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Mussolini's Cultural Revolution: Fascist or Nationalist?

Philip V. Cannistraro

Scholarly discussion about the nature of fascism in Italy began almost simultaneously with the appearance of Mussolini's first *Fascio di Combattimento* in March 1919. Over the years scholars have produced a prodigious body of literature on the subject that reflects a wide range of diverse methods and interpretations. In the past decade researchers have begun to advance beyond the usual political and economic analyses to explore such problems as the ideological, social, and cultural basis of fascism.[1] Most recently several studies have raised the significant question whether fascism was a traditional reactionary phenomenon of the conservative right, or a genuine revolutionary movement that sought the total reordering and modernization of Italian life.[2] This essay is an attempt to determine the extent to which fascist cultural policy was

[1] An excellent survey of the major interpretations of fascism in both its European and its Italian contexts is Renzo De Felice, *Le interpretazioni del fascismo* (Bari 1969). The single best volume to date on the fascist state is Alberto Aquarone, *L'organizzazione dello stato fascista* (Turin 1965). For fascist cultural policy and ideology, see the special issue of *Il Ponte* for October 1952; Carlo Ragghianti, 'Il fascismo e la cultura', in Luigi Arbizzani and Alberto Caltabiano, eds. *Storia del antifascismo italiano* (Rome 1964), I, Lezioni; Antonio Pellicani, 'Ideologie e cultura nel periodo fascista', *Rassegna di politica e di storia*, March 1968; Alessandro Bonsanti, 'La cultura degli anni trenta', *Terzo Programma*, November 1963; Carla Lazagna, 'La concezione delle arti figurative nella politica culturale del fascismo', *Il Movimento di liberazione in Italia*, October–December 1967. References to books and articles on cultural problems written during the fascist period can be found in *Catalogo guida per la scelta di opere di cultura fascista e di cultura generale* (Libreria del Littorio: Rome, n.d.). See also the chapters by G. L. Mosse and P. Vita-Finzi on 'Fascism and the Intellectuals', in S. J. Woolf, ed., *The Nature of Fascism* (New York 1968).

[2] See especially Roland Sarti, 'Fascist Modernization in Italy: Traditional or Revolutionary?' *American Historical Review*, April 1970; and E. R. Tannenbaum, 'The Goals of Italian Fascism', ibid., April 1969.

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revolutionary or traditional – a question of considerable importance, since official cultural theories reflect the broad premises that underlay the entire spectrum of fascist ambitions. The men who formulated ideology in Mussolini's regime claimed that they were making a new and unique culture. Yet an examination of Mussolini's efforts to reshape the life of the Italian people reveals that the fascist 'cultural revolution' was based largely on a skilful reformulation and a new application of nationalist ideology.

Although in later years Mussolini hoped that Italians would forget that he had once been a socialist, he never ceased to style himself a revolutionary leader. The precise nature of his socialism and his revolutionary position after 1914 has been the subject of considerable debate,[3] but it is clear that soon after the 1914–18 war Mussolini abandoned socialism in favour of a programme that combined 'national syndicalism' and 'productivism'. At the same time, he increasingly absorbed the attitudes and views of the Italian nationalists.[4] The one constant factor in this ideological transition was the myth of revolution, which remained an integral part of Mussolini's political thought. Between 1914 and 1918 he adroitly switched from his position as an advocate of the proletarian revolution to his new stance as a champion of the national revolutionary war.[5] In the years from the founding of the *Fascio* in 1919 to the March on Rome in 1922, Mussolini fully absorbed the tenets of nationalism while simultaneously proclaiming fascism as a new and radical departure in Italian politics. In this way he was able to maintain his identification with the revolutionary tradition, but now as the Duce of the fascist revolution.

Mussolini publicly emphasized the revolutionary nature of fascism almost immediately after his assumption of power. In an address to the Chamber of Deputies on 16 November 1922 he proclaimed: 'I am here to defend and strengthen to the utmost the revolution of the Blackshirts and to insert it firmly . . . into the

[3] For opposing views on the question see R. De Felice, *Mussolini il rivoluzionario, 1883–1920* (Turin 1965), esp. 221–361; and Roberto Vivarelli, *Il dopoguerra in Italia e l'avvento del fascismo (1918–1922)*, I (Naples 1967), 219–98.

[4] The programme of the first *Fascio* is reproduced in De Felice, *Mussolini il rivoluzionario*, 742–45.

[5] The nationalists, like Mussolini, viewed the first world war as the culmination of the nation's historical evolution. See Franco Gaeta, *Nazionalismo italiano* (Naples 1965), *passim*. The classic account of the common roots of nationalism and fascism is Luigi Salvatorelli, *Nazionalfascismo* (Turin 1923).

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history of the nation.'[6] From its earliest days fascism had been described by its supporters as a truly revolutionary movement, and the March on Rome (28 October 1922) was enshrined in fascist lore as the chief symbol of the revolution.[7] Fascist propagandists argued that their revolution would destroy the old Italy of decadent liberalism and democracy and give birth to a young, virile, new Italy. Revolution became a major ingredient of official fascist doctrine, and Mussolini's propaganda machine advanced the myth of the 'continuing revolution'.[8] Twenty years after the March on Rome, when fascism was on the verge of collapse and it was apparent to almost everyone that there was little to justify the myth, the fascists continued to sustain that concept.[9]

Ideologues in the regime liberally interpreted their revolution to include not only political and social renovation; they also attributed to fascism a cultural and intellectual break with the past. In their rhetoric, 'culture' and 'revolution' became almost synonymous terms, for an important result claimed for the revolution was the liberation of Italian intellectual and creative genius which had not found expression since the Renaissance.[10] There were many who took the rhetoric seriously and who, as either minor cultural figures or major intellecuals, helped to propagate the revolutionary myth. Emilio Bodrero, a wealthy senator and noted historian, conceived the ideal task of fascism as 'that of establishing a new Enlightenment, a new Encyclopedia, which through our revolution...

[6] Text in *La nuova politica dell'Italia*, 2 vols. (Milan 1928), I, 8.

[7] The Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution, organized in Rome in 1932, was the first great propaganda effort of the regime. See Dino Alfieri and Luigi Freddi, *Guida della mostra della rivoluzione fascista* (Florence 1932).

[8] For early discussions of fascism as a revolutionary phenomenon see Dino Grandi, *Le origine e la missione del fascismo* (Bologna 1922), and Massimo Rocca, 'Il minestrone rivoluzionario', originally published in 1921 and reprinted in his *Il primo fascismo* (Rome 1953). Revolution as an element in fascist philosophical doctrine is analysed by a noted fascist theorist in Antonio Canepa, *Sistema di dottrina del fascismo*, 3 vols. (Rome 1937), III, 181–201, 208–13. The standard official account of the early fascist movement is G. A. Chiurco, *Storia della rivoluzione fascista*, 5 vols. (Florence 1929).

[9] Speech by Alessandro Pavolini, Minister of Popular Culture, to newspaper editors, 17 April 1942. Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Rome (hereafter ACS), *Il Ministero della Cultura Popolare* (hereafter MCP), busta (b.) 76, fascicolo (f.) 'Orientamento politico della stampa'.

[10] Balbino Giuliano, 'Il fascismo e l'avvenire della cultura', in Giuseppe Pomba, ed., *La civiltà fascista illustrata nelle dottrine e nelle opere* (Turin 1928); Bruno Corra, *Gli intellettuali creatori e la mentalità fascista* (Milan 1923); Guido Bortolatto, 'Intelligenza, Rivoluzione e Corporativismo', *Rassegna Italiana*, December 1933.

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will result in the revision of all the moral, social, legal, economic, political, and . . . religious concepts that form the spiritual patrimony of mankind. All those who have been touched by the grace of fascism must contribute to this end'.[11] Spokesmen for the regime's cultural policies wrote of a 'revolution of ideas' which would eventually affect all mankind, and they drew a contrast between the French and the Russian revolutions, which attempted to bring change by killing men, and the fascist revolution, which would promote progress by changing men's ideas and spirit.[12]

Camillo Pellizzi, one of the first and most perceptive fascist theorists to examine the nature of the movement, argued in no uncertain terms that its principal ideas were rooted in the past greatness of the national tradition, and that its revolutionary thrust could not be divorced from Italy's historic foundations.[13] Most spokesmen agreed with Cornelio Di Marzio, president of the Confederation of Professionals and Artists, that a culture could not be created in isolation and *ex novo*, that it must have national precedents. 'Even the most revolutionary cultures', Di Marzio explained, 'have more or less orthodox origins.'[14] It was therefore no accident that the fascists borrowed generously from others, claiming as part of their cultural patrimony men and ideas that were compatible with their own aspirations. Much of what they said had been part of broader cultural movements in Italy between 1890 and 1914, or had arisen after the first world war. Mussolini himself claimed that fascism stemmed partly from the 'revolt against positivism' in which many Italian and European intellectuals had participated during the two decades before 1914.[15] Writers like Enrico Corradini, Alfredo Oriani, Giosuè Carducci, Filippo T. Marinetti, and Gabriele D'Annunzio, had foreshadowed the fascist glorification of pagan and Roman heroes as well as the myth of the Italic race. These writers exalted violence and war as regenerative forces,

[11] Bodrero to Cornelio Di Marzio, 29 December 1927, ACS, *Carte Di Marzio*, I Versamento (V.), b. 21, f. 1.

[12] 'Cultura fascista', text of a lecture by Di Marzio, 14 February 1933, ibid., I V., b. 20, f. 'Lezioni all'Accademia Aereonautica'.

[13] Camillo Pellizzi, 'Tradizione e Rivoluzione', *Gerarchia*, May 1927.

[14] Di Marzio's article, 'Cultura', 1935, ACS, *Carte Di Marzio*, I V., b. 24, f. 6. In the famous article, 'Dottrina politica e sociale del fascismo', in the *Enciclopedia Italiana*, XIV (Milan 1932), 850, Mussolini asserted that 'No doctrine is born completely new . . . or can claim absolute originality'.

[15] Ibid., 874.

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the spiritual strength and vitality of Italy, and the need for national renovation.[16]

In the bitter years of despair that followed the war young Italians had turned in growing numbers to the nationalist cause as a legitimate alternative to satisfy their need for moral and creative fulfilment. 'Nationalism', as Eugen Weber observed, 'uses intellectual arguments based on more sophisticated ideas like tradition, history, language, and race; it argues a wider community and a common destiny which are not immediately perceptible but whose traces can be found in the past, whose reality can be demonstrated in the present, and whose implications have to be worked out in the future.'[17] When Mussolini incorporated these ideas into fascist doctrine, he succeeded in attracting a considerable part of the disoriented nationalist intelligentsia to his movement. In their search for meaningful commitment many Italian intellectuals, fired with an intense but unchannelled desire for change, naively embraced the fascist revolutionary doctrine.[18] The absorption of the Nationalist Party into the fascist movement in 1923 seemed naturally to reflect the fact that fascism was a more comprehensive ideology. The tendency towards cultural nationalism had already become pronounced in Italy by 1919, causing what has been characterized as an 'involution' of Italian culture.[19] Even Marinetti's Futurist movement, fervently committed to a revolt against the past, abandoned its intellectual links with Europe in favour of nationalism in art and culture. Marinetti's idea that the nation's culture had to be infused with a sense of *Italianità* – the quality and essence of being Italian – was readily adopted by the fascists as a cardinal point of their cultural policies.[20] To a large

[16] In April 1925, immediately after the first meeting of fascist intellectuals, an important assemblage of fascist leaders, including Luigi Federzoni, Dino Grandi, and Leandro Arpinati, led a ceremonial march to the tomb of Alfredo Oriani, where they paid homage with almost pagan ritual to their intellectual hero. ACS, *Ministero dell'Interno* (DGPS), 1914–26 (1925), b. 59, f. Bologna, sottofasc. 'Onoranze ad Alfredo Oriani'.

[17] Eugen Weber, *Varieties of Fascism: Doctrines of Revolution in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton 1964), 18–19.

[18] On the attraction of fascism for the intellectuals and the nationalists, see G.L. Mosse, *loc. cit.*, esp. 206–09.

[19] C. S. Lazagna, 'La concezione delle arti figurative nella politica culturale del fascismo', and Lionello Venturi, 'Gli studi di storia dell'arte medioevale e moderna', in *Cinquant'anni di vita intellettuale italiana 1896–1946*, 2d ed., 2 vols. (Naples 1966), II.

[20] A report by Lando Ferretti (1931) inclu'ed *Italiantà* as a principal cultural

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extent the Futurists courted Mussolini because they expected fascism to implement a cultural revolution based on *Italianità* and the rejuvenation of Italian intellectual life. In 1923 Marinetti presented Mussolini with a 'Manifesto in Defence of Italianità' in which the Futurist leader expressed the hope that the regime would aid young artists in the reassertion of Italian cultural supremacy.[21] Later the regime was to encourage the identification with important cultural movements and intellectuals as evidence of the legitimacy and vitality of fascist cultural aspirations.[22]

BETWEEN 1922 AND 1925, while Mussolini struggled to consolidate his hold over the state, cultural policy was necessarily subordinated to politics. Thereafter the fascists turned with renewed energy to the problems of culture. On 29–31 March 1925 the regime demonstrated its cultural revolution to sceptics by holding a 'Congress of Fascist Intellectuals' at Bologna. This gathering of the most prominent cultural figures who supported Mussolini's government was the first deliberate effort to define fascist cultural aspirations. Under the chairmanship of the neo-idealist philosopher Giovanni Gentile, the conference proudly proclaimed the alliance between culture and fascism, thus challenging those critics who had questioned the cultural respectability of the regime. The so-called 'Manifesto of Fascist Intellectuals', published by Gentile shortly after the close of the congress, affirmed that the fascist revolution was based on the co-operation of culture and politics. There was considerable debate over the doctrine of fascism, and much was said about the need for new directions in Italian cultural life, about the rebirth of the Italian spirit, and about the need for a 'disciplined' culture.[23] The speeches at Bologna de-

theme of fascist propaganda, MCP, b. 155, f. 10, 'Ufficio Stampa'. Alessandro Pavolini, in a letter to Dino Alfieri, 11 January 1939, described one major goal of the regime as the 'triumph of *Italianità* in our culture'. MCP, b. 127, f. 3, 'Pavolini, A'.

[21] ACS, *Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri* (hereafter PCM) (1923), f. 3/11, n. 313, 'Proposta di Marinetti'. For an example of how Futurist and fascist ideas about culture were merged, see the collection of Futurist essays *Arte Fascista* (Turin 1927).

[22] A series of annual propaganda programmes begun in the 1930s, the 'Celebration of Great Italians', commemorated many of the distinguished figures to whom fascism looked for cultural respectability. See MCP, b. 18, f. 258, 'Celebrazioni Grandi Italiani'.

[23] On the Bologna congress see Carlo Bo, 'Ideologia del regime', in *Fascismo e*

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monstrated that neither the intellectuals nor the regime had yet evolved clear or precise cultural theories. The congress was unanimous, however, in applauding Gentile's offer of 'the homage of our hearts and minds to Benito Mussolini, the man of the new Italy, the Duce of our rebirth, our spiritual leader who holds in his iron fist . . . the fortunes of Italy'.[24]

The most important result of the Bologna meeting was that fascism announced its rejection of nineteenth century liberalism and set as its goal the creation of a new culture of its own. Roberto Forges Davanzati, an early *squadrista* who later became a well known writer and lecturer on cultural affairs, asserted bluntly: 'We are at war, at war with the universal abstractions of anti-fascist culture, which lacks the essential characteristics of our race and is spiritually inferior . . . Fascism must and will create an epoch with its own mentality, its own art, and its own culture.'[25] The fascist intellectuals demanded an original and unique culture, but no one in the 1920s was quite sure what form it would assume. The one recurrent theme in the speeches of Gentile and other fascist intellectuals was the emphasis they placed on a spiritual rebirth, thus deliberately indicating that their ideas were firmly rooted in Italy's historic past, and at the same time opening to question the uniqueness of their new culture. Even prominent anti-fascist intellectuals such as Benedetto Croce and Gaetano Salvemini did not know what to make of the regime's cultural intentions,[26] but they reacted sharply to the claim that no genuine culture could exist without fascism. On 30 April 1925 Croce issued a manifesto of his own in which he stirringly defended the principles of nineteenth-century liberalism and documented the incompatibility of fascism with culture. Scores of independent-minded intellectuals, including Luigi Einaudi, Arturo Labriola, Piero Calamandrei, Luigi

antifascismo: Lezioni e testimonianze, 2 vols. (Milan 1963), I, 310–14; Carlo Ragghianti, 'Il fascismo e la cultura', 95–96; Emilio R. Papa, *Storia di due manifesti: il fascismo e la cultura italiana* (Milan 1958).

[24] Prefect of Bologna to Mussolini, 31 March 1925, ACS *Ministero dell' Interno* (DGPS), 1914–26 (1925), b. 59, f. Bologna, sottofasc. 'Convegno istituzioni fasciste de cultura'.

[25] Speech to the University of Pisa, 24 January 1926, in his *Fascismo e cultura* (Florence 1926), 6. The Fascist Party also told its members that 'Fascism, in order to keep its combative spirit alive, creates its own culture'. See Foglio d'ordine n. 25, 3 March 1927, ACS, *Partito Nazionale Fascista* (hereafter PNF) (Direttorio), b. 338.

[26] Ragghianti, 'Il fascismo e la cultura', 90–91.

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Albertini, and Salvemini himself, added their signatures to Croce's manifesto in open defiance of the regime. Gentile unabashedly replied to Croce's challenge by arguing that liberal Italian culture, represented by men like Croce, was 'a monstrous form of servility to foreign culture', and he again denied the validity of any culture that rejected fascism. The signatories of Croce's manifesto had 'misunderstood' fascism and were in error: 'Whoever rejects fascism', Gentile concluded, 'has no right to citizenship in our national culture.'[27]

The only 'revolutionary' doctrine to emerge from the Congress was the announcement that culture must be 'disciplined' – that it must, in fact, become an instrument of the state. Less than a year later Mussolini himself underlined this point in his first public statement about the role of culture in the regime. Speaking at the opening of the Novecento art exhibition in Milan in February 1926, he suggested in simple and typically fascist terminology that the cultural function of the state would be carried out by creating a 'hierarchy between politics and art'.[28] That the artist had to be totally committed to advancing fascist themes in his work was naturally assumed by the regime, for those especially endowed with talent were 'morally' bound to interpret fascism for the masses. Artists and intellectuals, therefore, must be considered 'political' men who immerse themselves fully in the life of the nation and the state, and put their abilities at the service of fascism to fulfil its goals. 'Fascism is not anti-intellectual or anti-culture', declared Forges Davanzati; 'rather it seeks to infuse culture with the severe and profound spirit of discipline which is found in the barracks.'[29] The first attempts to impose this discipline on national culture and establish the 'hierarchy between politics and art' followed immediately after the Bologna congress. In June 1925 Mussolini created the National Fascist Institute of Culture under the direction of the Fascist Party, and early in the following year he announced the formation of the Royal Academy of Italy. Despite these early efforts, however, the theoretical concept of cultural totalitarianism

[27] Gentile's letter to *Il Tevere*, 29 April 1926. He had already made a similar statement in criticising Croce and others who attended a philosophical congress in Milan 28–30 March. See *Il Popolo d'Italia*, 14 April 1926.

[28] *Discorsi del 1926*, 57–58. See also Partito Nazionale Fascista, *La cultura fascista*, 13.

[29] Speech to the Istituto di Cultura Veneziano, 18 February 1926, in *Cultura e fascismo*, 17.

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was not fully developed until the next decade, with the setting up of the first formal ministry of culture.

It was with deliberate intent that Mussolini's first pronouncements about culture came at the inauguration of the Novecento Exhibition. The Novecento (1900s) art movement, arising after the first world war, proclaimed the need to return to classical ideals and styles in Italian art. Its disciples, many of them former Futurist artists such as Giorgio Morandi, Carlo Carrà, and Felice Casorati, disdained all forms of cultural internationalism, rejecting especially the romantic art of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as alien to Italian culture. Seeking a compromise between the ancient and the modern,[30] the Novecentisti arrived at a modernized classicism which later came to be identified with the formalism of official public art under fascism. As early as 1922 Ardengo Soffici had hailed the Novecento movement as fascism's ideal cultural and artistic basis, presenting art as the expression of a political programme and an instrument for the regime's cultural policies.[31] In praising the Novecento movement Mussolini suggested that its name did not refer simply to chronology, but to a certain 'artistic direction' which was particularly fascist because it was different from its immediate antecedents in Italy. In the paintings and sculpture on display in Milan he saw signs of 'strict internal discipline' and a reflection of 'this Italy that has fought two wars, that has become disdainful of long speeches and of everything representing democractic slovenliness'. The style of the Novecento, he confidently predicted, would become the artistic style of modern Italy.[32]

In the 1930s Novecento painting became the subject of an acrid public debate over the cultural policies of the regime. Roberto Farinacci, the controversial *ras* of Cremona, gave the support of his newspaper *Il Regime Fascista* (8 January 1932) to Italian artists who worked in the eighteenth and nineteenth century traditions, while he questioned the validity of Novecento art for fascism. The noted Futurist writer Emilio Settimelli replied sharply in defence of Novecento, contending that to reject the 'new, aggressive, and

[30] In 1926 Mussolini had called for a fascist art that was both traditional and modern by building on the great Italian artistic patrimony. See his speech to the Academy of Fine Arts in Perugia, 5 October 1926, in *Discorsi del 1926* (Milan 1927), 317–18.

[31] Ardengo Soffici, 'Il fascismo e l'arte', *Gerarchia*, September 1922, 504–08.

[32] *Discorsi del 1926*, 57–63.

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revolutionary art' of Italy was to reject the revolutionary basis of fascist culture itself.[33] The polemic increased in scope and bitterness during the subsequent Exhibition of Modern Decorative Arts and Architecture, held in Milan in 1932. Farinacci took the occasion not only to renew his attacks on the Novecento movement, but to question the entire concept of modernity in fascist culture. The subsequent furore induced Party Secretary Achille Starace to intervene personally in support of Novecento and modern fascist art.[34] When Farinacci intimated that government officials were using the regime's artistic policies for private financial gain, and that the 'rooms, halls, and attics' of state ministries were filled with Novecento paintings, Mussolini himself had to silence him.[35]

The controversy over Novecento art confirmed the regime's commitment to cultural forms that reflected fascist ambitions to create a new, modern Italian culture based on the traditions of a more glorious past. The Novecento movement, with its emphasis on Roman styles and *Italianità*, its rejection of the recent past, and its embracing of cultural nationalism, clearly reflected the nationalist basis of fascist cultural theories. The fascists saw no real contradiction in the simultaneous acceptance of an ancient heritage and modernity, for their revolution aimed at creating a new Italian citizen inspired by the Roman principles of discipline, duty, martial valour, and national unity.

Their doctrine of cultural autonomy gave the myth of the cultural revolution added significance. Fascism had divorced itself from Italy's immediate past and from liberal Italian culture, which had been 'contaminated' by foreign and democratic influences. 'There is a vast gulf between Italy and the conservative powers', an Italian diplomat told Mussolini in 1926, 'and it is fundamentally a cultural distinction which we have already begun to eliminate at home. Both the theory of neo-idealist philosophy and fascism in actual practice have cleared Italian culture of the contradictions

[33] 'Un nuovo critico d'arte', *Il Corriere Padano*, 6 June 1933.

[34] Starace ordered Farinacci to end the controversy because it was producing dissent and confusion within the Party and the regime. See the documentation in PNF (*Direttorio*), b. 262, 'Mostre', f. 'Triennale di Milano'.

[35] Mussolini to prefect of Cremona, 13 June 1933, ACS, *Segreteria Particolare del Duce* (hereafter SPD), *Carteggio Riservato* (1922–43), f. 242/R, 'Farinacci, Roberto', sottofasc. 10, insert A, 'Polemica sull'arte del Novecento'.

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between democratic rationalism and our national spirit'.[36] For the next decade a central theme of fascist cultural policies was to be the elimination of foreign influences from Italian culture, as well as the glorification of the nation's distinctive cultural heritage.

IN THE LATE 1920s the regime launched a systematic and intensified programme of cultural nationalism (paralleling the campaign for economic autarky) in which foreign newspapers, music, films, and literature were systematically withdrawn from circulation. Popular aspects of twentieth-century American culture especially were thought to illustrate the democratic-liberal civilization that dominated Europe and against which fascism was struggling. The policy of cultural self-sufficiency sometimes assumed more exaggerated forms, such as the prohibition of beauty contests because they were 'an expression of foreign decadence', and the elimination of foreign words and expressions such as 'soda parlour' and 'bar' from store fronts.[37] Perhaps the most notorious example was the campaign against using the third person singular 'lei' as a polite form of address; the fascists considered this pronoun a remnant of Italian servility to foreign invaders as well as a snobbish bourgeois expression. An exhibition of paintings, cartoons, and publications called the *Mostra Anti-Lei* was organized in Turin in 1937 to encourage the abandonment of this un-revolutionary word, while Fascist Party leaders sternly advocated the abolition of 'lei' as a measure of the maturity and discipline of the Italian people under fascism.[38] A similar effort was also directed against foreign influences in clothing fashions, for which a *Mostra Permanente della Moda Italiana* was opened in 1935 and about which newspapers spoke as the 'Battle for Italian Fashions'.

[36] Report by Ettore Marrone, Italy's representative at the League of Nations, 'Europa societaria e Italia fascista', 22 November 1926, MCP, b. 183, f. 15, 'Carte varie riservate del Ministero degli Affari Esteri'.

[37] See, for example, 'Parlando con Mascagni', *Radiocorriere*, 5–11 June 1930, and 'Il Roxi e l'Americanismo', ibid., 15–22 January 1933. On the beauty contests see report of 5 January 1934, ACS, *Agenzia Stefani*, b. 3, f. 8. Foreign words were forbidden in newspapers on 2 April 1934. Mussolini's order to eliminate American expressions from store fronts is found in a memo dated 17 September 1936, SPD, *Carteggio Ordinario*, b. 273, f. 1, 'Ministero della Cultura Popolare'.

[38] Party newsletter of 25 February 1938, n. 40, 'Stile dei tempi nuovi', PCM (1937–39), f. 1/1.5, n. 3500, sottofasc. 19. See also Asvero Gravelli, ed., *Anti-Lei* (Rome n.d.).

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The fascists themselves recognized that it would be impossible to create a new, revolutionary culture merely by rejecting the recent past or through a policy of cultural nationalism based on the elimination of foreign influences in Italian life. Fascism, like similar movements elsewhere in Europe, sought to give its ideology legitimacy by claiming that its origins lay in an ancient and more glorious national past. The ethos of the Italic race and the traditions of ancient Rome, evoked in the mysticism and ritual surrounding much of fascist public display, provided the regime with the national roots of official culture. It never claimed that history began with fascism, but that fascism was the fulfilment and rebirth of the true spirit and soul of the Italic race, which had found its first and greatest expression in Imperial Rome.[39] It was no accident that the fascists had established an Institute for Roman Studies in 1925, that the symbol of the regime was the *Fascio Littorio*, or that Mussolini was referred to as Dux. In 1926 Gaetano Polverelli, head of Mussolini's Press Office, suggested that the Augusteo, tomb of the first Roman emperor, be made into a 'temple of fascism', and that the regime should display the most important artifacts of ancient Rome together with mementos of the fascist movement in one large exhibit.[40] Caesar and Mussolini were both presented as heroes of the same great national tradition, with Caesar as predecessor of fascism.[41]

These themes formed the basis for much of the cultural propaganda of the 1930s. Newspaper editors were instructed to devote considerable space to the idea of *Romanità*, while the release of Carmine Gallone's celebrated film *Scipione l'Africano* (1937) after the Ethiopian war was a clear indication that Mussolini's new empire was the recreation of the Roman empire. The adoption by the Fascist Party of the Roman salute, the *passo romano*, and similar forms of public behaviour, were efforts to imbue Italians outwardly

[39] Giuseppe Bottai, *L'Italia di Augusto e l'Italia d'oggi* (Rome 1937); Emilio Bodrero, *Auspici d'impero* (Milan 1925), 89.

[40] Polverelli to Mussolini, 18 April 1926, SPD, *Carteggio Riservato* (1922–43), b. 62, f. W/R, 'Polverelli, G.' Di Marzio suggested that the statue of Marcus Aurelius in the Campidoglio might better be replaced by that of Julius Caesar because 'it is more worthy and representative' of fascist Italy. 'Lezioni di cultura fascista', 7 February 1933, ACS, *Carte Di Marzio*, I V., b. 20, f. 'Lezioni'.

[41] The article on Julius Caesar in the *Enciclopedia Italiana* by Mario Levi was rejected by Mussolini because 'it did not sufficiently represent Caesar in the light of Roman and fascist traditions'. Memo by Di Marzio, 31 December 1932, SPD *Carteggio Riservato* (1922–43), b. 36, f. 251/R, 'Enciclopedia Trecanni'.

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with the spirit and discipline of Roman life. Latin dramas and modern opera were performed at night in illuminated ancient amphitheatres to revive an appreciation for Roman culture. But perhaps the most important and vivid expression of the fascist commitment to the imperial heritage was the use of modified classical Roman architecture as the official building style of the regime. Railroad stations, government centres, and Party headquarters constructed on classical lines were permanent and obvious reminders of the fascist assimilation of *Romanità*. The style was used widely in the Foro Mussolini decorated with statues of Roman athletes, in the Città Universitaria of Rome, in entirely new cities like Latina, and in the ambitious but unrealized plans for the 1942 *Esposizione Universale di Roma*.[42]

The glorification of the Roman past and its identification with fascism was publicly illustrated in a monumental propaganda exhibition called the *Mostra Augustea della Romanità*. Planned as early as 1932 under the direction of Professor Giulio Giglioli of the University of Rome to celebrate the two thousandth anniversary of the birth of the emperor Augustus, the huge exhibition opened in 1937 with sections on the early origins of Rome, its imperial conquests, the life of Augustus, the Roman army, law and institutions, and, significantly, a section entitled *Fascismo e Romanità*. A concerted publicity campaign in the cities and countryside was aimed at drawing as many Italians as possible from all walks of life to the exhibition. Organized tours of school children and university students, Dopolavoro members, Fascist Party youth organizations, and the militia, were arranged with reduced railway fares so that 'the masses can take a bath in *Romanità*'. While careful attention was given to the presentation of historical and archaeological evidence of Rome's greatness, the real meaning of the entire show was made clear to visitors. Over the entrance were inscribed Mussolini's words: 'Italians, you must ensure that the glories of the past are surpassed by the glories of the future', while symbolic impact was added during the closing ceremonies by the presentation of a live eagle to the Duce as a sign that the imperial tradition had passed to fascism.[43]

[42] For the Party's attempt to recreate a Roman life-style, see Asvero Gravelli, *Vademecum dello stile fascista* (Rome 1939). On architecture see Paolo Napoli, *Arte e architettura in regime fascista* (Rome 1939), 59–103.

[43] Documentation on the exhibition in PCM (1937–39), f. 14/1, n. 918, 'Mostra Augustea della Romanità'.

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A GROTESQUE COROLLARY of the Roman theme appeared in 1938 when Mussolini announced his anti-Semitic programme. Although Italian racism came out of the doctrine of the twentieth-century demographer Corrado Gini, fascist racial policies appeared to embody unoriginal ideas borrowed from nazi ideology for the sake of strengthening Italy's political ties with Hitler's Germany.[44] This blatant form of anti-Semitism was vigorously advocated by a few fanatical fascists such as Roberto Farinacci, Giuseppe Preziosi, and Telesio Interlandi. Nevertheless, viewed in the perspective of the regime's cultural ambitions, these racial policies reinforced the official search for the historical roots of Italian national identity. Marshalling a confused mixture of archaeological, linguistic, and anthropological evidence, the fascist ideologues created the myth that Italians were descended from a pure 'Italic race'. In addition to articles in scientific and popular periodicals by respected scholars, photographic displays, exhibits, and film documentaries were used to persuade Italians that there existed an ideal Italic type similar to the nazi 'Nordic' type. Fascist propaganda portrayed imperial Rome as a great 'Aryan' empire in which all the superior physical and spiritual traits of the national character had been moulded. Since Mussolini's revolution sought to instil Italians with the attributes of their Roman ancestors, the regime now attempted to purify national culture of those 'non-Aryan' influences that had contaminated and weakened the Italian spirit since the fall of Rome. In April 1940 the government organized an elaborate *Mostra della Razza* in Rome which traced the origins and development of the 'Italic race' from prehistoric times through the Etruscans and the Romans down to the fascist period.[45]

The regime also came to the 'defence of the race' by attempting to revitalize the physical strength of Italians through government agencies such as the *Opera Nazionale per la Maternità e l'Infanzia*, as well as through health agencies devoted to hygiene and disease

[44] Renzo De Felice, *Storia degli ebrei italiani sotto il fascismo* (Turin 1961).

[45] Memo by Alberto Luchini, head of the Racial Office, 20 April 1939, 'Raccolta di materiale paleantropologico e palentnologico', MCP, b. 130, 'Propaganda Razziale in Italia'; memo for Mussolini, August 1939, 'Raccolta fotografica di tipi razziali italiani', ibid., b. 120, f. 3; Giacomo Acerbo, *I fondamenti della dottrina della razza* (Rome 1940). On the use of the term 'razza italica' in the media see press directive for 8 August 1938, ACS, *Agenzia Stefani*, b. 4, f. 11. On the mostra see PCM (1937–39), f. 14/1, n. 8147, 'Roma – Mostra della Razza', and PNF (Direttorio), b. 263, f. 'precedenti altre mostre'.

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control programmes. Nor were fascist racial policies limited to anti-Semitism. A similar programme of systematically eliminating the autonomous cultural traditions of the Yugoslav population in Italy had been carried out since the early 1930s and was intensified after 1938.[46] During and after the Ethiopian campaign a great deal of propaganda was distributed concerning the racial inferiority of the Negro population of Italy's newly acquired African colony, popularized in the song *Faccetta Nera* and in a film by the same title produced in 1936 (but never shown). Significantly, the term 'Italic race' was defined in such a way as to emphasize the historical rather than the ethnic distinctions between Italians and other nationalities.[47]

Closely associated with the Roman myth was the concept of the 'new man', a common feature of totalitarian ideologies, and one which in Italian fascism became a major cultural theme. Gentile's neo-idealism provided a philosophical basis for the claim that fascism released the talents and energies of the individual through the ethical state. These energies, he hoped, would encourage the development of a new type of Italian suited to twentieth-century fascist civilization. For Gentile, the degree to which Mussolini could succeed in creating a new Italy was directly related to the regime's ability to reshape the habits and customs of the Italians, to form a 'new culture, a new way of thinking, and a new man'.[48] When, during the crisis of war in 1943, some fascist newspapers suggested that their long established customs and traditions should be recalled to the Italians, Polverelli bitterly demanded to know 'why Mussolini ever led the Revolution if not to renew Italy and above all the character of the Italians?'[49]

The fascists sought to emphasize the revolutionary character of their movement by removing all traces and influences of the 'old'

[46] Lavo Cermelj, *Life-and-Death Struggle of a National Minority: The Jugoslavs in Italy* (Ljubljana 1936), 30–115. The same policy was followed with regard to Germans living in the Alto Adige. See D. I. Rusinow, *Italy's Austrian Heritage 1919–1946* (Oxford 1969), 170–79.

[47] Memo of 19 August 1938, 'Clarificazione del termine razza italiana', MCP, b. 130, 'Propaganda razziale in Italia'. On the African aspect see the memo to Mussolini of 24 July 1938, MCP, b. 7, 77, 'Rapporto al Duce', and the later account by a contemporary observer, Luigi Preti, *I Miti dell'Impero e della Razza nell'Italia degli anni '30* (Rome 1965).

[48] Giovanni Gentile, *Fascismo e cultura* (Milan 1928), 86.

[49] Briefing to journalists, 18 March 1943, MCP, b. 173, f. 12, 'Rapporti ai giornalisti'.

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Italy and her recent liberal past from official culture. For two decades the mass media were instructed to avoid all references to the 'old' Italy of liberalism and foreign domination, and instead to exalt the achievements of the fascist era. Mussolini told writers that they were to be 'the bearers of a new type of Italian civilization', and he admonished editors not to publish articles about 'certain old habits and a certain mentality absolutely passé'. When writing about Italy, journalists 'must describe only that which occurs in our time during the regime of Mussolini . . . newspapers must fully convince [their readers] that we live in the atmosphere of a revolution'.[50] During the last few months before Mussolini was driven from power in 1943, these prohibitions reached absurd proportions, and newspapers were confiscated merely 'for having praised eighteenth century – and therefore pre-fascist – Italy'. Still other newspapers were confiscated because they used expressions such as 'the Italians are angels' in headlines: Editors warned their staff not to use 'phrases which may recall to mind the old, deplorable commonplace about the "good Italian".'[51]

In their efforts to eliminate what they considered to be outmoded cultural forms and influences, the fascists even attacked traditional dialects. Given their aim to mould nationally conscious citizens, these local variations in language represented all that was wrong in the old Italy, including political regionalism, cultural disunity, and anti-modernism. They wanted to make Italy into a modern, integrated nation in which no differences existed among provinces or people, and provincial prefects were ordered to confiscate all newspaper articles encouraging the use of dialects or similar forms of cultural *campanilismo*. Beginning in the late 1920s, local periodicals were prohibited from publishing stories, poetry, or songs in dialect, and aspects of folk culture such as dialect theatre were discouraged. As late as 1941 the fascists considered withdrawing from circulation all literary works in dialect, while actors were forbidden to speak even a few lines of dialect in films.[52]

THE CONCEPT OF THE 'new man' was the fascist solution to the problem of the individual's place in the state and in society. In the

[50] Speech to the Society of Authors and Publishers, in *Il Giornale d'Italia*, 2 July 1926; press directive, 17 January 1933, ACS, Agenzia Stefani, b. 3, f. 7.

[51] Instructions to the press, 18 March 1943, MCP, b. 173, f. 12, 'Rapporti ai giornalisti'; directive to editors, 19 June 1943, MCP, b. 29, f. 'Relativo al PNF', f. 3.

[52] MCP, b. f. 113, 'Dialetti'; b. 127, f. 2, 'Letteratura dialettale'.

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1920s there was much discussion among fascist ideologues concerning an 'elite'. Camillo Pellizzi argued that without an elitist group of leaders free to exploit their own genius for the benefit of the collectivity, the state itself could not be created or maintained. On the other hand, the fascist elite had all the best qualities of the 'new man', who knew his responsibilities to the state, obeyed the commands of Mussolini, and had absolute and unquestioning faith in fascism. The ideal was the man of action who devoted his life to making the revolution a 'living reality'.[53] The fascist model of an elite was not, however, D'Annunzio's superman. Some theorists, like Di Marzio and Pellizzi, conceived of the new man as the *gerarca*: the competent official who served the state and the Fascist Party in peace as well as in war. By the time that the revolutionary ideology had been fully absorbed by the fascist state in the 1930s, the ideal had become the individual who expressed his will and his talents through the state.[54]

More militant fascists, especially Party spokesmen, demanded that the 'new man', once rid of his provincialism and his attachment to old-fashioned customs, and shorn of his stereotyped image as the amiable, peace-loving, spaghetti-eating Italian, must embody both the thought and the action of Mussolini's revolution in the form of an idealized *squadrista* modelled after the virtuous citizen of Imperial Rome. One of the basic aims of the Fascist Party was to mould every Italian into the 'new man who will believe, obey, and fight' in the name of Mussolini.[55] Reporting in 1934 on the goals of the regime's pre-military training programmes, General Francesco Grazioli observed that 'under the stimulus of the fascist spirit all the fundamental military virtues of our people are being increasingly accentuated without ever degenerating into uncivilized forms. It is precisely in this climate that we are forging

[53] Camillo Pallizzi, *Fascismo-Aristocrazia* (Milan 1925), 45–46; idem., *Una rivoluzione mancata* (Milan 1949), 30–35; Antonio Aliotta, *La formazione dello spirito nello stato fascista* (Rome 1938), 209–15.

[54] 'Sagoma dell'Uomo Nuovo', ms. by Cornelio Di Marzio, n.d. but late 1930s, ACS, *Carte Di Marzio*, II V., b. 13, f. 'S.E. Mussolini'. Pellizzi, *Fascismo-Aristocrazia*, 194–95, objected to the 'new man' being a 'functionary of a large, new bureaucracy' because this would limit fascism's ability to grow. Biographies of the most prominent 'new men' were published in Edoardo Savino, ed., *La Nazione Operante* (Milan 1934).

[55] Starace to Mussolini, 3 November 1939, SPD, *Carteggio Riservato* (1922–43), b. 34, f. 242/R, 'Starace, A.', sottofasc. 1. See also 'Lineamenti e fattori del costume fascista', *Critica Fascista*, 1 August 1937, 292–93.

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the ideal type of *the new Italian*'.[56] Physical fitness, martial spirit, hard work, discipline, and intellectual prowess were the ideal characteristics of the new Italian, expressed in the slogan '*Libro e moschetto, fascista perfetto*'.

Fascist propaganda projected Mussolini as the archetype of the new man and sought to make the Duce an object of worship and a moral example for all Italians. The Party disseminated basic fascist doctrines among members of its youth organizations in the form of the 'Ten Commandmants of the New Italian', while older members received small prayer cards containing a hagiographic portrait of Mussolini and the 'Decalogue of the Blackshirt' to provide spiritual inspiration.[57] Mario Carli's prize-winning novel *L'Italiano di Mussolini* (1930) was an attempt to portray in popular literary form the new man of the revolution and his new Italy, just as the film *Camicia Nera* (1933) by Giovacchino Forzano was a major effort to project the theme on the screen.

The fascists expressed their commitment to forge a new Italy and a new 'historical era' by means of various public symbols and ceremonies. Drawing on precedent from the French Revolution of 1789, the regime officially adopted a new calendar system in 1926 which began with the date of the March on Rome as 'Year One of the Fascist Era'. This form was used on all government documents and increasingly appeared on public buildings and propaganda material.[58] In 1927 another Roman symbol – the *Fascio Littorio* – became the official symbol of the state, and the regime did all it could to popularize it as a replacement for the Savoy coat of arms.[59] Many other traditional symbols and customs which reflected the culture of pre-fascist, bourgeois society were discouraged. Press campaigns against New Year celebrations and dinners were begun in the early 1930s, and the public was also admonished not to use the Christmas tree because it was a foreign import not rooted in the national heritage.[60]

In place of these outmoded practices the regime hoped to sub-

[56] SPD, *Carteggio Riservato* (1922–43), f. 91/R, 'Grazioli, F.'

[57] Party newsletter, 2 January 1939, n. 107, PCM (1937–39), f. 1/1. 15, n. 3500, sottofasc. 19, 'Notiziario'.

[58] Government circular of 25 December 1926, ACS, *Ministero dell'Interno* (DGPS), Series B-5-AG (1927), b. 104, f. 88, 'Data dell'annuale'.

[59] Foglio d'ordine n. 17, 17 December 1927, PNF (*Direttorio*), b. 338.

[60] See, for instance, orders to the press for 20 December 1933, ACS, *Agenzia Stefani*, b. 3, f. 7, and for 19 and 20 December 1937, b. 4, f. 10.

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stitute fascist ritual and symbolism. The anniversary of the March on Rome thus became the Fascist New Year, celebrated with parades and mass rallies in Rome and the provinces. The *Giornata di Fede* (Day of Faith), 28 October, was highlighted by a mystical ceremony before an ancient Roman altar placed before the tomb of the unknown soldier. Instead of traditional May Day celebrations, the fascists proclaimed 21 April a national holiday, the *Natale di Roma* (Birthday of Rome). Traditional religious festivals were linked to fascism by popularizing important Italian saints as national heroes, while Epiphany was taken over by the Fascist Party in 1934 as the *Befana Fascista* during which toys and gifts were distributed to children of workers.[61] To impress Italian youth with the conviction that they were living in a new culture, the traditional carnival for initiating first year university students was replaced in 1932 by a *Festa delle Matricole*. The usual student carousing and merry-making was prohibited, replaced by ceremonies of a serious, disciplined, and mature character 'worthy of the climate and style created by fascism'. At the same time, the Catholic variety of these customary celebrations, the *Giornata Universitaria*, was substituted by a state counterpart called the *Giornata Universitaria Fascista*. In this manner the regime hoped to integrate traditional student leisure activities into the broader framework of fascist cultural propaganda.[62]

The attacks launched against many of the long-established customs of traditional culture were part of a conscious effort to create a new moral climate, a style of conduct for the individual in his public and private life. Fundamentally, it was designed to give Italians a sense of identity with the regime and to forge a popular commitment to fascism. The ultimate goal of these cultural and social policies was the integration of the masses into a well-ordered national life. The Party's youth groups, the famous *Gioventù Italiana del Littorio* (GIL) and the *Gioventù Universitaria Fascista* (GUF), as well as the Dopolavoro organizations, were important means towards its attainment.

By the mid-1930s the fascists found that their ideas about the

[61] See the plans for celebrating the feast of St Francis in MCP, b. 18, f. 158. For the origins of the Befana Fascista see report of the Party Directorate for 22 November 1934, SPD, *Carteggio Riservato* (1922–45), b. 23, f. 242/R, 'Riunione del Direttorio'; PCM (1939–43), f. 3/3.6, n. 3200/5, 'Befana Fascista'.

[62] PNF (*Gioventù Universitaria Fascista*), b. 973 B, f. 'Festa delle Matricole', especially circular by Starace of 15 December 1932.

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relationship between culture and the state were too vague and unsatisfactory for their broader ambitions, and they began to carry their earlier cultural theories to their logical conclusion. The pursuit of culture for its own sake was never officially fashionable in fascist Italy. In true totalitarian style the regime demanded that culture must serve the aims and purposes of the state. The Party's accepted definition of culture proceeded from the assumption that culture was a function of politics, an assumption which had been implicit in the writings of fascist ideologues since the early 1920s.[63] Some writers asserted that art and politics were inseparable aspects of the state's activity. Only fascism, they argued, had recognized this relationship and put it into practice. It followed that for them the concept of art for art's sake – or the quest for 'pure' culture divorced from the political requirements of the nation – was meaningless. Culture was an instrument of government to be used by the state for the political and social advancement of all its citizens. Pure art ('cultural anarchy') was thus rejected in favour of politically inspired art that conformed to official styles such as classical formalism in architecture and stylized realism in painting. All forms of culture were to reflect the ideology and the aims of the state, including even everyday household items such as glassware, pottery, and children's toys. In the 1930s a common style of home and office furniture with heavy, rounded lines and veneered finish was officially dubbed '*lo stile Duce*'.[64]

These cultural theories, in themselves merely an extension of the ideas proclaimed at the Bologna congress in 1925, clearly determined the position that intellectuals and artists would hold in the regime. The fascist intellectual could not remove himself from his political surroundings or his obligations to the state. The artist must be a political man, using his talents to advance the policies and aims of the national government. Art, the product of his genius, must have a moral and ethical basis, just as Gentile en-

[63] Elio Scardamaglia, 'La cultura in funzione politica', in Partito Nazionale Fascista, *Dizionario di politica*, 4 vols. (Rome 1940) I, 709–10. Ardengo Soffici, 'Il fascismo e l'arte', and Davanzati, *Fascismo e cultura*, made the same point much earlier.

[64] Cornelio Di Marzio, 'Arte e politica', in *Professioni ed Arti*, August 1938, 58–59; Partito Nazionale Fascista, *La cultura fascista* (Rome 1936), 10–14. On official architectural styles see the two articles in *Il Popolo d'Italia*, 7 October 1936 and 23 April 1937. On the decorative arts see the pamphlets and catalogue of the Mostra Internazionale delle Arti Decorative held in Milan, PCM (1931–33), 14/1, n. 1543.

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visaged an ethical state. 'No one', insisted Mussolini, 'merely because he is cultured or has academic degrees, can consider himself removed from the life around him. He must, instead, live it completely, he must be a man of his times, he must avoid isolating himself in sterile egocentrism.'[65] In this way the artist and the intellectual assumed the role of workers and constructive citizens in the nation. Their usefulness to society and to the state could thus be exploited in a manner unthinkable in conventional political regimes. Not only would they have a duty to support the political programmes of the government, but a right to be represented and to participate in the political life of the nation.[66]

Thus in 1931 Mussolini boasted that under fascism culture had become an essential 'arm of the regime'.[67] The new element added to the concept of fascist culture in the 1930s was the more extreme imperative that culture would be not only an instrument but also a product of the state. As the only legitimate source of artistic inspiration, the state must organize and institutionalize all cultural activities. For the real essence of the fascist cultural revolution was to provide society with the necessary political direction and to secure a firm and disciplined relationship between cultural life and the changing objectives of the state. In the eyes of fascist ideologues official propaganda became increasingly identified with culture, for the ultimate aim of propaganda was the edification and moulding of national citizens. Quick to recognize the potential of mass propaganda as an instrument of the modern state, they were inclined to see it as the highest expression of culture. 'The more a work of art fulfils its task of propaganda', asserted the official Party manual, 'the more it becomes art'.[68] Mass propaganda was the ideal instrument for carrying out Mussolini's admonition '*andare verso il*

[65] Mussolini's speech to the Union of Professionals and Artists, 25 September 1932, in Edoardo and Duilio Susmel, eds., *Opera Omnia di Benito Mussolini*, XXV (Florence 1958), 130. See also 'Funzione degl' intellettuali', *Critica Fascista*, 1 March 1943, 103, and Francesco Tropeano, 'Italianità ed Europeismo', in Partito Nazionale Fascista, *I littoriali della cultura e dell'arte dell'anno XIV* (Naples 1936), 12.

[66] Undated manuscript [1932] by Di Marzio with an outline of a 'study on the artist in the political life of the nation', ACS, *Carte Di Marzio*, II V., b. 4; Giuseppe Bottai, *Fronte all'arte* (Florence 1943), 10.

[67] Speech to the second congress of the Istituti Nazionali Fascisti di Cultura, 14 November 1931, *Opera Omnia*, XXV, 58.

[68] Partito Nazionale Fascista, *La cultura fascista*, 22.

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popolo' – to reach down to all levels of the people and bring the revolution directly to every citizen.

The growing realization of the potential uses of government-made mass propaganda necessitated the creation of a state agency that could produce culture according to the theoretical premises of fascism and deliver it to the people in a uniform and systematic manner. In 1937 these goals were embodied in the Ministry of Popular Culture. The new ministry, which had evolved slowly over the years, revealed the actual meaning of the 'hierarchy between politics and art'.[69] The preceding decade had been characterized by a vast amount of legislation and numerous ministerial decrees regarding various aspects of cultural activity, but without any significant degree of co-ordination or any serious attempt to have them conform to an overall cultural policy. The new ministry sought to rationalize the previously haphazard measures and to implement what Dino Alfieri, its first head, called the 'passage from a liberal regime to a disciplined regime in the realm of culture'. Only then did spokesmen for fascist cultural policies realize that a truly 'totalitarian' state required the complete and absolute control of culture by the national government.[70]

Nevertheless, the concept as a whole remained naive and incomplete. In the 1920s the first consideration seems to have been to make the most important agencies of culture subject to the judicial authority of the state and to place good fascists in executive positions, after which it would be possible to co-ordinate the policies of those agencies with the broader aims of the government. In the 1930s the fascist view of 'totalitarian' culture was simply the administrative centralization of cultural institutions. The creation of bureaucratic categories into which all manner of men and cultural pursuits could be neatly compartmentalized – and by implication disciplined – was thought to be sufficient for the total control of the arts. This structural approach provided the regime with the surface appearance of totalitarian organization, but did little to prevent deviations from accepted norms in the actual products of cultural and intellectual thought. Moreover, the new and cumbersome

[69] On the evolution of fascist cultural institutions and the Ministry of Popular Culture, see P. V. Cannistraro, 'Burocrazia e politica culturale nello stato fascista: Il Ministero della Cultura Popolare', *Storia Contemporanea*, June 1970.

[70] Alfieri to Ferruccio Lantine, 8 June 1937, MCP, b. 13, f. 175, 'Corporazione delle Professioni e delle arti'; Rudolfo De Mattei, 'Cultura fascista e cultura dei fascisti', *Critica Fascista*, 1 April 1938.

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bureaucracy was never efficiently run, nor did it achieve its goal. Realization fell far short of the target in terms of the impact of these policies on the Italian people.[71]

The fascists had more success in other areas of their cultural policy. Intimately bound to the concept of a totalitarian culture was the significant place that 'popular' culture – largely a euphemism for mass propaganda – came to have in official ideology as well as in the regime's broader policies. Not only was mass culture introduced into Italy for the first time by the fascists; it may well be argued that fascist Italy was the first state in Western Europe to recognize the potential value of the mass media for purposes of political control. Fascist leaders were well aware that all forms of popular entertainment attracted large audiences and that the control of popular pastimes could be turned into an important instrument for political regimentation. Reporting to the Fascist Grand Council in 1935 on the state of the regime's cultural policies, Starace emphasized the necessity for increased 'discipline' over mass leisure-time activities, remarking that 'During the summer months the beaches . . . are extremely overcrowded; the traditional festivals have had a following far greater than that of past years; theatres, movie houses, and amusement places . . . are widely frequented; sporting events attract an impressive mass of people. It is not the enthusiasm of the crowds that is lacking'.[72]

It was this relatively new area of popular culture that the fascists proudly claimed – and with some justification – as their own special creation. As a phenomenon directly stemming from the totalitarian state, popular culture meant the total integration and participation of the masses in the cultural and social life of the nation. The state assumed the role of tutor and educator, whose main task was to elevate the 'spiritual life' of the people, and especially of the workers and peasants who traditionally had had little opportunity to share in the nation's culture. Fascist efforts to raise the level of mass participation in cultural activities resulted, whether intentionally or not, in the creation of an entirely new dimension of government action through which political control could be exercised to an extent and in ways previously unknown in modern regimes.

[71] See Alberto Aquarone, *L'organizzazione dello stato totalitario*, 310–02, and Costanzo Casucci, 'Fascismo e cultura', in Casucci, ed., *Il fascismo: Antologia di scritti critici* (Bologna 1961), 431–32.

[72] Starace's report of 14 February 1935, SPD, *Carteggio Riservato* (1922–43), b. 242/R, 'Il Gran Consiglio', sottofasc. 13 (1935).

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But even in the realm of modern mass propaganda the regime failed to create a 'revolutionary' culture. Instead, the Ministry of Popular Culture produced and disseminated cultural images and themes that continued to reflect the nationalist origins of its ideology. An examination of Italian domestic propaganda and cultural policy during the two decades of fascist rule reveals that both the revolutionary and the fascist content of official propaganda were consistently subordinated to more conventional national themes. Every newspaper, newsreel, and radio programme had, of course, the requisite measure of the fascist presence. By and large, however, the daily image of Italy and Italian society projected by the Ministry of Popular Culture stressed not the fascist aspect of official life, but rather the themes of a well-ordered, powerful nation. News photographs and documentaries proclaimed each day that Italy was a young, virile country of extraordinary military prowess and discipline. Such propaganda was to be expected, but there was nothing particularly fascist about it. Photographs of marching troops and naval manoeuvres were more frequent than parading Blackshirts and *squadristi* (the latter had already been relegated to the annals of official history by the 1930s). Although Mussolini's picture appeared at least once in each issue of the daily newspapers, photographs of the king and royal family appeared almost as frequently. For the regime's internal propaganda lower crime statistics were more important than high Party membership figures, and the ban on reporting suicides was intended to prove that Italy gave her citizens everything to live for. The Ministry of Popular Culture provided soccer games, boxing matches, and the Italian Olympic team with immensely greater news coverage than the latest tract on fascist philosophy. Italians were to be made to feel that they were a vigorous, industrious people, filled with pride in being Italians – not in being fascists. Official propaganda was largely propaganda for Italy and her greatness, sprinkled now and then with the spice of fascism.[73]

It is true that in some of the media such as motion pictures fascist themes were increasingly frequent by the 1930s, but the perennial lament of many *gerarchi* about the need to give national

[73] This generalization held true for the press as well as the other mass media. See P.V. Cannistraro, 'The Organization of Totalitarian Culture: Cultural Policy and the Mass Media in Fascist Italy, 1922–1945', unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, New York University, 1970.

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culture a greater fascist content continued unabated over the years. The regime's ideologues may have debated and theorized much over the nature of the fascist cultural revolution, but those who ran the cultural agencies and ministries had their own approach to propaganda. If the portrait of Italy created by the cultural bureaucrats was less revolutionary than the ideologues would have liked, it was also infinitely more practical. Such an approach to cultural propaganda was not particularly totalitarian, nor was it especially fascist. In the final analysis, then, Mussolini's cultural revolution represented the successful absorption and reshaping of nationalist ideology into the rhetorical framework of fascism.

But what of the nationalist intellectuals themselves who had given Mussolini their support in the days after the war in the hope of resurrecting a greater Italy? Their swift and often painful disillusionment demonstrates clearly their ultimate realization that Mussolini had used and twisted their ideals to serve his own ends. The case of the artist C.E. Oppo provides instructive testimony. In 1925 Oppo, a former writer and art critic for the recently defunct nationalist newspaper *L'Idea Nazionale*, had been given a position on the fascist journal *La Tribuna*. Writing on *La Tribuna* stationery in December of that year to Cornelio Di Marzio, another former nationalist, Oppo told of his disillusionment with Fascism: 'Dear Friend: Do you see where I am writing from? Perhaps you have not yet heard of the sordid event. Anyhow, *L'Idea Nazionale* is dead and we have all made the March on the Tribuna. A Melancholy March: Farewell Youth! . . . Now I think only of my art. Everything else is repulsive.'[74]

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[74] Oppo to Di Marzio, 29 December 1925, ACS, *Carte Di Marzio*, II V., b. 11.

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