Erschienen in: Fascism ; 2 (2013), 1. - S. 117-118
https://dx.doi.org/10.1163/22116257-00201014

Monica Cioli, *Il fascismo e la 'sua' arte: Dottrina e istituzioni tra futurismo e Novecento* (Florence: Olschki, 2011)

In his recent book on the Italian Futurists and their misalliance with Fascist politics, Emilio Gentile made a whimsical, but very telling, remark: 'It may be erroneous to consider politics an important aspect of Futurism, but it was certainly the Futurists themselves that were the first to make this mistake.'[1] In her insightful study on Fascism and 'its' art, Monica Cioli examines this close nexus between Futurism (and the *Novecento* movement) and Italian Fascism, and follows its evolution.

As Fascism mutated from a revolutionary movement aiming at the seizure of power, into a regime that was set on securing the latter and evoking a mass consensus, its relationship with its artists was transformed. The art that they created consequently underwent a metamorphosis in regard to both its scope and its content. At first, the Futurist avant-garde sought primarily to reify the dynamism of the mechanical era and to stress the need to overcome 'passatism'—a past that in the eyes of the Futurists was embodied by Italy's weakly liberal order. Futurist works served to bring about a new mindset and a corresponding 'technocratic' elite designed to govern a renewed and powerful modern Italy. Yet with the shift to a new futurist generation, and especially with the passage to *aeropittura*, the art's *raison d'être* shifted to the 'fascistization' of the masses (p. 135).

Cioli shows that the liaison between large parts of Italy's artistic faction and the black-shirted thugs, intellectuals, and politicians did not materialize by chance and was by no means spurred only by opportunism, that is, the need to make a living as an artist. Rather, Cioli plausibly argues that Futurism and Fascism had a common progenitor as well as a mutual aim: Both movements were actualizations of a widespread revolutionary *Zeitgeist* and acted as the mouthpiece of the same vision of modernity. Although in theory the two movements acted in two diverging social fields each with its particular set of rules—which both movements effectively transgressed—these fields started to overlap in the course of the First World War. Marinetti's and his fellow campaigners' political activism, as well as the 'aestheticization of politics' that Fascism began to foster, certainly helped to induce this intersection. Yet it was primarily the totalizing aim shared by both Futurism and Fascism that brought the two together: They were both set on implementing an 'anthropological

1) Emilio Gentile, *'La nostra sfida alle stelle': Futuristi in Politica* (Roma: Laterza, 2009), 8.

 DOI 10.1163/22116257-00201014

revolution.' The creation of a new Italian man and a new, revitalized and modern Italy was their common goal, which they set out to achieve with their respective means.

Cioli's book is a very convincing contribution to the cultural history of Fascism in the line of such studies as those by Walter Adamson, Günter Berghaus, Marla Susan Stone, Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi, Ruth Ben-Ghiat, and Mark Antliff, to name just a few.[2] Even though Cioli is an internationally trained scholar, she has regrettably avoided taking up the dialogue with her Anglophone predecessors. However, this is a minor flaw in the light of the multitude of findings and materials she has unearthed. Relying on a wide range of both published and unpublished sources, Cioli has meticulously reconstructed the eventful affiliation between Fascism and the Italian art of the era, and covered a wide variety of topics: From the relevance of science and technology to the avant-garde and the importance of tradition, order and spirituality, via corporatism, the Futurist relationship to Nazism and anti-Semitism, to the concrete Fascist praxes in regard to 'its' art in the 1930s, encompassing the *Mostra della Rivoluzione*, the *Biennale*, the *Quadriennale*, and the *Triennale*.

This diversity may leave readers a little disorientated at times, and it would have been helpful to provide some more explicit directions to guide them through the labyrinth of findings. Yet the reader is rewarded not only by the abundance of insights into contemporary thought that lie just around unexpected corners, but also by the fundamental problems that the book tackles. For instance, Cioli's and Fascism's oscillation between Futurism and the *Novecento* movement raises a crucial question in regard to generic fascism's reaction to the seemingly aporetic situation that resulted from the temporal structures of modernity: How did fascism come to grips with the need to order time and to find a plausible balance between breaking with the past and constructing continuity, between revolution and acceleration on the one hand and rootedness and eternity on the other?

Fernando Esposito
Universität Tübingen, Germany
fernando.esposito@uni-tuebingen.de

---

2) Walter Adamson, *Avant-garde Florence: From Modernism to Fascism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993); Günter Berghaus, *Futurism and Politics: Between Anarchist Rebellion and Fascist Reaction, 1909-1944* (Providence: Berghahn, 1996); Marla Susan Stone, *The Patron State: Culture and Politics in Fascist Italy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998); Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi, *Fascist Spectacle: The Aesthetics of Power in Mussolini's Italy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities: Italy, 1922-45* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Mark Antliff, *Avant-Garde Fascism: The Mobilization of Myth, Art, and Culture in France, 1909–1939* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).