived as a celebration of human knowledge, especially as expressed through the

Vanguardia en España, 223. See also Cano Ballesta, J. *La poesía española entre pureza y revolución (1920-1936)* (Madrid: Siglo Veintiuno de España Editores, 1996).

union of art and technology. But the climate of the time, marked by the rapid demise of the idea of progress and the hostile posturing of totalitarian regimes, turned the commercial show into a propaganda competition where different nations primarily aimed to project a distinct political and cultural image.[158] In this context, the Republican government sought to use its participation as an opportunity to portray the Republic as a modern and progressive state. To further this ambition, Renau based his contribution to the Republican pavilion on photography, an art form which he deemed uniquely placed to illustrate both aspects of the message thus projected. But before considering this work in more detail, we should first note that photography was not only prominent in propaganda campaigns abroad, but used in various publications at home too.

When working on governmental leaflets and posters for domestic consumption, Renau typically collaborated with the Polish-born typographer Mauricio Amster. Amster had come to Madrid in 1930, directly after having finished his studies in Berlin, where he had been exposed to the influence of artists like George Grosz and John Heartfield. His relocation resulted from an invitation from his childhood friend and likewise graphic designer Mariano Rawicz, who had worked for various progressive publishing houses in Spain since 1928 (especially Hoy and Cenit, which sought to follow the model set by Malik, the German publishing house founded in 1917 by John Heartfield and his brother Wieland Herzfelde). Together Amster and Rawicz introduced to the Spanish capital the design language of magazines like *USSR in Construction* and *A-I-Z*. In autumn 1936, Amster was sent to the front but was soon discharged because of his short-sightedness. During the same period he had joined the PCE, and after his military discharge was offered work in the Ministry of Public Instruction, first in relation to the Prado evacuations, and then as Director of Publications.[159]

Photography was the preferred medium of illustration for Amster as much as Renau. In terms of the work Amster was commissioned to do by the Republican authorities, this can first be seen in the richly illustrated leaflet describing the agricultural decree of 7 October 1936 (mentioned in chapter 6), where some of the photography displays unusual angles of the kind first associated with Soviet avant-garde artist Alexander Rodchenko.[160] Similar photo-based leaflets were later published by the

[158] Rosón, M. 'Fotomurales del Pabellón Español de 1937. Vanguardia artística y misión politica' *GOYA*, 319-20 (2007), 282f. See also Ades, D. (Ed.) *Art and Power: Europe under the Dictators, 1930-1935* (London, Thames and Hudson, 1995).

[159] Various authors. *Mauricio Amster: Tipógrafo* (Valencia: IVAM, 1997).

[160] Rodchenko would often use extreme bottom-up or top-down perspectives. For an analytical account of contemporary Soviet photography, see Tupitsyn, M. *The Soviet Photograph, 1924-1937* (Yale

culture and education ministry – a good example would be the one made in conjunction with Children's Week (*Semana del Niño*), the Christmas-related propaganda event, organised in January 1937, highlighting the Republic's concern for children (mentioned above).[161] Amster would also be responsible for the design of a graphically original set of posters announcing the creation of the Worker Institutes and children's colonies, a set where each poster included a series of photographs showing the viewer different aspects of everyday life at the particular institution (a feature which may well have had huge practical significance as thousands of parents took the agonising decision over whether or not to send their children to an unknown destination for the remainder of the war). The most important work published by the wartime culture and education ministry, however, and the one which allegedly made Amster most proud in his later years, was the 'anti-fascist' primer used by the Cultural Militias in their front-line teaching. Here illustrations consisted of photomontages, to which one or two colours were added. According to art historian Patricia Molins, the colouring is indicative of the influence of Renau [Fig. 25].[162] But, as Molins also notes, more unequivocal evidence of Renau's involvement can be found in the inclusion of photographs from *Nueva Cultura*'s special issue on the politicised 1937 version of the Valencian *Fallas* – photographs taken by Renau himself and in all likelihood handed over to Amster in person.[163] At any rate, the montages provide clear visual reinforcement of the slogans that readers were asked to interpret, and moreover introduced them to the faces of key political figures of that time. Seen from this perspective, the decision to use this particular technique for the illustrations no doubt owed a lot to its accessibility and pedagogical value. Yet placed in the context of Amster's and Renau's artistic backgrounds, as well as the latter's theoretical endorsements of photography as a progressive art form, it is equally clear that the inclusion of photomontage was also informed by a more generalised desire to link the Republican state to an idea of cultural modernity.

The most elaborate manifestation of this desire is found in the Republican pavilion constructed for the Paris Expo in summer and autumn 1937. Several scholarly studies have shown how both the building and its contents constitute landmarks in the

University Press: New Haven, 1996).

[161] See, for example, Ministerio de Instrucción Pública y Bellas Artes. *Luchamos por una infancia feliz.* Amster's name does not appear on the leaflet, but looking at the style and considering that he was the main graphic designer for the ministry, there can be no doubt that he was responsible for the lay out.

[162] Although Molins does not say so explicitly, she is presumably thinking of the montages Renau produced for *Estudios* before the war. Various authors. *Mauricio Amster*, 196.

[163] Ibid. Molins does not speculate on whether Amster got the images straight from Renau, but considering that this would have been easily arranged, it must be considered likely.

history of modernist architecture and art in Spain.[164] The functional structure designed by Josep Lluís Sert and Luis Lacasa met the need for a cost-effective building that emphasised the modernity of the Republic, while the collaboration of renowned artists like Joan Miró, Julio González, and Alexander Calder, as well as Pablo Picasso (who painted Guernica for the occasion) ensured that the Republic's contribution would receive the public attention that the Popular Front government was counting on to support its vital ongoing diplomatic efforts to break the Republic's international isolation.[165] Less frequently discussed by that scholarship – at least until recently – are the numerous photomurals designed by a team led by Renau. Covering two of the pavilion's three floors, they constituted, as art historian Jordana Mendelson has pointed out, the greatest visual mass of the exhibition.[166] The murals provided the backdrop to two of the Pavilion's five thematic sections,[167] contextualising and guiding visitors' reading of the exhibition materials. The first, considered the most important by the pavilion's chief curator, university rector José Gaos, showcased different folkloric crafts from Spain's rural regions. Renau's photographic compositions were here relatively simple, involving mainly maps, landscapes and portraits of rural 'types'. This focus on rural culture was criticised by some Spanish observers at the time, not least for seemingly undermining the Republic's claim to modernity. Yet in terms of their content, such images carried clear references to a typical and eminently modern twentieth century nation-building project – especially prominent in the 1920s and 1930s – which saw the state increasingly map out and define its population according to ethnographic categories. That photography, as a form widely associated with objectivity, was the dominant medium used to present such ethnographic knowledge further underscored the link between the folkloric presentation and modern science. But it is also important to note that the organisers of the Pavilion, Renau among them, placed this section within a larger political narrative highlighting the Republic's progressive and modernising

[164] See, for example, Freedberg, C. *The Spanish Pavilion at the Paris World's Fair of 1937* (New York: Garland, 1986); Martín Martín, F. *El pabellón español en la Exposición Universal de París en 1937* (Sevilla: Universidad de Sevilla, 1983); and Alix Trueba, J. *Pabellón español, Exposición Internacional de París, 1937* (Madrid: Ministerio de Cultura, 1987). Bibliography as listed in Mendelson, J. *Documenting Spain*, 125.

[165] In addition to literature in the footnote above, see also Cabañas Bravo, M. *Josep Renau*, and Cabañas Bravo, M. 'Renau y el pabellón español de 1937 en París, con Picasso y sin Dalí' for extensive detail on the particular administrative tasks co-ordinated by Renau.

[166] Mendelson, J. *Documenting Spain*, 126.

[167] The five sections making up the Spanish Republican exhibition were centred on: folklore, Popular Front politics, contemporary art from Spain, contemporary art by internationally renowned Spanish artists residing in Paris (centre piece being Picasso's *Guernica*), and performance and film (located on the patio).

intentions. In this way the Republic could distance itself from its conservative opponents and celebrate a plurality of regional traditions without ascribing to these a timeless national identity.[168]

The second thematic section shaped by Renau's photomurals introduced visitors to aspects of the Republic's war policy and reform programme. Topics like land distribution, educational reform, and the protection of the artistic heritage (the latter also a topic of two detailed talks by Renau[169]), were explained through a complex series of visual illustrations, combining texts, images, and statistical graphs. In contrast to the folkloric section, many of the compositions used for these murals count among Renau's most formally advanced. His illustration of the Misiones Pedagógicas – of questionable actuality since the organisation had virtually ceased its activities all together by this point[170] – was singled out for praise in article by photographer and critic Gisèle Freund, published on 15 March the following year.[171] Again, as Freund also pointed out, the very use of photomontage for propaganda purposes was in itself a quintessentially modern state practice.[172] Though first exploited by the Soviet Union, it was quickly adopted by states of various ideological hues, and the Paris Expo as a whole effectively became a showcase of photo-based exhibition techniques. In theory this meant that Renau could use it to pay homage to Soviet pioneers like El Lissitzky without the form of his work necessarily carrying a clear – and in the event, diplomatically damaging – ideological charge tying the politics of the Republic to international communism.[173] But here again we must return to the fact that the goal of Renau's representation of Spanish Popular Front reforms was not only to highlight the Republic's credentials as a modern European state, but also to link its modernity with an ideological commitment to progressive liberal politics with a strong humanist content. This coupling of modernity and humanist values constituted the foundation of the image that the Republican government sought to convey. To Renau, this ambition squared perfectly with the unique representational

[168] Both Rosón and Mendelson discuss how rural images were used by Republicans and Francoists in different ways. See Rosón, M. 'Fotomurales del Pabellón Español', 291f, and Mendelson, J. *Documenting Spain*, 172-183.

[169] The first was delivered at the end of July and the second the end of November 1937. For Renau's account of these, as well as extracts from one of the texts prepared, see *Arte en Peligro.*

[170] Mendelson, J. *Documenting Spain*, 164f.

[171] Ibid., 144. The article was entitled 'La photographie à l'Exposition' and originally appeared in *Arts et metiers graphiques*, 62 (1938), 37-41.

[172] Ibid., 143.

[173] Ibid., 125-183. Mendelson's chapter on the Republican Pavilion focuses to a large degree on the political ambiguities that resulted from Renau's use of styles and imagery that may be linked to his political pre-war oeuvre. For contemporary statements highlighting the importance of not being linked to the Soviet Union, see Ángel Ossorio's comments in Cabañas Bravo, M. 'Renau y el pabellón español de 1937 en París, con Picasso y sin Dalí', 156.

qualities of photography. As his artistic practice and thoughts on 'new realism' would suggest, photography was, in his mind, intrinsically suited to the task of synthesising the modern and humanist aspects of the progressive Republican vision.

8. EPILOGUE: PROPAGANDA AGAINST ALL THE ODDS (1938-1939)

From the end of 1937, as a result of material shortage and the demoralisation of the civilian population which was well aware of the Republic's international isolation, this progressive vision of the Republic became increasingly difficult to sustain. Rebel advances meant that refugees swelled urban centres, and in addition to housing and sanitation problems resulting from overcrowding, larger cities (especially Barcelona) began to suffer acute food shortages. The Republic was unable to make up the lack through imports, partly because sea connections were cut off by Franco, partly because Non-Intervention meant that the Republic, with few exceptions, had to pay over the odds for military materiel, leaving it short of funds for anything else. Non-Intervention was also the deep cause of a military situation that had become increasingly dire. The North had fallen to Franco in summer of 1937, and with it vital industrial resources. This prompted a government move (including Renau and his family) to Barcelona, where Juán Negrín, Prime Minister from May 1937, tried to exert greater control over the Republic's remaining centre of war industry. But the arms embargo and erratic French border policy entailed severe limitations for Republican defence. This became particularly clear at Teruel, which was taken by Republican forces on 7 January 1938, after intense fighting in some of the worst winter conditions that Spain had ever seen. The town was lost again less than two months later, together with precious materiel and nearly 15,000 troops. What happened at Teruel encapsulated the problems from which the Republic could never break free. Despite having built a competent fighting force in record time, the material inferiority imposed by a one-sided arms embargo placed the Republic at an insurmountable disadvantage. It could not win the war militarily, by 1938 that much was absolutely clear; and hope even for Republican survival in the medium term began to be eroded with every new setback.

Events in spring 1938 made the situation increasingly desperate on all fronts. Barcelona, which had been target of mass-bombing in December 1937, saw a second wave of saturation bombing by Italian planes in March. No part of the city was spared – even hotels with foreign correspondents and wealthy areas were hit – though poorer areas, crammed with refugees, bore the brunt of the attack and thus of the suffering.[1] For

[1] Graham, H. *The Spanish Republic at War*, 351.

the first time in the war, Catalonia would also be directly threatened by the rebel armies, as Franco amassed all available fire power to break through the Aragon front shortly after the recapture of Teruel. The northern wing of the rebel advance reached the Catalan town of Lleida at the beginning of April, then the power station at Tremp, temporarily blacking out Barcelona and reducing industrial output thereafter. Meanwhile its central forces continued towards the coast of Castellón province in the Valencia region (then Levante). On 15 April they reached Vinaroz (Vinaròs) on the Mediterranean coast, cutting the remaining Republican territory in two.

The worsening situation inevitably strained political collaboration at all levels. Negrín's public war policy was one of resistance and a widened 'national unity' against foreign intervention in Spain, since only continued military resistance might force Franco to treat, thus enabling the conditions for a meaningful negotiated peace for the Republic (as was Negrín's plan, for which he was already attempting to negotiate in secret). The PCE supported Negrín resistance policy as the only available strategy, other than outright surrender. The PCE was the only party which by virtue of its discipline managed to display a relative united front here, at least among its ideological core members. Most other organisations, including PSOE-UGT and the CNT, were deeply divided over the issue of continued military resistance, and internal discord would only intensify as further dislocations and material deprivation ensued. Divisions became very apparent at cabinet level, too, leading to a cabinet crisis and the formation, on 5 April, of a new government in which Indalecio Prieto exited and Negrín took over from him the war portfolio (while still also remaining in his post as Prime Minister). Prieto had become openly pessimistic and defeatist after Teruel, as well as increasingly critical in public of the PCE and how its organisational proselytism had damaged the PSOE. In the build-up to the cabinet reshuffle, Prieto had also been publicly criticised by Jesús Hernández, who had thereby made himself guilty of breaching ministerial protocol. As a result Hernández too lost his cabinet post in the reshuffle, which in turn meant the era of Renau and his colleagues at the Ministry of Public Instruction and Fine Arts reached its end.[2]

After his resignation was confirmed on 22 April 1938, Renau took up the post of Director of Graphic Propaganda at the General Commissariat of the Central Group of Armies (which meant he effectively followed Hernández, who after exiting the cabinet

[2] Ibid., 360-367. For an analysis focusing on the PCE's perspective on the cabinet crisis, see Hernández Sánchez, F. *Guerra o Revolución*, 369-379.

was appointed as the Group's General Commissar.). Thus there commenced a phase when Renau was able to focus more on graphic arts production. Very little documentation about his activities in this role has survived, but we do have a number of Renau's posters produced during this new phase, and published almost exclusively by the Subsecretariat of Propaganda, part of the Ministry of the Interior. Some of them number among the best produced during the entire war.[3] Maintaining such high standards was doubly remarkable considering the material shortages now obtaining. But if conditions were particularly challenging, the need for images that could boost military and civilian morale was, at the same time, particularly acute. In this period, referred to by himself as one of the most intense of his life, Renau faced the gargantuan task of shoring up, against all psychological and material odds, the disintegrating hope of an exhausted Republican population.[4]

Renau's initial approach to this formidable task may partly be deduced from an article he published a little earlier on 16 February 1938 (that is, when he was still General Director of Fine Arts) in the Catalan daily *La Vanguardia*. Entitled 'Between life and death' (Entre la vida y la muerte), the article stressed that in the circumstances they all faced the need for positive art was much greater and pressing than critical art.[5] Artists had to remind audiences of the universal values championed by the Republic and reiterate that the stakes of the conflict went beyond the survival of a particular government, as they concerned nothing less than the very possibility of a just and democratic future. To succumb to pessimism in the present was to betray this aspiration and surrender to the enemy, ideologically as well as practically.

If there was a moment when an optimistic tone may still have resonated, it was during the initial stage of the battle of the Ebro in summer 1938, which is indirectly referenced in one of Renau's posters from this time. The battle objectives were to defend Valencia from encroaching Francoist attack, to reconnect the two Republican zones, and to prove to international observers that the Republic still retained substantial fighting

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3 Again Renau's posters were likely, material situation permitting, to be distributed widely in the Republic. There is no precise data, but a official decree of 16 August 1938 stated that the Press and Propaganda Section of the General Commissariat – of which Renau formed a part – would be free to use all the resources of the Interior Ministry's Subsecretariat of Propaganda, and that it should distribute all material produced through the channels of the General Staff of the Republican Army. See Cabañas Bravo, M. *Josep Renau*, 217. Scarcity of empirical material during this period of Renau's career is also noted by Cabañas (218).

4 Archivo Josep Renau (Valencia), 'Apuntes sueltos manuscritos y mecanografiados', 14/4.3. Renau also comments on the scarcity in Ruipérez, M. 'Renau-Fontseré: Los carteles de la guerra civil', 16.

5 Renau, J. Entre la vida y la muerte' *La Vanguardia* (Suplemento de Arte y Arqueologia) 16 February 1938, no page numbers.

capacity. To these ends, a regrouped Republican army launched its attack on enemy positions across the Ebro river just past midnight on 24-25 July. The operation was initially a success and generated a great upswing in the Republican mood. In combination with the mounting international crisis over German claims in Czechoslovakia, even the Republican President Manuel Azaña thought that the tide might finally turn in favour of the Republic. Franco's counter attack was ferocious, and the Ebro campaign turned into the greatest battle of the war. It involved Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union testing new weaponry and strategies, especially in the air, as nearly 3,000 planes participated in air clashes of a scale that would not be witnessed again until the Battle of Britain in the early stages of the Second World War.[6] Renau's poster of this period, although it does not refer to the Ebro specifically, was almost certainly produced with it in mind, as its depiction of the centrality of aircraft to the Republican campaign attests [Fig. 26]. The composition shows a pilot looking up towards a light blue sky in which he sees a squadron of Republican fighter planes forming a 'V' for 'Victory'. The man's awe-inspired expression and the dynamic formation of the squadron produce a sense of elation in the viewer, while the text 'today more than ever' (hoy más que nunca), placed above the spelling out of 'Victory', is written among the clouds in a style which suggests that it is carried by the wind, further reinforcing the general impression of lightness, optimism, and triumph.

Another example of the positive propaganda advocated in Renau's *Vanguardia* article can be found in a poster made up of a photo collage of men and women arranged against a green clenched fist and a red star [Fig. 27]. The poster is unsigned but was probably made by Renau towards the end of the war.[7] Apart from the tone, the form reminds us of the fact that Renau's article of February 1938 argued for the journalistic photograph as the most powerful means to convey the positive values defended by the Republic, while the absent signature could be explained by the fact that in late 1938 all artists were told by the Subsecretariat of Propaganda to leave their work unsigned in order to protect them from future reprisals.[8] The people appearing in the poster are all –

[6] Graham, H. *The Spanish Civil War*, 109f. See also Thomas, H. *The Spanish Civil War*, 813-824 (esp. 821), and Graham, H. *The Spanish Republic at War*, 373f, 382.

[7] Facundo Tomás Ferré maintains that this poster was indeed made by Renau. See *Los Carteles Valencianos*, 147.

[8] Galdón i Casanoves, E. 'La salvaguarda d'un patrimoni per a la protecció ciutadana' in Aznar Soler, M. (ed) *Valencia, capital cultural de la República*, 128. It should be noted, however, that Renau did sign other work made at the very end of the conflict. See reproductions in Cabañas Bravo, M. *Josep Renau*, 230-234. Another possible explanation of the absence of any signature is that it was made by a team. Either way, Renau's direct influence is highly likely, which is enough to make the poster relevant for the purposes of the argument here.

with the exception of two nurses, a peasant, and three youths of undefined profession – part of the armed forces. All are smiling, if not laughing. They seem relaxed, confident, proud. Beneath the portraits, a text reads 'The popular army fights for the well-being, happiness, and liberty of the Spanish people' (Por el bienestar, la felicidad y la libertad del pueblo español, lucha el ejército popular).

However, if the exuberance of the 'Victory' poster corresponded to a brief moment of optimism afforded by the early stages of the Ebro offensive, it is likely that the undeniably kitsch celebration of the Popular Army in the unsigned poster jarred with the feelings of many Republican civilians. The relationship between army and rural communities had been strained by increasing food requisitions, sometimes amounting to plain theft, especially during the panicked flight of Republican troops from the Aragon front. To compensate for military losses, the Republic also had to step up conscription. This meant calling up ever younger and older drafts, as well as using increasingly intrusive methods to track anyone trying to avoid military service.[9] Tension between the civilian population and army may well have been the reason for publishing the 'Popular Army' poster in the first place, but considering the increasingly desperate situation faced by a war-weary Republican citizenry, the message likely rang hollow.

At one level the Republic's loss of credibility affected the communists most of all, since they had largely built their wartime mass-support on the premise that the party would guarantee victory. Hence the PCE's rigid discipline and stoic adherence to an apparently inflexible policy of resistance could only be maintained at increasing political cost. 'I no longer believed in the communists. Their language, everyday familiar language, was completely stereotyped; they reminded me too much of priests, the same slogans day after day', Alvaro Delgado, an art student living in Madrid, later recalled.[10] Those who had joined during the war because of the party's military virtues now left in droves.[11] But the political crisis also affected the legitimacy of the Republican project as a whole. The increasing militarisation of daily life was undermining the Republic's democratic *raison d'etre*, and its legitimacy was further eroded by the failure adequately to protect its population from the multiple pressures and dislocations caused by war. Death, hunger, and disease did not only diminish hope, but also signalled that the state was no longer able to fulfil its obligations – in the sense

[9] Graham, H. *The Spanish Republic at War*, 352f, 375.
[10] Fraser, R. *Blood of Spain*, 487.
[11] See figures in Hernández Sánchez, F. *Guerra o Revolución*, 246. The PCE was losing members fast already from the end of 1937, as membership figures in January 1938 were down by 46.8% (from 339,682 to 180,821) compared to November 1937.

of providing a minimum level of welfare – towards those who had sacrificed in its defence. It became increasingly difficult, as a result, to continue to present the Republic as the embodiment of a credible progressive project.[12]

A tacit recognition of this erosion of legitimacy can be seen in another set of posters that were also anonymous but in clear ways linked to Renau. Once again the composition are, in the main, made up from montage, but what is particularly striking – and what clearly indicates Renau's involvement, either as the sole designer or as member of a design team – is that the constituent photographs are combined with precisely the same kind of statistical graphs that could be seen in the Republican pavilion in Paris.[13] One poster purports to display the mood of rural workers 'before' and 'after' the proclamation of the Republic, and explains the illustrated shift from misery to joy through a graph indicating the scale of land re-distribution [Fig. 28]. Another highlights the increase in the number of Republican maternity ward beds during the reformist years of 1931-1933, and from 1936 onwards. Together, the images and numbers thus aimed to remind the population of the real potential of a new social order by pointing at concrete changes that the Republic had already achieved. Rather than a passionate exultation of popular unity, they present a reasoned appeal for support. As such, they effectively constitute a tacit admission of the distance now separating large parts of the population from their leaders – a distance that would no doubt continue to grow as the prospects of Republican survival faded.

Renau's most eloquent celebration of the Spanish Republican project, produced sometime in summer and/or autumn 1938, was also, in many ways, his most subdued. It was conceived as a set of illustrations for the Republican government's 'The Thirteen Points of Victory', proclaimed on 1 May 1938. 'The Thirteen Points' was essentially Negrín's liberal constitutional blueprint with nationalist overtones aiming to broaden the Republic's support domestically, especially among conservatives and Catholics uneasy about the extensive influence Germany and Italy in Francoist Spain, while also, and most importantly, serving as starting point for renewed diplomatic efforts to force Franco to consider a negotiated peace. The international projection of 'The Thirteen Points' was thus crucial, and in this context it is significant that Renau's illustrations were intended for another international exhibition, this time the World Fair to be

[12] Graham, H. *The Spanish Civil War*, 106f.

[13] The Hungarian photographer Francois Kollar photographed the contents of the Pavilion and reproductions of his images can be consulted in the library of the Museo Centro de Arte Reina Sofia in Madrid. See also images reproduced in Mendelson, J. *Documenting Spain*, chapter 5 (especially 154).

inaugurated in New York in summer 1939.[14] The official ending of military hostilities in Spain on 1 April meant that 'The Thirteen Points' would never be shown there, but they were nonetheless reproduced earlier for a domestic Republican audience and still constitute an important part of Renau's oeuvre.[15] Moreover, although they were not the last images he made during the war, they may be considered, for various reasons, to represent an end point in the specific political and artistic journey charted in this thesis. As we shall see, they marked the point when his radical politics found, as a response to the encroaching violence of fascism, its most moderate and inclusive expression. 'The Thirteen Points' was moreover the first work showing the full potential of Renau's skills as a montage artist, even if those skills were here deployed, paradoxically, to an effect that complicates the images' claim to realism.

If Renau's graphic work during the first stages of the war had aimed to foster a broad alliance between the disparate and in many cases antagonistic constituencies making up the fractured social base of the Republican polity, 'The Thirteen Points' took this inclusive strategy to its logical if polemical conclusion [Fig. 29]. The images contain no party symbols or slogans. Strictly speaking they are no longer necessary because the meaning of each illustration is already encapsulated in the 'point' to which it refers, and of course the inclusion of overtly ideologically combative images or texts would have done little good in New York. Nevertheless the omission is still significant in relation to the purely visual impression produced. As a result, despite illustrating a concrete political blueprint, the images acquire a universal dimension. Themes like democracy, justice, and independence are represented in an international symbolic language that would have appealed to a wide, heterogeneous audience both at home and abroad. Through this open-endedness the 'Thirteen Points' achieves a communicative reach beyond the conventional confines of propaganda.[16]

In technical terms, the illustrations for 'The Thirteen Points' contain some of the most accomplished photomontages produced during the Republican period, and as a whole the series can be said to represent, as Albert Forment claims, Renau's first work

[14] For an investigation into the preparations that were made, see Murga Castro, I. 'El pabellón español de 1939: un proyecto frustrado para la Exposición Internacional de Nueva York' *Archivo Español de Arte*, lxxxiii, 331 (July-September 2010), pp. 213-234. The initial proposal to make a set of montages for the occasion apparently came from Renau himself. See Forment, A. *Josep Renau*, 172.

[15] For a domestic audience he also produced produced a poster with small illustrations of each of the points, and a cover drawing for leaflet outlining the programme. See Cabañas Bravo, M. *Josep Renau*, 218-224, and Basilio, M. M. *Visual Propaganda*, 58-63. The reproductions shown here are from photographs of tests made with silver bromide, which are the only surviving copies of the images destined for New York. See Forment, A. *Josep Renau*, 172.

[16] Cf. Forment, A. *Josep Renau*, 173.

of full maturity.[17] Much of the imagery is familiar from previous works, but there is a sense in which the iconographical, technical, and rhetorical elements of Renau's first years as a montage artist come together to produce a more refined result. Formative foreign influences are still visible, but they have been incorporated into an artistic expression that is now genuinely and fully Renau's own. Ironically, perhaps, considering the artist's advocacy of realism, 'The Thirteen Points' also reproduce, albeit in more understated form, the oneiric quality seen in some of his pre-war work. The visual cues – skies, seas, voting under the rainbow, the sheer fact that everything appears distant – are all subtle but together generate an impression that the montages portray a series of tranquil dreamscapes, surrealistic visions of an imagined future, rather than any actually existing reality. But then again, unrealised desire was, of course, precisely what remained of the Republican attempt to create a more democratic and egalitarian Spain. Whether this ties Renau's illustrations to the moment of impending defeat is an open question; in essence the Republic was always more 'real' as a symbol than as an accomplished fact.

After Spain: Renau in Mexico and Berlin

Despite the tenacity of the Republican forces, the Ebro offensive would end in another defeat, this time more devastating than any preceding it because it was not solely military. For the retreat back across the river in November 1938 was not so much the result of a final blow on the battlefield – though a shortage of arms and adequately trained men had once again placed Republican forces as a massive material disadvantage – but rather the diplomatic blow incurred in September as Britain and France signed the Munich agreement and thus opted to allow Hitler to dismember the last functioning democracy in Europe rather than take a stand against Nazi expansionism. In so doing, they showed that they were willing to go to any lengths to appease Hitler, which in turn deprived Negrín's policy of open-ended resistance of its fundamental rationale, counting, as it did, on Britain and France soon being forced to confront fascism's imperial intent as a threat to the continent as a whole.[18]

While the Ebro offensive did successfully block Franco's attack on Valencia, it did not prevent the fall of Catalonia, which occurred swiftly across the January and February of 1939. Intense war weariness and loss of hope had left the civilian

[17] Ibid., 172.
[18] Graham, H. *The Spanish Civil War*, 110f.

population utterly demoralised. Resistance to advancing rebel troops continued but could do nothing to halt their eventual advance, and soon hundreds of thousands civilians, as well as military personnel, turned to flee across the Pyrenees into France.[19]

Among those fleeing were Renau and his family, more numerous since the birth of his daughter, Julia (in March 1937). According to his own account, the artist had been in his Barcelona studio working on a poster during the last days of January 1939 when his third brother, Alejandro,[20] a sergeant working for the Air Force, had come to look for him. Renau was allegedly unaware of the fact that the rebels were just about to enter the city, and the 'rescue mission' initiated by Alejandro, who had access to a pick-up truck, managed to get the family, plus parts of Renau's library and archive, out of Barcelona at the very last minute.[21] In the second week of February, they crossed the border at Portús, where Renau would commence a period of uninterrupted exile lasting 37 years. He was first interned, together with his brothers Juan and Alejandro, and thousands of other Republican refugees, at Argèles-sûr-Mer, one of the camps set up on the freezing beaches of France's south east coast. About a month later, after receiving help from a certain Miss Palmer of the Carnegie Institute, he was able to leave the camp and travel to Toulouse, where like many other exiled Republican intellectuals, he received financial aid from Pablo Picasso.[22] Shortly thereafter, and as a prominent Republican artist, he was able to arrange papers to go with his immediate family, as well as Manuela's sister and her two children, to Mexico, which had opened its borders to Republicans and became one of the primary destinations for the Spanish intellectual community in exile.[23]

The Republic resisted militarily for another couple of months. The government had also been forced into France after the fall of Catalonia, but Negrín flew back to the Republican centre-zone with the intention of directing residual military resistance in a safe zone until either the international climate changed, or, at the very least, to gain time for an orderly evacuation of those most at risk of reprisals. Negrin was also holding out to force from Franco a a guarantee of no reprisals against the civilian population, a hope that was brutally quashed with Franco's adoption of the so-called 'Law of Political Responsibilities in February 1939, and which provided the legal framework for blanket

[19] Ibid. Thomas, H. *The Spanish Civil War*, 844-858.
[20] Alejandro was the second child of José Renau Montoro and Matilde Berenguer Cortés.
[21] Forment, A. *Josep Renau*, 175. See also Bellón, F. *Josep Renau*, 265-279, for further details on the Renau family's exit from Catalonia.
[22] Ibid. 176-179.
[23] Boat departed from St Nazaire 6 May 1939.

repression in the post-war period. Then, in March, the desperation caused by war-weariness and material deprivation led a group of military leaders in Madrid to rebel against Negrín in the mistaken belief that they would stand a better chance at getting Franco to the negotiation table – a rebellion which sparked, in effect, a civil war within the civil war. The negotiation attempt came to nought, and the impossible situation thus facing the Republic led its commanding officers to surrender. Franco declared the war officially over on 1 April 1939, though the vanquished would still suffer persecution and discrimination for several decades to come.[24]

Once in Mexico, Renau would embark on new political art projects, especially in the form of mural paintings, while continuing to make a living through commercial poster production.[25] From 1949, he would also work on a montage series, only completed twenty years later, called *The American Way of Life*. The series may be considered his *magnum opus*, yet Renau found no publisher for it in Mexico. Instead, it would first be partially published in 1954 in East Germany, where Renau also moved after being offered, in 1958, a job as an illustrator for East German state television. That he was prepared to leave his life, including his family, in Mexico, has to be explained with reference to a number of factors, including the unsatisfying nature of his poster work and a deteriorating relation with Manuela (who, together with their two youngest children, nonetheless reunited with him in East Berlin in 1959).[26] Renau would engage in a series of film and mural based projects in East Germany, but acclimatisation proved difficult both professionally and in terms of private life – partly because of cultural and linguistic barriers, partly because of the East German Communist Party's dogmatic approach to art.[27] Even so Renau would remain in a resident of the country until his death in 1982.[28] From 1976, one year after Franco's death, he started making occasional return trips to Valencia, where he was warmly welcomed by a progressive generation trying to recover a repressed past. Yet his engagement with cultural life within Spain would not be resumed in any form comparable to that of the Republican years. His exile

[24] For a recent and detailed analysis of the Casado rebellion, see Viñas, A. & Hernández Sánchez, F. *El desplome de la República: la verdadera historia del fin de la guerra civil* (Madrid: Crítica, 2010). For an analytical overview of the repression that followed the war, see Graham, H. *The War and its Shadow.* See also Preston, P. *The Spanish Holocaust*, Part 6.

[25] The mural work was first done in collaboration with the Mexican realist painter David Siqueiros, as well as other artists. See Forment, A. *Josep Renau*, and Bellón, F. *Josep Renau*, 281-367. A concise overview of Renau's entire artistic career can also be found in Cabañas Bravo, M. 'Josep Renau y la recuperación de una belleza comprometida'.

[26] Cabañas Bravo, M. 'Josep Renau y la recuperación de una belleza comprometida', 14f.

[27] It seems Renau never managed to acquire a real proficiency in German.

[28] Renau died in a Berlin hospital on 11 October 1982. His ashes lie buried in the Friedrichfelde cemetery in the German capital.

in 1939 had marked a definite end to the cultural project envisioned in relation to his native country.

CONCLUSION

The content of Renau's cultural vision was, as we have seen, coloured both by artistic and political conceptions of progressive social change. The extent to which the one or the other would influence his activity varied with the historical circumstances in which he operated. Both aspects – the artistic and the political – were always present, continually remoulding each other in a dynamic relation constantly unsettled by tensions. To conclude the work presented here, it seems appropriate, then, to provide a summarizing analysis of how these tensions found expression in the work of Renau and his colleagues during the period of the Spanish Second Republic. Such an analysis must first return to the theoretical roots of these tensions before considering their impact on two broad areas: the first concerning the relation between the artistic and political avant-garde, and the second the relation between the avant-garde as such and the 'people'.

The artistic and political avant-garde shared an aspiration to find new ways of framing and organising a future social community. That art could play a decisive role in the elaboration of new ways of living was initially suggested in the work of German Idealists in the late nineteenth century. Kant first set the stage by describing the experience of Beauty as a conceptually distinct way to relate to the world, which led Hegel to proclaim that art had a special ability to convey the Truth. In addition to this ability, Schiller proposed that the aesthetic experience, conceived in Kantian terms, also carried a lesson that could form the basis for a more peaceful and harmonious society – a society where oppositions between subject and object, activity and passivity are dissolved in a universal totality based on co-operation and equality. This vision has, consciously or otherwise, clearly influenced utopian visions during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and must be seen as part of the intellectual heritage shaping collectivist visions during the interwar period. For the German Idealists and their heirs, aesthetics was not simply a visual language, but also a reflection of the defining values of the community. But to inspire new ways of living, then, art had to innovate, to explore new aesthetic forms. This innovation would take increasingly radical forms at the beginning of the twentieth century, which gradually gave rise to accusations that art had retreated into a subjective world of fantasy. The formal experimentation of the avant-garde led its critics to claim that art had ceased to reflect any shared reality beyond the surface of the image itself.

Such voices grew stronger as the Great War and its aftermath shattered European

self-perceptions and intensified demands for social change. Art had to engage with social issues in a more direct way, radical critics maintained. This demand related not only to content, but would also concern questions of form. Social engagement thus became one of the reasons why many artists returned to some kind of realism. But realism was not necessarily imposed on artists from external political quarters. Its political value, particularly at a time of burgeoning mass-democracy, was perceived by many artists to reside in its inherent qualities. Among these were its concern for a shared reality, its accessibility, and its ability to communicate messages on an emotive level. For these reasons, realism appeared the natural aesthetic choice for artists who wanted to act as witnesses to social conditions and contribute to political mobilisation processes against worsening manifestations of social injustice.

As a result of this trend there emerged a closer collaboration between the artistic and political avant-garde – a collaboration where the role of the artist was to increase political awareness by providing critical portraits of social life. This was the role that Renau would adopt after his first solo show of December 1928 had contributed to a personal and creative crisis. Rather than imagined landscapes, the focus was now on existing social phenomena. Artistic commitment to change was to be directed towards the task of conveying social knowledge, which would, in theory, underwrite a consensus guiding united collective action. This function was particularly evident in the increasing interest shown during the 1930s, in Spain as well as Europe as a whole, in documentary modes of representation. In combination with progressive politics, such forms played an important part in social change, even if they did not in themselves indicate a vision of an alternative. By claiming to establish the truth, the documentary image delineated the realm of the possible.

As art forms based on modern technology, however, photography and film also represented, in and of themselves, a progressive alternative to traditional painting. They offered a new aesthetics, a modern visual language associated with science and rationality. They conferred on representations of visual reality an objective dimension, and were thus powerful instruments in progressive struggles against traditional mysticism. For all these reasons Josep Renau saw a particular potential in photography and film as visual languages in which a new national self-image could be formulated. Through the photographic arts a new national myth could be established: a myth constituted, essentially, by fact.

From this perspective it is clear that the Idealist aesthetic vision was present in

Renau's work also after his entry into politics. It was the political weakness of the Spanish Communist Party, which he had joined after being deeply impressed by the theoretical teachings of Marx and Engels, that allowed affiliated artists to play such a prominent role in the formulation of an alternative social vision for Spain. The constructive role played by artists in this regard was metaphorically mirrored in Renau's use of montage, a principle that Renau took from film and applied to still photography. Montage represented a form of innovative realism, where the persuasive power of the photograph was combined with the freedom to create new meaning. In his adoption of this technique, using reality fragments in compositions where truth could be given a new form, Renau arguably reconciled the conflicting priorities of the political and artistic avant-gardes.

The onset of the war in July 1936 altered the dynamic once again, and led Renau to insist that artistic production be guided more rigorously by political strategy. This shift also corresponded to the phenomenal transformation of the Spanish Communist Party, which as a result of its war policy and the vital aid provided to the Republic by the Soviet Union rapidly turned into one of the most influential political forces within the Spanish Republic. To some extent, then, the more imposing presence of the party affected cultural production too, or at least it did among its own members. But in a broader context the shift towards a stricter adherence to strategies shaped by political and military concerns must primarily be understood as a response to the war itself, which immeasurably raised the stakes of Spanish social conflict and obliged cultural workers of all political persuasions to focus on making a direct contribution to the war effort.

We have also seen that Renau was not the only one who granted politics a greater role in artistic production during the war. Most progressive artists and writers chose to subordinate their work to the political demands of the moment. In so doing, they were not driven, in the first instance, by any specific or clearly defined party political programme, but rather by a broad loyalty to the Popular Front coalition and to some form of anti-fascism. It would be similarly misguided to consider Republican artists' widespread adherence to realism during the Spanish Civil War as anything other than a generic response to the war and their understanding of fascism as resting fundamentally on a dangerous denial of reality. As already indicated, realism was perceived by progressive cultural producers to have a number of qualities that made it a natural aesthetic for those who wanted to bear witness and convey an image of human

suffering. In addition to this, Josep Renau, together with other commentators within the Republican cultural elite, described realism as an aesthetic tied to democratic values, to pluralism and humanism – values that were all considered to be antithetical to fascism. Exactly how artists understood realism varied, but as long as the anti-fascist coalition agreed on fundamental points in a collective war vision, such differences did not cause any significant internal rupture. What united the Republic's progressive artists was anti-fascist strategy, not artistic vision.

This did not mean, however, that artistic visions were irrelevant. Many artists and writers saw, just like Renau and his nearest colleagues did, anti-fascism as more than a defence of constitutional rights. In order to secure a lasting victory over fascism it was necessary, they maintained, to seek greater social change and alter the very conditions that had made the emergence of fascism possible. In these circumstances, many cultural workers continued to see a central role for art, in the formulation of new modes of co-existence. As a result, aesthetic dreams were revivified, even when the political and military task of securing the Republic's survival became an inescapable priority for all. Calls for political discipline and artistic innovation were equally intensified, which in turn meant that the tensions between the perspectives of the artistic and political vanguard became more marked. This is seen clearly in Renau's 1936 lecture on Republican war posters and the debates that followed. But these tensions were not as dramatic as the plain contradictions that often arose when the progressive cultural and political elite had to contend with the fact historical agency was no longer theirs alone, but had to be shared with many groups of other social and political actors (‘the people’), as a result of the revolutionary changes following the July 1936 coup in much of the territory where the military insurgents were defeated.

In the eyes of Renau and many other radical activists within the cultural left, the 'people' had long been seen as a necessary participant in the elaboration of a new Spanish culture. The 'people' was both a guarantor of authenticity and a historical force destined to shape the future. According to Renau it was not enough, then, to increase access to culture and democratise its consumption. Rather, the 'people' had to be placed in a position where it could creatively shape the community to come. Concrete steps towards this goal were taken by Renau's flagship project during the Republican period, the magazine *Nueva Cultura*, and was furthermore given clear expression during the war, when popular cultural production was encouraged both by the Republican army and the PCE-led Ministry of Public Instruction and Fine Arts. This was the main

difference between the policy developed during the war and that pursued by the reformist liberal government in the period 1931 to 1933. The 'people' would now be active participants in the formation of a new Republican order.

Yet celebrations of popular cultural production on both military and home fronts quickly made apparent one of the problems inherent in Renau's project: beginners in poetry and visual arts tended to imitate the traditional forms with which they were familiar, which in turn minimised the effect that art would have as a force of innovation. In response to this dilemma, most radical left-wing artists and writers, including Renau, ended up adopting the same paternalistic approach which liberal intellectuals had displayed prior to the war – an approach that Renau himself had criticised. A thorough popularisation of Republican cultural production was consequently postponed for the future. For the moment, art and literature would exist on several levels, allowing amateur productions to be included as valid parts of a national cultural heritage but with the works of the cultural elite retaining their authority and prestige.

But practical (as opposed to theoretical) stances vis-a-vis 'the people' also revealed deeper contradictions in Republican cultural politics. Many cultural progressives supported, in principle, the idea of radical social change, not least in order to make a future resurgence of fascism impossible, but in practice they opposed the uncontrolled (as they saw it) violence and destruction caused by the unfolding of the popular revolution in Republican territory. Above all, they would not support political demands for the decentralisation of power, demands which weakened the Republic's ability to defend itself. In accordance with this conviction, they contributed to efforts to reconstruct centralised government authority and strengthen the overall co-ordination perceived necessary to build a viable war effort against an internationally-backed military enemy. However, such centralisation went counter to revolutionary conceptions, propagated particularly within anarchist and libertarian circles, which saw local empowerment of grass-roots organisations as an essential part of an anti-fascist order. Local committees and collectives were, according to defenders of the decentralising revolution, the only guarantee of genuine popular rule. The internal political tensions that followed led to several clashes, which in turn damaged the Republic’s international standing and thus its war effort. One of the critical challenges facing the Republican government was, then, to legitimise central rule and unite multiple political wills without resorting to an excessive use of coercive force. In this task, cultural mobilisation strategies inevitably became an indispensable tool.

In order to shape and deliver such strategies, the Republican cultural elite collaborated closely with the Ministry of Public Instruction and Fine Arts – led, for most part of the war, by a team that included Renau. They shared a desire to revitalise the Republican reform programme, which had now become a cornerstone in efforts to legitimise the wartime Popular Front government. To further these efforts and to highlight a governmental commitment to egalitarian politics – crucial given influential revolutionary groups were claiming that the government was hostile to the egalitarian society that the revolutionaries wanted to build – the ministry and its collaborators formulated a cultural policy that expanded access to education and emphasised every citizen's right to participate in the cultural construction of a new Spain. Even if independent worker committees would be increasingly rare, the popular revolution would still prevail on a cultural level.

As a consequence of this policy, the 'revolution' was aestheticised and transformed into a unifying cultural project. For artists and writers eager to engage with social and political developments, aestheticisation became, besides a means to contribute to mobilisation efforts, a way to resolve the tensions that arose in their attempts combine artistic and political commitments. Artistic visions could not always be reduced to concrete political strategy, and to minimise the opposition between the two, politics was to be fused with art. Thus artists would play a central role in the shaping of the now differently defined revolution, while politics would be ascribed the unifying qualities widely ascribed to aesthetics. Politics became another form of artistic self-expression, another way to innovate with the real.

The question remains how this could be squared with the progressive artists' commitment to a vision purportedly defending pluralist democracy. To aestheticise the revolution – that is, to equate it with manifestations of unity – was to limit the register of sanctioned cultural expression, which in turn entailed a reduction of pluralism. But in the Republican case it is unclear to what extent a reduction in pluralism corresponded to an impoverishment of democracy. Aestheticisation was not only a product of the cultural elite but also of ordinary conscripts and other citizens who participated in the Republic's expanded cultural programme. We cannot disregard the possibility that many opted voluntarily to adapt to the limited register that corresponded to the aestheticisation process, especially when the enormous challenges that the Republic faced potentially had a strong unifying effect on the population's outlook (at least until the intensification of desperate material and international circumstances divided opinions on how the war

should best be ended). If the most radical aspects of the revolution were eventually contained, it was because of a complex development shaped by grass-roots actors as well as by leadership figures. In the final analysis, it was a development that was shaped, more than anything else, by the war itself.

Given more time, the changes introduced by the wartime cultural programme might nonetheless have had radical effects. A recognition of peoples' right to participate fully in processes of social formation are not easily erased from historical memory. Radical democratic changes were undoubtedly something that Renau would have supported, even if they would have obliged him to compromise on his own cultural vision. Of course, such visions took various forms among the progressive cultural elite too. Nevertheless, the absence of any sharply defined plans ultimately makes it easier to identify certain common strands. Among these, the most noteworthy may be that Renau and his colleagues – who in their vast majority were not ideological communists – often used a hybrid political language to suggest that a collectivist utopia could be achieved without sacrificing liberal democratic freedoms. Exactly how this might have come to pass remains unclear. The possibilities of progressive social change opened up by the Republic and, more traumatically, by the civil war, were ultimately buried under the myriad ruins that a triumphant fascism left in its wake.

ILLUSTRATIONS

Fig. 1. Josep Renau, [Untitled], 1926.

EL SENTIDO HUMANO DE LA MUJER

Es conveniente hacer destacar en todas sus facetas las diferencias sustanciales o típicas que caracterizan los dos mundos hoy en lucha por la hegemonía en la dirección y apropiamiento de los hechos y principios humanos o vitales. Queremos definir en nuestra expresión «dos mundos» a las dos fuerzas antagónicas, capitalismo y proletariado que, como vemos, se disputan, hoy con más rudeza que nunca, el derecho a ser fundamento en la vida.

Sin pasar ahora a definir algún otro de los infinitos aspectos por los cuales chocan uno contra otro estos dos mundos (uno, el capitalismo, en decadencia, ya que el ciclo histórico de su preponderancia llega a su fin; y el otro, el proletariado, la masa productora, pujante y fuerte, el esclavo que quiere libertarse y lo va consiguiendo poco a poco, aun a costa de grandes dolores), hemos de señalar, aunque sólo sea a título de comentario, la diferencia que en el concepto de la feminidad hay entre ellos y de la que son expresiva muestra las fotografías adjuntas.

En ellas vemos dos tipos bien característicos: el de la decadente y, por lo tanto, teatral y falsa, mujer burguesa, y el de la mujer del pueblo, la trabajadora o campesina, optimista y sana.

En la primera vemos la tan cacareada «flor de estufa»; el sentido mujer en toda su amplitud desaparece en la muñeca de carne aquí representada, individualista y artificial. Nada maternal nos sugiere su actitud, ni siquiera hay en su mirada una atención amistosa hacia los demás. Pero sí un cúmulo de vanidades y la expresión de un deseo de sentirse adorada por todos, y con la convicción de que nadie merece nada de ella.

Todo lo contrario expresa la mujer representada en la segunda fotografía. Ella nos sugiere todo lo que puede ser una mujer: madre y hermana, amiga y amante. En su mirada y la expresión de su rostro hay condensada una atención de cariño hacia todo; de comprensión y amistad hacia todas las cosas. Nos sugiere su contemplación una profunda alegría de vivir y nos sentimos confiados imaginándola compañera nuestra.

Fig. 2. [Artist unknown], 'El Sentido Humano de la Mujer', 1933.

Fig. 3. Josep Renau, [Untitled], 1932.

Fig. 4. Josep Renau, 'Panorama de la sociedad burguesa', 1932.

Fig. 5. John Heartfield, 'Krieg und leichen – die letzte hoffnung der reichen', 1932.

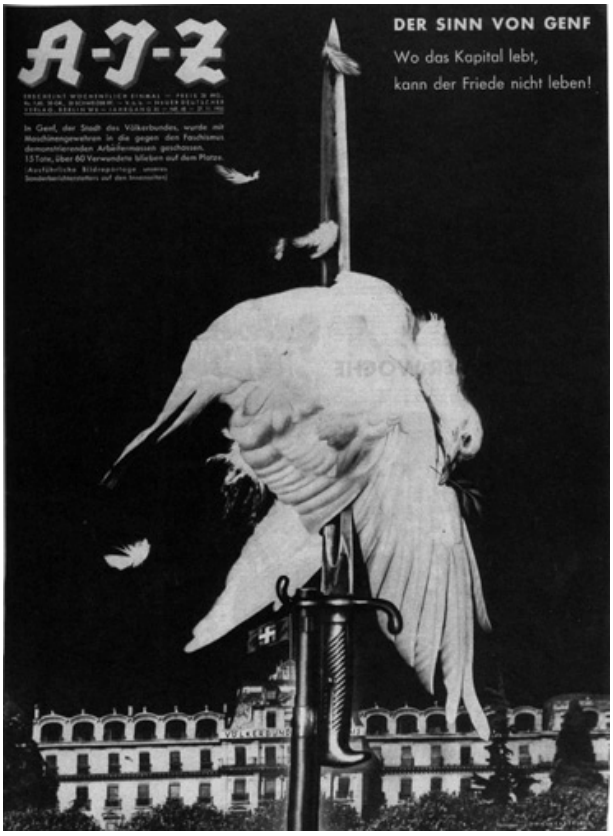


Fig. 6. John Heartfield, 'Der sinn von genf', 1932.

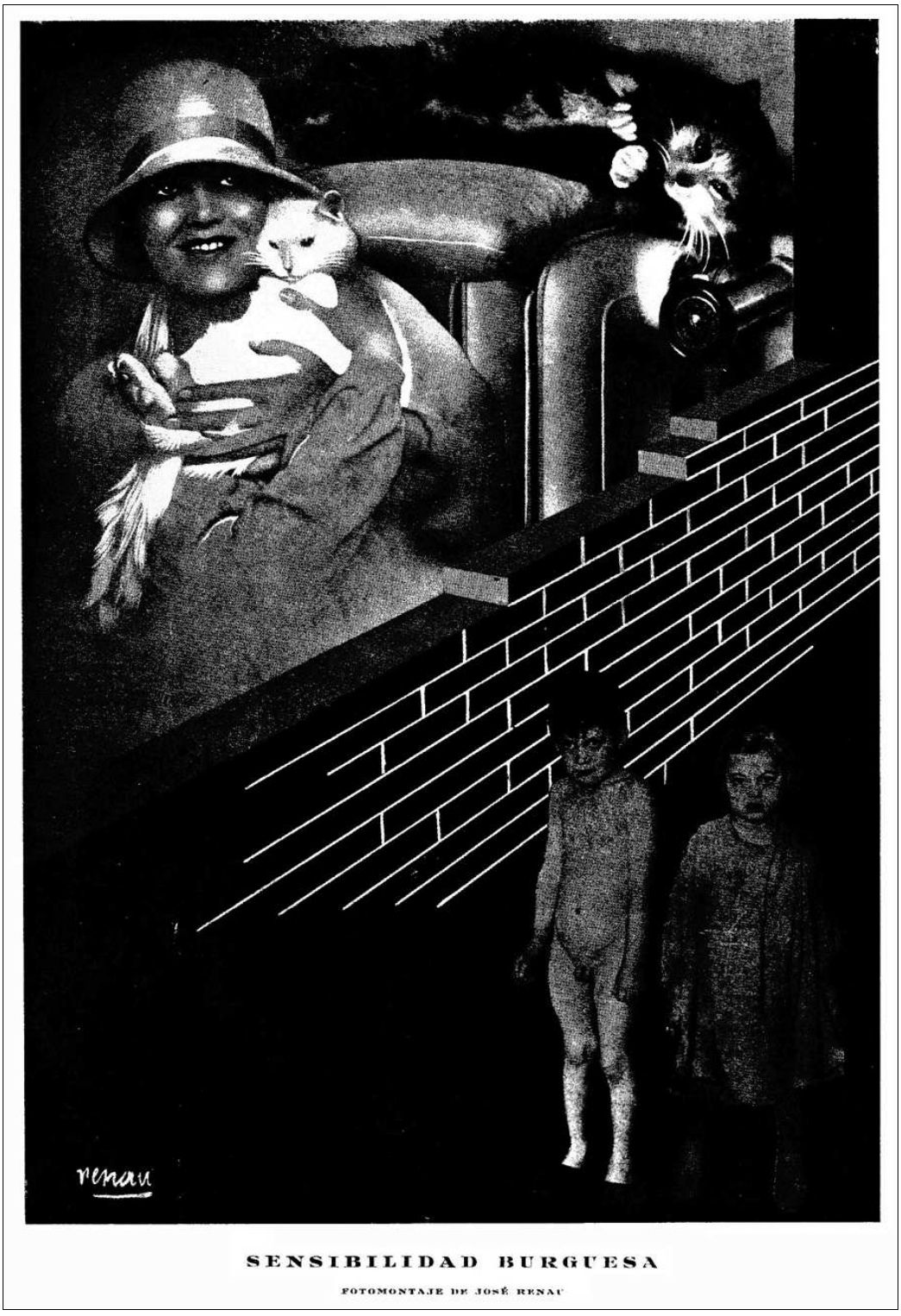


Fig. 7. Josep Renau, 'Sensibilidad burguesa', 1932.

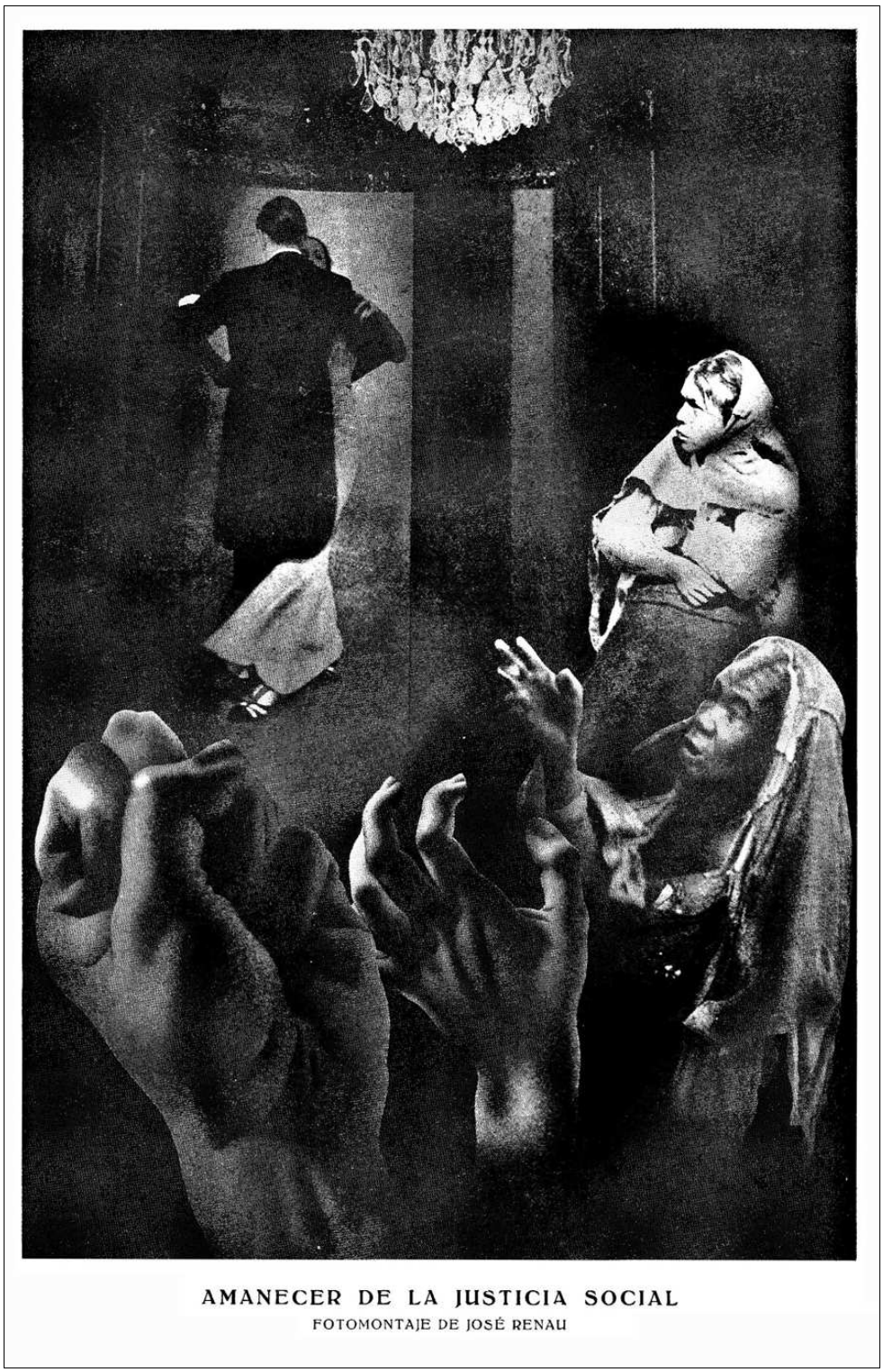


Fig. 8. Josep Renau, 'Amanecer de la justicia social', 1932.

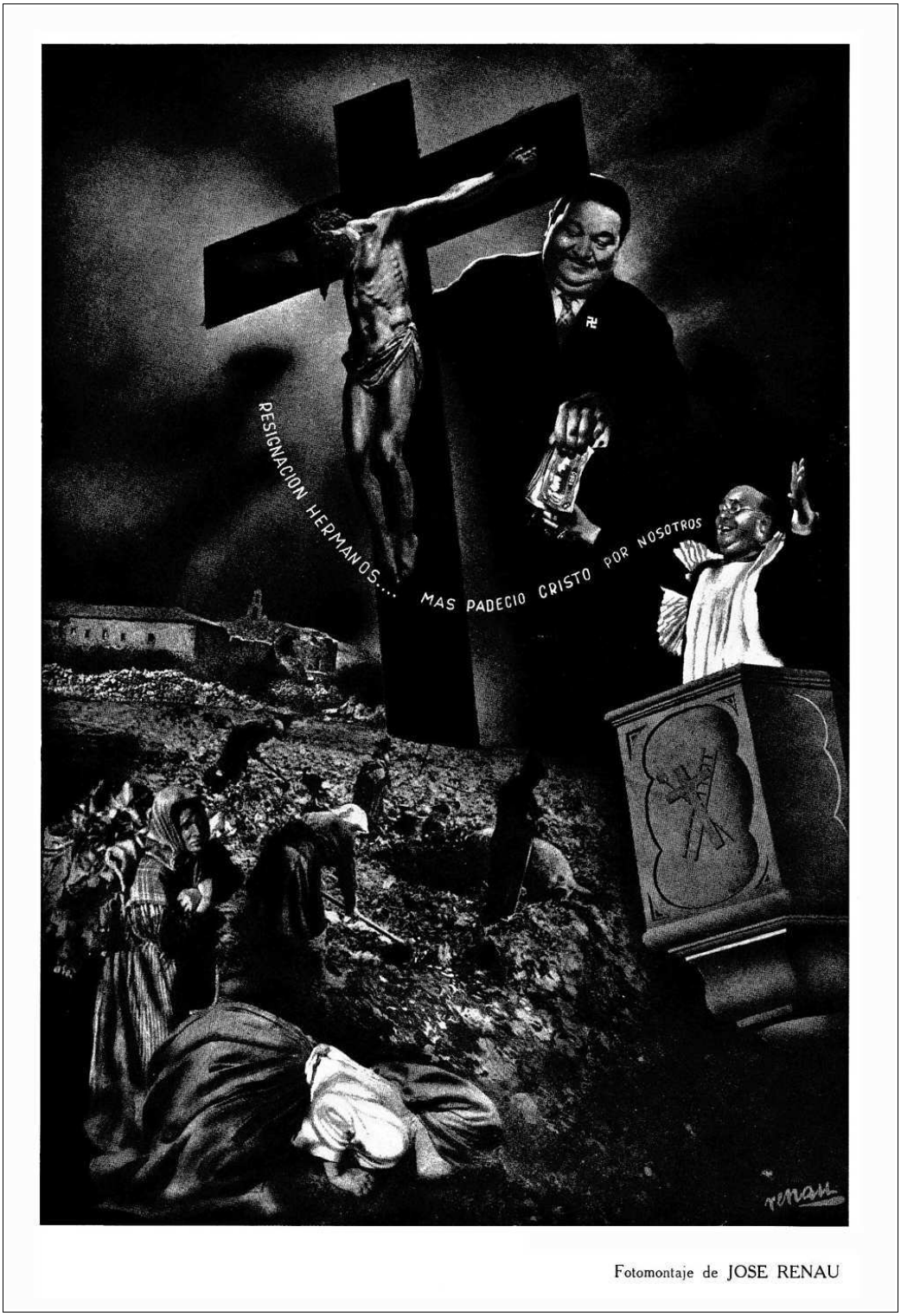


Fig. 9. Josep Renau, [Untitled], 1933.

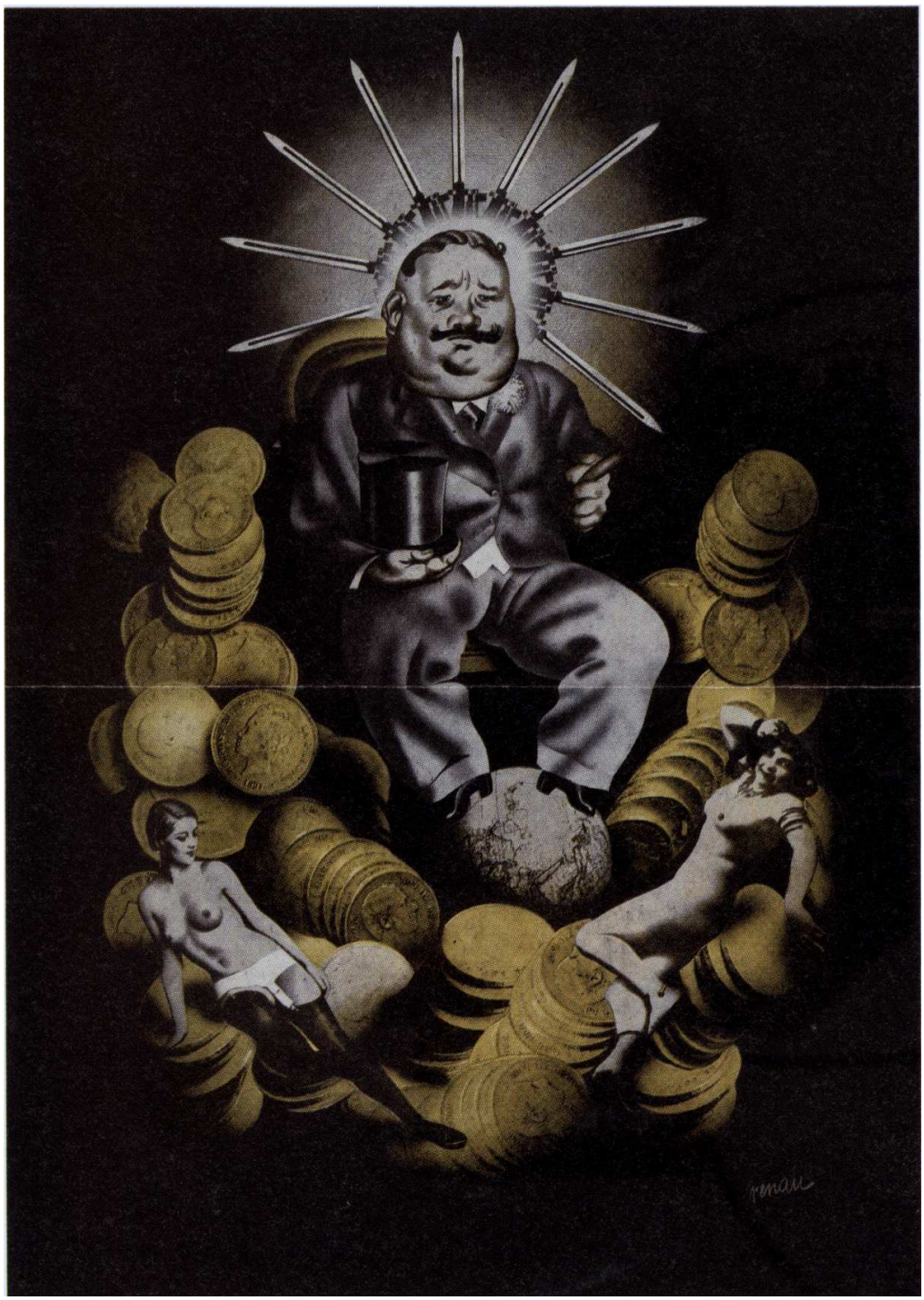


Fig. 10. Josep Renau, 'Los diez mandamientos' (no. 1), 1934.

Fig. 11. Josep Renau, 'Los diez mandamientos' (no. 2), 1934.

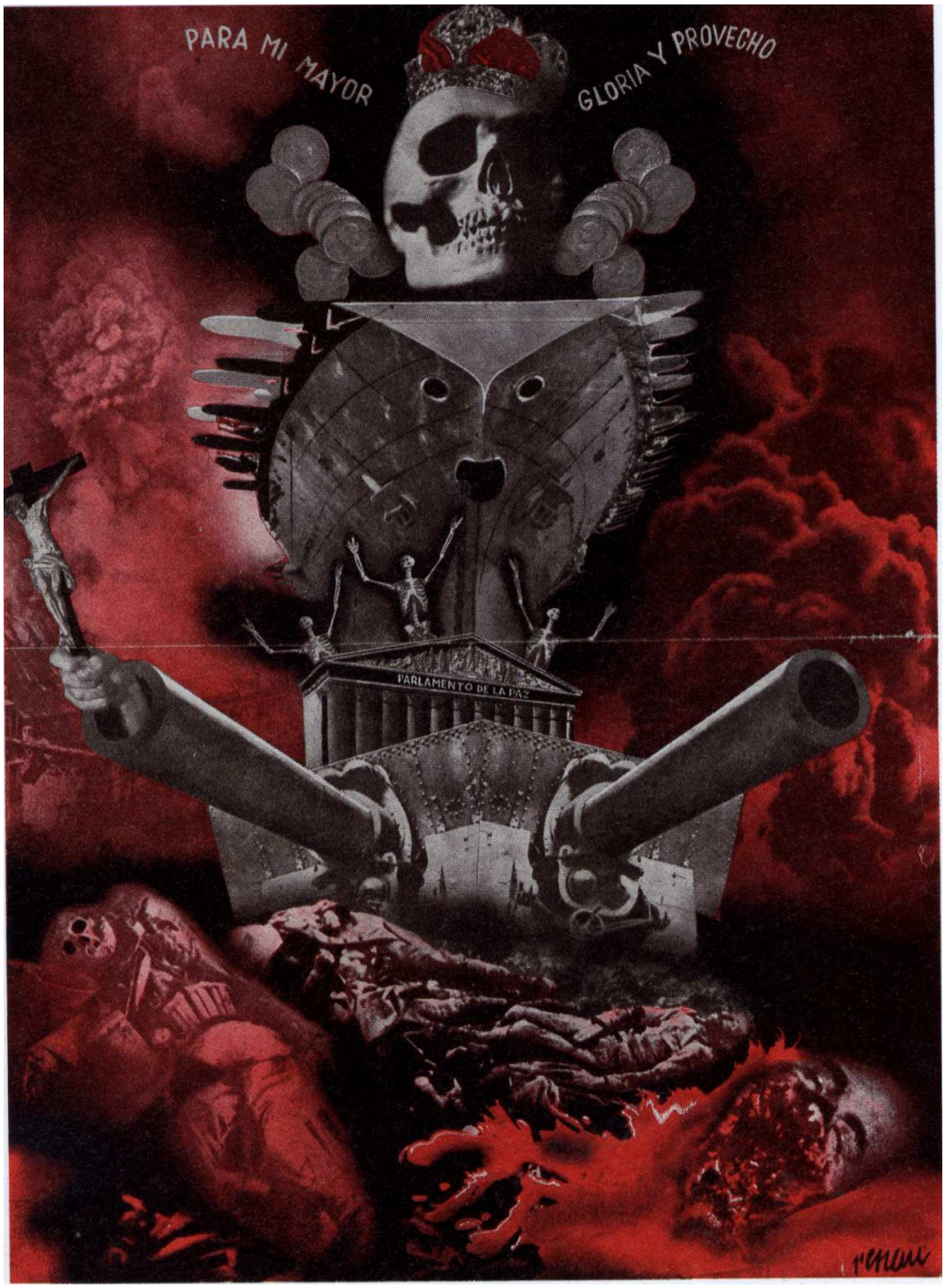


Fig. 12. Josep Renau, 'Los diez mandamientos' (no. 5), 1934.

Fig. 13. Josep Renau, 'Los diez mandamientos' (no. 8), 1934.

Fig. 14. Josep Renau, 'Hablemos ahora del buen vivir en España', 1935.

Y por si acaso es usted ateo recalcitrante, he aquí a este inocente niño de Ezquioga que con la misma candidez con que sacaría la bola en la lotería nacional, le dará a usted testimonio cierto y desinteresado—al margen de la lucha de clases—de haber visto al propio dios en imagen viva...

Y aquí tiene usted este otro adulto testimonio—por si no cree en los niños prodigio—también de Ezquioga, donde el propio Corazón de Jesús se apareció a esta casta y extasiada doncella, haciéndole conocer los placeres del divino Himeneo, pero sin la mancha vergonzosa del pecado original

Fig. 15. Josep Renau, 'Hablemos ahora del buen vivir en España' (detail), 1935.

Fig. 16. Josep Renau, 'Anatema', 1936.

Fig. 17. Josep Renau, 'Obreros, Campesinos, Soldados, Intelectuales: Reforzad las filas del Partido Comunista', 1936.

Fig. 18. Josep Renau, 'Industria de guerra: potente palanca de la victoria', 1936.

Fig. 19. Josep Renau, 'Campesino, defiende con las armas al gobierno que te dió la tierra', 1936.

Fig. 20. Josep Renau, 'El comisario, nervio de nuestro ejército popular', 1936 [1949].

Fig. 21. Josep Renau, 'El comisario, nervio de nuestro ejército popular', 1936.

Fig. 22. Josep Renau, 'Tchapaief, el guerrillero rojo', 1936.

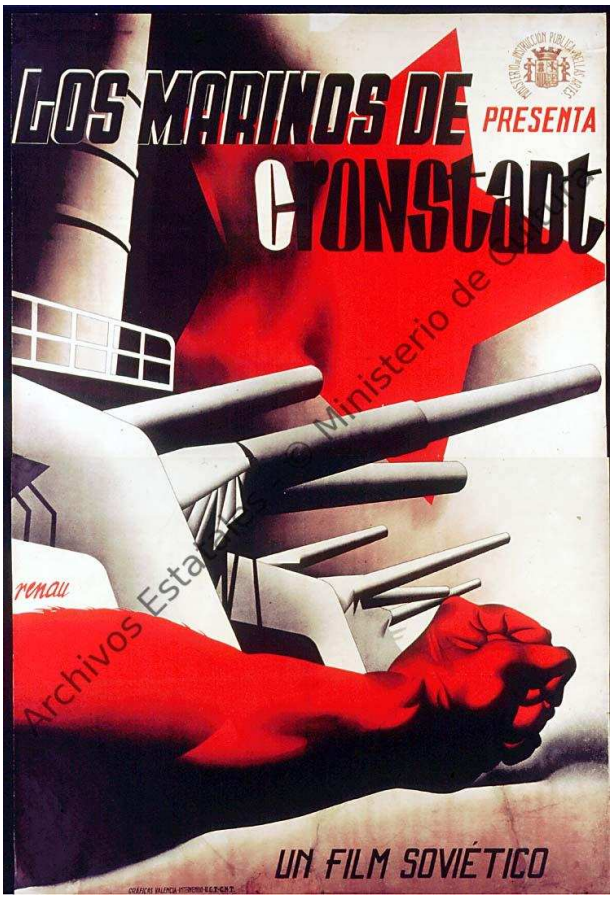
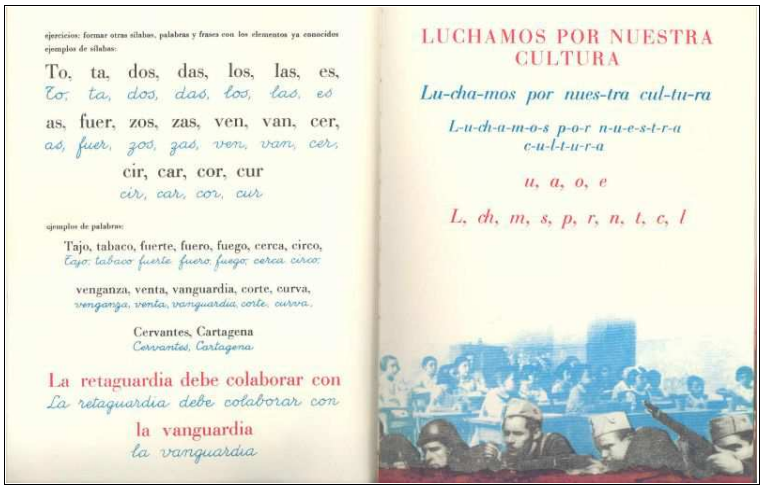


Fig. 23. Josep Renau, 'Los marinos de Cronstadt', 1936.

Fig. 24. Regino Mas and Gori Muñoz, 1936.


ejercicios: formar otras sílabas, palabras y frases con los elementos ya conocidos
ejemplos de sílabas:

To, ta, dos, das, los, las, es,
To, ta, dos, das, los, las, es

as, fuer, zos, zas, ven, van, cer,
as, fuer, zos, zas, ven, van, cer,

cir, car, cor, cur
cir, car, cor, cur

ejemplos de palabras:

Tajo, tabaco, fuerte, fuero, fuego, cerca, circo,
Tajo, tabaco, fuerte, fuero, fuego, cerca, circo,

venganza, venta, vanguardia, corte, curva,
venganza, venta, vanguardia, corte, curva,

Cervantes, Cartagena
Cervantes, Cartagena

La retaguardia debe colaborar con
La retaguardia debe colaborar con

la vanguardia
la vanguardia

LUCHAMOS POR NUESTRA CULTURA

Lu-cha-mos por nues-tra cul-tu-ra

L-u-ch-a-m-o-s p-o-r n-u-e-s-t-r-a
c-u-l-t-u-r-a

u, a, o, e

L, ch, m, s, p, r, n, t, c, l

Fig. 25. Fernando Sainz, Eusebio Cimorra (text), Mauricio Amster (design), 'Cartilla Escolar Antifascista' (2nd ed.), 1937.

Fig. 26. Josep Renau, 'Hoy más que nunca, Victoria', 1938.

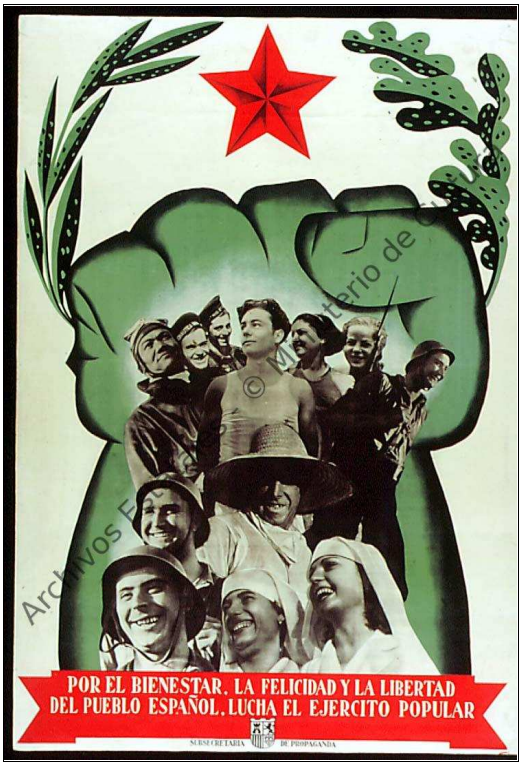


Fig. 27. [Josep Renau?], ' Por el bienestar, la felicidad y la libertad del pueblo español, lucha el ejército popular', 1938.

Fig. 28. [Josep Renau?], 1938.

Fig. 29. Josep Renau, 'Los 13 puntos de la victoria' (nos. 1-4), 1938.

Fig. 29. Josep Renau, 'Los 13 puntos de la victoria' (nos. 5-8), 1938.

Fig. 29. Josep Renau, 'Los 13 puntos de la victoria' (nos. 9-13), 1938.

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