

Total/Eclipse

Ara H. Merjian

Romy Golan, *Muralnomad: The Paradox of Wall Painting, Europe 1927–1957* (Yale University Press: New Haven & London, 2009), 40 colour illns, 120 b&w illns, 256 pp., ISBN 9780300141535, cloth £40.00.

Karen Fiss, *Grand Illusion: The Third Reich, The Paris Exposition, and the Cultural Seduction of France* (University of Chicago Press: Chicago & London, 2009), 95 b&w illns, 286 pp., ISBN 9780226251998, cloth £68.50.

Taking as its historical touchstone France's 1937 international 'Exposition des Arts et Techniques' – for which Germany erected an extensive pavilion – Karen Fiss examines the cultural relations that subtended its portentous presence in Paris, from cinematic cooperation between the two countries throughout the 1930s to popular photo-essays illustrating the affinities of their respective peasant cultures. Borrowing the title of Jean Renoir's 1937 film by the same name – a reverie on Franco-German rapprochement debuted to great success during the Paris Exposition itself – *Grand Illusion* exposes French cultural policy of the mid-1930s for the figment it was: a passive consumption of Nazi excess that strained to believe in its pacifist intentions. Beginning with an elegant exegesis of Renoir's eponymous work, Fiss turns the film's premise on its head, as the premise of her book's argument: that 'the grand illusion of the film . . . was not the futility of war but the futility of believing that peace was possible' (p. 14). The rootedness of this study in and around 1937 and the spaces of the Exposition affords a richness of historical detail which the author applies to larger geopolitical narratives.

Along with a keen analysis of German cultural propaganda and its reception abroad, *Grand Illusion* explores the prehistory of a parallel myth: the myth of two Frances, the France of Vichy and of the Resistance, of craven collaboration and noble, covert insurgency. The specious neatness of that myth is alive and well. 'The true France', avowed President Nicolas Sarkozy as recently as 2008, on the anniversary of the War's end, 'was not at Vichy'.¹ Fiss pushes past the facile political commonplaces of truth and lies, good and evil. Her book uncovers roots messily intertwined, sunk deep into a pre-war ethos of conciliation, deeply fraught, and ultimately failed. What De Gaulle once called the 'dull pain in the depths of our national consciousness' began throbbing well before the Occupation. Its pain, Fiss shows, was inextricable from the pleasures offered by Nazi culture throughout the 1930s, both in widespread reproduction and culminating in the 1937 Exposition.

As significant as the concessions Fiss details is the language in which they are couched – a linguistic *pas de deux*, illustrative of the rhetorical exchange between these two countries: 'demand' and 'acquiesce', 'order' and 'accept',

'request' and 'comply', 'insistence' and 'capitulation', to name a few such dialectical pairings. The civil 'seduction' of the book's title inevitably conjures its eventual upshot: Germany's uncivil invasion in 1940. Since the Prussian siege of Paris in 1870, Germany had been cast as the virile other to France's feminine grace – a conceit that found fresh metaphorical energy in the rise of the Third Reich. Yet what once was perceived as a kind of rape seemed, by the eve of the Occupation, a willing submission. 'There are moments', noted a wide-eyed Amédée Ozenfant of Albert Speer's hypertrophic pavilion, 'when size itself becomes a kind of beauty'. Fiss details the abidingly gendered trope of that allure in the Nuremberg rallies and Riefenstahl films – cultural products widely admired in France throughout the 1930s, and not simply by reactionary factions. As Fiss demonstrates through a fine-combed review of contemporary commentary, both right and left found much to admire in Nazi culture. More alarming than the gold medal awarded Speer for his pavilion is the praise of even radical socialist publications for the structure's 'undeniable grandeur'. The same kind of response is traced in the book's fourth chapter on cinema; we find the editors of the journal *Comoedia* (a clearing house of avant-garde ideas in years past) marveling at the 'interesting and varied productions' of the German film industry, declaring Goebbels and his Propaganda Ministry responsible for the country's 'preponderant and honorable' cinematic culture (p. 139). A smiling Riefenstahl herself appeared fêted in the pages of *Pour Vous* and other journals. Militarised seduction could wear a reassuring grin. Discussing the Nazi film industry's use of French actors and directors, Fiss notes, via Rémy Pithon, that the Germans had 'no difficulties in finding the collaborators they needed in France' (p. 134). Word choice here is surely more than casual.

Whether in reports from officials visiting Nuremberg congresses, or press clippings from the entire political spectrum in Paris, the spectacle of form was routinely, even blithely, cleaved from suspect ideology. It was not simply the pro-fascist hacks of *Je Suis Partout* who praised the 'spiritual unanimity' of Nazi pageantry; even Popular Front pundits found something to praise in its cinematic self-consciousness, mesmerising precision, almost mystical discipline. For those bemoaning the loss of France's cultural greatness, the rites of Nazi pomp could be imitated even as their content was disavowed – the case, as Fiss details in word and image, in the Bastille Day celebrations in 1937 that emulated the orchestrations of Speer's mass rallies. In the wake of economic uncertainty and political discord, the laconic virility of visual spectacle seemed a better bet than the effete ratiocinations of democracy. Reconciling preindustrial atavism with media-savvy appeal, Germany's totalising culture set into tattered relief the relative disunity of France's parliamentary tradition (disparaged even in more progressive papers as rife with 'byzantine quarrels, circular discussions, infantile chatter' [p. 180]).

Next to Speer's hermetic edifice, even the Eiffel tower seemed now pierced and perforated, unduly quirky in its singularity, anything but the decisive thrust into modernity it had once embodied. For several prominent figures, it was

less what the German pavilion represented, than what France had failed to contribute: to the Exposition in particular and to politics more broadly. Wedged between two new emblems of modernity, Eiffel's now outmoded monument underscored the ambivalence plaguing democracy. Rather than simply a righteous bulwark against the two totalitarian *frères ennemis*, France – or at least wide swathes of it – revealed a morbid fascination with German will. Attendance at the Exposition's German film program exceeded those of other countries. In Speer's unflinching edifice, French contemporaneity found a kind of mirror in which to take stock of its crippling diffidence. Onto Nazi culture, meanwhile, numerous French critics projected their own desperate wish for peace, finding in the Germans a 'profoundly pacifist' people – exemplified, for Ludovic Naudeau, in nothing less than the solemnity of Nuremberg processions. The prominence in the Exposition's grounds of an 'Avenue de la Paix' only underscores the bitterness of such irony. In retrospect, the portents of war seem to have been everywhere on display – to have structured, in fact, the barely concealed aggression of Speer's building. Even the Jura limestone employed in its construction was the same used for his Nuremberg's Zeppelinfeld. In just one of the several unnervingly prophetic intuitions related by Fiss, the German exile Paul Westheim likened Speer's pavilion to a crematorium, and its display cases to sarcophagi. More banal elements proved equally significant, whether the synthetic materials on display, later used by the German war machine, or the trade agreements struck just after Exposition's opening. The latter facilitated the exportation of iron ore to Germany – a raw material that helped ensure France's military subjugation just a few years later.

To be sure, many on the left in France sought to distinguish 'German' culture from its 'Hitlerian' foil. Yet that very dichotomy afforded a myth of two countries. It disavowed the affinities tunneling between apparently opposite elements: repressive Fascism and its silent, suffering other. As Fiss examines in Chapter 3, the same manichean Marxism resulted in some facile, base-superstructure analyses of Nazi culture – a phenomenon many dismissed as an oxymoron. The French left regarded National Socialism not as inflected with participatory consent, but as a political imposition, whose stilted manifestations were a *fait accompli*. It was not until the Frankfurt School's methodological shifts that critics approached Nazi culture as generative of Nazi subjectivity, rather than some passive, herd-like reflection of enforced ideals. Even these methods tended – and needed – to cast the Reich's culture as regressive and repressive, and to disavow its potential influence on properly progressive thinkers.² Louis Althusser, Ernst Bloch, and Georges Bataille shed more nuanced light on the recesses of an ideology 'at once anti-bourgeois and anti-Marxist' (Bataille quoted by Fiss, p. 118), and the effects of that paradox on culture. Yet even Bataille ended up calling for an authoritarian leftist counterweight to Fascist aesthetics, rather than a subversion of authoritarianism itself. Less deleterious than Nazi culture, Fiss shows, was the failure of the French left to recognise Fascism's mass appeal and to develop comparably persuasive and inclusive strategies.

Any ostensible inclusiveness in Nazi culture was, of course, a sham. The very appeal to international trade implied by a German presence at the exhibition flew in the face of the state's recently declared self-sufficiency, its ceremonious shows of hostility to capitalism (particularly as an ostensible tool of international Jewry). More fundamentally glaring – and at the same time more ineffable – were the incongruities of National Socialist culture at large. Its appeals to a pre-rational, primitive sacrality chafed against its technological and industrial ambition (inextricable, in turn, from a burgeoning military escalation). In other words, the modernisation of Germany for which the Nazis demanded recognition threatened the very pre-industrial organicism to which they laid simultaneous claim. Technology could thus not be left stripped to the degree zero of functionalism; it had to be packaged in a phony aura of *Volkisch* trappings and artisanal trimmings. The same rhetoric was marshaled to counter (in word, if not in deed) the soullessness of capitalist production even as its basic mechanisms remained in place. *Grand Illusion's* inventory of import quotas and purchase orders make for some intermittently dry reading; accounts of backroom deals and diplomatic parleys drag a bit. Yet Fiss argues convincingly that the Exposition's practical minutiae epitomise some of its more unsettling elements. The Popular Front's seemingly inexorable concessions to its German counterparts take on poignant significance in their seeming triviality. The proverbial devil was in the details.

At once anxious in its innovations and outdated in embellishments, the central parlour of Speer's building literally domesticated Nazi foreign policy for audiences abroad. Fiss exposes the contradictions smoothed over in this benignly named *Deutsche Haus*. 'The idea of a "temporary" monument to the Third Reich', she notes of its seeming permanence, 'was a contradiction in terms' (p. 70). Like the new nation for which it spoke, the solid edifice was wrought from disparate elements, both material and ideological. Fiss rightly reads the space as something more than a facile reflection of ideology; she demonstrates how much the Reich *needed* aesthetics to temper its technocratic modernity. To wit, the almost funereal inorganicism of Speer's building, offset by a proliferation of plants in its exhibition halls. Or, as the author reads in the paintings on display, the modern highway that plunges into Wolf Panizza's snow-draped landscape. The pavilion's mock-medieval stained glass, and the pagan pretension of Adolf Ziegler's tapestry of *The Four Elements*, likewise mediated the prominent display of foundry equipment, diesel motors, and other industrial machinery (parts of which may have been designed by Mies van der Rohe before his exile to the United States this same year). Fiss illustrates one such object: a curled steel pipe produced by Krupp industries and photographed by Hugo Herdeg as it sat in the German pavilion. For anyone familiar with early twentieth-century modernism, the piece recalls László Moholy-Nagy's Nickel Construction of 1921 – a visual shibboleth of Bauhaus experimentation in particular, and the utopia of international Constructivism more broadly. The simultaneous expropriation and taming of Moholy-Nagy's experimentation speaks to the larger conciliations practiced

in Nazi culture – summed up in Jeffrey Herf's notable study, *Reactionary Modernism*.

In making sense of that *coincidentia oppositorum*, Fiss draws further upon the work of Jeffrey Schnapp, who has helped to illuminate the 'productive paradoxes' characteristic of Fascism's Italian strain. 'Neither monolithic nor homogeneous', he writes, '[Italian] fascism's aesthetic overproduction relied on the ability of images to sustain contradiction'.³ Schnapp demonstrates how that overproduction masked the hollow core of Mussolini's ideology and distracted from its rather disparate subscriptions. I am not certain whether this model applies to the German case. If its pavilion smoothed over various 'stylistic incongruities', these were far less egregious in their errancy. By 1937, the core of Nazi ideology proved anything but hollow. As Fiss herself notes, Hitler himself appeared represented in the pavilion only once, pictured from behind in a marginal painting. In contrast, Italian 'overproduction' made of Mussolini's body a proliferating symbol – compensatory in its ubiquity and elasticity. Yet this is a minor quibble with an exemplary work of scholarship – one that examines a politics of diffidence and deference that extended far beyond the Trocadéro fairgrounds.

During the same months that the infamous Entartete Kunst show was breaking attendance records in Munich, an exhibition of French Contemporary Art attracted a more discreet audience. Curated in Berlin by the reactionary Robert Rey, the exhibition presented a racially and aesthetically sanitised survey of French painting for German audiences. The French offices of German companies, meanwhile, began firing all Jewish employees in 1935, just as the French film industry embarked on renewed partnerships with its German counterparts. Fiss's study is admirable in its refusal to parse out heroes from villains, even as it calls attention to the insidious affinities between them. With a sense of understated revelation, she notes that France's mass internment of political prisoners (Jews and suspected Nazi agents alike) coincided with the declaration of war against Germany (p. 52). When the short-lived defense against the Wehrmacht crumbled, Vichy had no problems instituting dozens of laws and decrees against Jewish citizens. The ease with which the regime instituted anti-Semitic and anti-Communist policies, *Grand Illusion* demonstrates, was abetted by a long cultural apprenticeship. Invoking nostalgia as a palliative to modernity, purity as a cure for decadence, Vichy's 'return to the land' proceeded along an already well trod path, laid even amidst the more righteous foundations of French democracy.

'In painting, only easel painting is civil. For mural painting, for painting stretched over great spaces, across vaults and cupolas, the word "civil" is unsuitable'.⁴ Quipped in 1944 by one of the century's most arch (and understudied) writers, the remark recoils as much from the year of its writing as from the phenomenon it disparages. More than the civic publicness of the mural, it is surely the incivility of Europe's World War that drives the disdain of Alberto Savinio (brother of Giorgio de Chirico) here. A vital aspect of Romy Golan's *Muralnomad* – the second book under review – is its attention to the anxieties stirred up by the mural's format

well before – and for some time after – the catastrophe at mid-century. If the free plans and transparent panes of modern architecture had broken up solid walls; if modernity itself meant fragmentation and anomie; if urban life entailed the loss of a consoling totality, then what role could be wrested for the perceived *ür*-form of painting itself? The three decades traced in Golan's account witnessed the very term 'mural' creep, by degrees, into something less than certain. The word's etymology (from the Latin *murus*, 'wall') could no longer indemnify its object from a mounting ambiguity. Indeed, many of the images examined in *Muralnomad* are severed from the surfaces on which we might expect to find them, cleaved from the support that might justify their existence, whether physical or philological. Photomontage panels seemingly free-floating on spindly scaffolds in Italian Fascist installations of the 1930s; Synthetic Cubist-style mosaics suspended at the entrance to Paris's 1925 Exposition; hypertrophic likenesses of Stalin and Lenin looming over Moscow's May Day parades in Gustav Klutis's photo-portrait effigies. As Golan details in a series of interrelated cases, various media – by turns innovative and atavistic, autonomous and integrated – came to compete for aesthetic sovereignty in European culture: fresco, mosaic, tapestry, photomural. But what, then, becomes of a mural by any other name? That predicament, as Golan compellingly demonstrates, exceeds the medium in question.

The shifting role of the mural was bound up with various cultural apprehensions under democracy and dictatorship, whether rehearsing the Second World War in international exhibitions or memorialising its unprecedented devastation. Like that labile term 'realism', the mural served as a screen for the projection of wide-ranging ambitions. Somewhere between the clunky vulgarity of the panorama and the fresh technology of the cinema, it formed a kind of battleground between archaism and innovation. The eponymous paradox of Golan's title thus plays out in a number of ways. As she details in five richly layered chapters, the mural threads a number of vital twentieth-century questions, even, or especially, as it unravels as a cohesive practice: questions about the plight of the public sphere; polemics over rationalist architecture; the contested nature of decoration and ornamentation; the prominence of world's fairs in the age of totalitarianism; regional versus cosmopolitan objectives; and finally, how these various phenomena became stretched across the procrustean bed of ideological imperatives. Illustrated with over two hundred images (a good number in colour), *Muralnomad* evokes disparate objects in terms of scale and detail, a literally tall (and often wide) order for a book on the subject. Notwithstanding such visual charisma, this is no coffee table book. Golan brings a consummate archival knack to the topic, tracing the mural's relevance to print culture and political fiat alike, bringing to bear sources both prominent and forgotten. Even seemingly familiar art works themselves – beginning with Monet's *Water Lilies* canvases from the Orangerie in Paris – are exhumed from the commonplaces that have long encrusted them. Monet's panels exemplify the vicissitudes of the mural-sized image over the century's course. Ignored during

an age of politicised swagger between the World Wars, their ephemerality sparked renewed interest at mid-century, when the cultural stock of abstraction and impermanence soared once again. Anything but soothing, however, the *Water Lilies* had come to form an unwitting site of traumatic memory, as Golan details in a nuanced reconstruction of their physical and art historical import, from the genteel penchant for Japonisme to the horror of the trenches.

As much as the mural bears upon a range of modernist practices, they also coalesce around a single image. At the heart of the twentieth century no less than at the crux of Golan's book, *Guernica* stands as its most enduring image precisely in the fracturing of its prodigious sprawl. It is an X-ray not only of the century's terrors but also a gloss on the means by which they were reckoned, from the newspaper to the newsreel. Even in its epic scale, Picasso's painting underscores the precariousness of the mural-sized image in 1937. In the best case scenario, the left could fight fire with fire, matching – even outwitting – the hypertrophic ambition of (most) Fascist culture. Against the grain of most accounts, Golan reads *Guernica* in light of the photo-mural, a medium of increasing consequence in the 1930s and particularly at the Paris Exposition. Picasso, she argues, looked in part to photomontage as a means of combating the 'auratic' nature of right-wing imagery on offer at the Exposition – a maneuver that, as Fiss's book makes plain, most of the French left failed to do. The visual 'homology' that Golan sets into relief contributes fruitfully to the extant scholarship on *Guernica*, while driving home a larger argument about the mural's evolving malleability. Golan addresses the predicament of a medium saddled with conflicting, even inimical ambitions: from a slate for the mobilisation of nationalist aggression, to an international front stretched wide, to blunt a relentlessly vertical chauvinism.

Like the panels by Robert Delaunay, she describes at one point, Golan's method is synchronic and simultaneous. Nothing in her book is allowed to exist in national or aesthetic isolation, no matter what its pretensions to singularity. And like Fiss's study of the German Pavilion in the wider context of French culture and Franco-German relations, *Muralnomad* tunnels between local and global politics, from Charlotte Perriand's attention to *The USSR in Construction* in conceiving photomurals for France's Agricultural Ministry to the politics of land reform and the rightward drift of the same nation's Socialist government. Golan exposes the affinities binding seemingly hostile practices in Italy and France, in Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. In this sense, the book forms a corrective to readings of the art of the 1930s and 1940s in national isolation – a practice that often unwittingly rehearses the very narratives of autarchy and exceptionalism to which different regimes adhered.⁵ Despite interwar governments' pursuit of unilateral aesthetic programs – or, rather, precisely because of such efforts – artists and architects paid close attention to counterparts in other countries. As Golan documents in detail, French critics took close note of Mario Sironi's efforts at the 1933 Milan Triennale, for which he attempted (to the tune of much derision) to reinvent mural painting as the new face of Fascism.

Golan also brings dialectical attention to particular, national cases as well. The role of the modernist-muralist as a revived medieval artisan offered a convenient trope not only to Fascist corporatism but also, as the author details, to Louis Chéronnet and his championing of capitalist billboards in Paris. The critic Pierre Courthion argued early on for the mural as a possible form of private, decorative reverie in the home – close to Matisse's claim for painting as a 'good armchair for tired the businessman', and worlds away from the claims made in favour of the mural's unrivalled publicness. In Italy, meanwhile, ideologues as diverse as F. T. Marinetti and Gustavo Giovannoni lay divergent claims to the mural's deployment. Fascism's ambivalence between isolationism and exportable culture often curdled on the surface of the debates over muralism. Golan pays close attention to the politics of form and format. She looks, for example at Giuseppe Pagano's installation of Mario Sironi's outsized propaganda mosaic, *Fascist Labor*, at the 1937 Exposition in Paris. She argues for Pagano's cantilevered detachment of the work from the wall as an ironic, 'destabilising' subversion of Fascist aura and monumentality – an irony later taken to the extreme in the 1955 BBPR monument to the victim's of Nazi Concentration camps (including, ironically or not, Pagano himself). The formal genealogy that Golan traces is impressive. Yet if the perforated lattice might signify a kind of transparency, or even an emancipatory detachment, then what must we make of that form's invocation by Fascism itself? Giuseppe Terragni's Casa del Fascio in Como makes literal the Duce's claim for Fascism as a 'glass house'. Even that political metaphor has been anything but transparent in the twentieth century; figures as diverse as André Breton and Yevgeny Zamyatin invoke the as symbols of Surrealist autonomy and totalitarian repression, respectively. I would submit Golan's claim for Pagano's 'detournement' to the incisive argument of her own book: that every format, during this period, doubles back on itself. Even the anti-mural, even a world without walls, was not necessarily revolutionary. Or rather, its formal revolution could also serve a politics of reaction.

That pernicious legacy – and the efforts to transcend it – occupy *Muralnomad's* attention to the 1950s. Rejoining the book's first chapter is its last, which opens by tracing the continuity between the Monet's late imagery and post-war practices. Titled 'All-redeeming Synthesis', the chapter addresses the mural in the wake of the 'politically grievous overtones' it had acquired in the 1930s (p. 181). As detailed in Fiss's book, the French paeans to the 'grandeur' of the German pavilion formed a case in point of that recent history – a bombastic arrogance which now lay in ruins (far less grand than those anticipated by Hitler's millennial Reich). Whether corporatist, communist, or nationalist, the scale of failed ambition rendered suspect any pretension to monumentality. A major burden of post-war European culture thus lay in proving itself more than ornamental, but less than ideologically coercive. The transience of Monet's imagery found, in Abstract Expressionism, a new champion across the Atlantic. And through abstraction, Golan argues – reviving critical voices subsequently smothered by Greenbergian dogma and American hegemony – European culture found a means of

redeeming outsized dimensions. Take, for example, the ribbed, cantilevered atrium of Rome's Termini Station – a space-age, post-Fascist experiment, commonly referred to (by Romans old enough to recall its unveiling) as 'Il dinosaurio'. Invoked to disavow lingering traces of Fascism, its strange mix of archaism and futurity epitomises Golan's close attention to abstraction as a post-war European nostrum. How to rescue the wall for more purely formal experimentation? How to have form resist the kitsch of lazy decoration? How to make over the mural into a less insidious mass ornament, apolitical but humanist?

Golan details the ecumenical imperatives unleashed before the war's embers chilled to Cold War temperatures. Commissions for the headquarters of the United Nations in New York, UNESCO in Paris, or the Food and Agriculture Organization in Rome, epitomise that international thrust – an 'inversion of signs' whereby universalism came to stand in for more provincial strains of populism. Other projects further exemplify a collectivity shorn of ideological coercion, whether the synthesising directives of the CIAM (International Congress of Modern Architects), or Jean Lurçat's 'neomedieval' tapestries (whose architect brother André, not surprisingly, was a founding member of CIAM). A non-denominational religiosity provided the rarefied glue for various efforts, whose cosmic genericism was often matched with forms anodyne (at best), or insipid/garish (at worse). Golan maintains a cool hand in the face of objects striking in their ungainliness. She trains her focus more fixedly on larger political discourses that subtend the mural's vicissitudes. It is that narrative urgency which drives the chapter's own breathless synthesis. The argument here is that material contingency could contribute to reconstruction without subscribing to a myth of spurious integrity. Detachment from the wall coincided with other kinds of connection, chiefly between painters and architects united in humanist edification. If the French distanced themselves from the decorative, Golan argues, the Italians embraced it as a vehicle of cultural redemption (largely) untainted by Fascism. As helpful as these paradigms are, they elide certain nuances. What of, say, the collaboration between the Spaniard Josep Lluís Sert and the German-American Hans Hofmann between 1948 and 1950 for the Peruvian municipality of Chimbote, consisting of detached mural-sized panels? Does this (largely unrealised) project qualify as 'European', even worlds away?

To be sure, the author is sensitive to the politics of a specious globalism, including the neo-primitivist risks of Le Corbusier's work in India. It is, in fact, the father of modernist synthesis himself who lends the volume its name, and who tried to unify so many of its disparate phenomena.⁶ Corbu coined the term 'muralnomad' in a 1952 essay on the tapestry: a foil to his pre-war notion of 'machines for living', and a metaphor of impermanence in line with the shifting contingencies of modern dwelling, even exile. The tapestry could bound and define large spaces without oppressive overtones; it could temper the severity of brutalist concrete. Its walls were – to conjure up the new-age rhetoric in which the architect's language was couched – 'wooly'. Not only Lurçat's mystical weavings aspired to a kind of cosmic harmony, nor Le Corbusier's hangings to a generic humanism. To wit the number of

formats that refused the yoke of any state (or even social) narrative: Joan Miró's ceramic mural, *Night* (1955–8); small-scale tapestries by Marc Saint-Saens and Mario Prassinis (1957); Lucio Fontana's ceramic balcony decorations from Milan; Victor Vasarely's perforated wall/sculpture, *Positive-Negative* (1953); Amerigo Tot's relief frieze on the façade of Termini Station (1953); *brises-soleil* mosaics by Mario Radici incorporated into the Casa Bini (1953). Rather than seek to redeem the failed syntheses of the century's first half, these works ignored the very possibility of mutual incorporation. The variety of materials addressed in this chapter, along with the range of their geographies, attests to practices increasingly unmoored from mediumistic strictures or national address.

Taking us from Paris to Rome and Como (with brief detours in Caracas and New York), *Muralnomad* eventually lands in Chandigarh, only to depart again in a fittingly nomadic *envoi*. For all its decentredness, however, the book remains largely – and productively – anchored in France. It is that country's freighted cultural history which lends the predicament of the modern mural, and its dissolution, such poignancy. Anything but detract from the book's international consequence, this rootedness only underscores its import. From the calm of Monet's Orangerie ponds turned into a site for soldiers billeted on leave from the trenches; to Paris's 1937 Exposition and its varied contenders for the mural's afterlife; to wall paintings entirely unfettered from walls, the paradox of twentieth-century muralism gains particular traction in the example of France. No less than as the stage for Karen Fiss's chilling history, it is Paris's slow eclipse that here bespeaks its centrality to twentieth-century European culture. Synthesis, of course, would soon have a new heyday, under the banner of various economic booms and in the guise of that no less synthetic rubric, 'design'. But it is the history of an earlier, more quixotic phenomenon that this book elegantly traces. It is a history that not even Le Corbusier's whimsical portmanteau could rescue from a slow, fitful unstitching.

Notes

1. See in Frederic Spotts, *The Shameful Peace: How French Artists and Intellectuals Survived the Nazi Occupation* (Yale University Press: New Haven and London, 2008), p. 2.
2. See Alice Yeager Kaplan, *Reproductions of Banality: Fascism, Literature, and French Intellectual Life* (University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, 1986).
3. Jeffrey Schnapp, 'Epic Demonstrations: Fascist Modernity and the 1932 Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution', in Richard Golsan (ed.), *Fascism, Aesthetics, and Culture* (University Press of New England: Hanover and London, 1992), pp. 1–32.
4. Alberto Savinio, *Ascolto il tuo cuore, città* (Bompiani: Milan, 1984 [1943–1952]).
5. In the excellent catalogue for *Art and Power*, Dawn Ades insists that the Paris Exposition's different pavilions 'are not just isolated pockets of interest' (p. 58); yet it is largely into separate pockets that their art and architecture have been placed in scholarship, including the *Art and Power* catalogue itself.
6. To wit, the masthead for *L'Esprit Nouveau* indicated that the journal served as clearing house for the 'new spirit' in 'experimental aesthetics, painting, sculpture, architecture, literature, music, engineering aesthetics, theater, music-hall, cinema, circus, sports, fashion, books, furniture and aesthetics of modern life'.

doi:10.1093/oxartj/kcs042