Fascism and Antifascism in Art and Architecture

CORE-UA 760, Expressive Cultures
Prof. Ara H. Merjian
NYU / Fall 2018
TAs: Emily Antenucci and Matthew Zundel

“When I hear the word ‘culture,’ that's when I reach for my revolver.”
- Hans Johst, Schlageter (long attributed to Hermann Göring)

The terms “fascism” and “culture” frequently resonate as opposites. We think immediately of sterile, bunker-like architecture, book burnings, and reactionary archaisms. Much fascist culture certainly entailed these. Yet we ignore the centrality of advanced culture to fascist ideas – both in the early twentieth century and beyond – at our own peril. This course of that centrality through particular cases in historical context: Mussolini’s Italy (home of the first fascist revolution and regime), Nazi Germany, Popular Front and Vichy France, and international anti-fascist activity up through World War Two. In particular, we will look at Paris’s 1937 Exposition Internationale as a site where these competing cultural ideologies first clashed on a world stage and in aesthetic and architectural form. The Exposition forms a kind of laboratory and concentration of these various political phenomena and their respective propagandistic arsenals.

Through the lens of particular cases we will tackle various questions: May we speak of a general fascist theory of culture and representation? How did fascist governments use aesthetics to respond to modernity, or to create a modernism of their own? Was the concept of an avant-garde alien to fascist culture, or useful to it? To what extent was there a movement of international anti-fascist resistance? How did it play out in art, architecture, or literature? May we even speak of a clean, absolute break between an aesthetics of fascism and that of anti-fascism? Did fascism die with World War Two? If not, how does it live on? What precise currency does the term “fascist” hold in contemporary culture?

We will begin by addressing the history and theory of fascism. We will then examine specific case studies: Italian Futurist art and literature and its relationship to the founding of Fascism; the 1932 Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution in Rome; National Socialist (Nazi) aesthetic policy, Nuremberg rallies, and Riefenstahl’s Triumph of the Will (1935); John Heartfield’s anti-fascist photomontages; Picasso’s Guernica at the 1937 Exposition Internationale; the 1937 Degenerate ‘Art’ Exhibition in Germany; and revivals of anti-fascist rhetoric and protest in the events of 1968 in the US and abroad. In the context of neo-fascist resurgence, we will also consider more recent manifestations of fascism in cultural discourse, from Timus Vermes’ compelling book Look Who’s Back (2012), to the nationalist populism of Donald Trump’s presidential campaign.

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matthew.zundel@nyu.edu
Recitations
Recitation "Group 2": Fridays 9:30-10:45, Goddard Hall B07, Emily Antenucci
Recitation "Group 3": Fridays 11:00-12:15, Silver 512, Emily Antenucci
Recitation "Group 4": Fridays 12:30-1:45, 25 West 4th St, C-3, Matthew Zundel
Recitation “Group 5”: Friday 2:00-3:15, 25 West 4th St, C-19, Matthew Zundel

Intended Learning Objectives
In addition to specific content on the history of Fascism, Antifascism and aesthetics, the course aims to provide tools for arguing about different cultural forms and the production of meaning and ideology. Since we will focus on a number of genres and media (manifestos; architecture; film; documentary; photomontage; painting; novel; essay), the course will introduce students to performing close readings and writing formal analyses. Students will develop strategies for analyzing images, objects and texts, and making sense of their aesthetic and political context and significance.

With each case study we will address the methodological tools for reading and analyzing different media, and will learn to argue about the relationship between form and content in visual and verbal formats. Students who successfully complete this course will develop skills in analyzing film, and performing a formal analysis of painting, architecture, and photomontage. Students will also complete a final research paper on a topic of their choosing.

Requirements and Assessment
Attendance and participation are vital to the successful completion of this course. Attendance is required and taken at lecture and recitation. Unexcused absences will negatively impact your final grade; students with more than four unexcused absences (lecture or recitation) are liable to automatic failure.

Class/section attendance, participation, and contribution to discussion……20%
Short Manifesto……………………………………………………………………….5%
First Paper (2-3 pages)………………………………………………………………10%
Midterm exam………………………………………………………………………20%
Second paper (6-7 pages)…………………………………………………………25%
Final exam…………………………………………………………………………20%

*You are expected to complete listed readings in advance of lecture and recitation; participation in class discussions forms a vital part of the course; brings texts to class
*There will be no excuses for late papers or missed examinations with the exception of a doctor’s letter or a documented family emergency. Late papers will be downgraded a half-mark for each day late (i.e. B+ to B; A- to B+…). Make-up exams can only be taken with a verified medical or similarly serious excuse approved by Prof. Merjian
*Papers must include a bibliography and footnotes or parenthetical citation to any author cited or used as a source of argument and/or information. Please review the university’s policy on plagiarism as it will be strictly enforced.
*The internet at large, and Google and Wikipedia in particular, should not be used for the research or recycling of scholarly materials, except to access databases of scholarly articles
*Please feel free to come see Prof. Merjian or your TA in office hours
*If you have any problems accessing “NYU Classes,” you may call ITS Client Services Center (www.nyu.edu/its/helpdesk) at 212-998-3333.
*Laptops are not permitted in lecture or recitation except under exceptional circumstances

Overview of Course Meetings and Due Dates

| Tues. Sept. 4 | Introduction and Overview |
| Thurs. Sept. 6 | Futurism and the Origins of Fascism |
| Tues. Sept. 11 | Dadaism and Dissent |
| Thurs. Sept. 13 | The Founding of Fascism and Development of Fascist Culture |
| Tues. Sept. 18 | Italian Fascism, between Revolution and Reaction |
| Thurs. Sept. 20 | Weimar Germany and the Rise of National Socialism |
| Tues. Sept. 25 | Nazi Cinema and Spectacle: The Films of Leni Riefenstahl, Part 1 |
| Thurs. Sept. 27 | Nazi Cinema and Spectacle: The Films of Leni Riefenstahl, Part 2 |
| Tues. Oct. 2 | John Heartfield and Anti-Nazi Photomontage |
| Thurs. Oct. 4 | Socialist Realism and Anti-fascism: Art under Stalin |
| Tues. Oct. 9 | No Class – Legislative Day |
| Thurs. Oct. 11 | The Popular Front, Surrealism, and Anti-Fascism: A Politics of Desire |
| Tues. Oct. 16 | Fascist Italy: The Debates over Fascist Culture |
| Thurs. Oct. 18 | *Midterm Examination* |
| Tues. Oct. 23 | Museum in Motion: The 1932 Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution |
| Thurs. Oct. 25 | Art and Activism in the Spanish Civil War (1936-39) |
| Tues. Nov. 6 | Racial Laws and Colonial Aesthetics |
| Thurs. Nov. 8 | The “Degenerate ‘Art’” Exhibition and its Context |
| Tues. Nov. 13 | Eternal Cities I: Hitler’s ‘Germania’ |
| Thurs. Nov. 15 | Eternal Cities II: Mussolini’s EUR |
| Tues. Nov. 20 | A Case Study |
| Thurs. Nov. 22 | No class – Thanksgiving Recess |
| Tues. Nov. 27 | Resistance and Realism I: Open Cities |
| Thurs. Nov. 29 | Resistance and Realism II: Open Cities, cont’d |
| Tues. Dec. 4 | Resistance and Realism III: The Literature of Resistance |
| Thurs. Dec. 6 | “Fascinating Fascism”: The Rhetoric of Demonization and Perversion |
| Tues. Dec. 11 | Fascism, Redux: Look Who’s Back and Luca Buvoli |
| Thurs. Dec. 13 | Conclusion and Review |

Septs 13: Short Manifesto due
Sept. 25: First Paper due (2-3 pages)
Oct. 18: Midterm exam
Nov. 15: Second paper topic due
Dec. 6: Second Paper due (7-8 pages)
TBA: Final exam
### COURSE MEETINGS and ASSIGNMENTS

#### Tues. Sept. 4  Introduction and Overview

- What is Fascism? When and why did it begin? When does it end? Introduction to main themes and background of course; Italy’s belated unification and search for national culture/identity; general theories of fascism versus particular cases; what is Formal Analysis?

#### Thurs. Sept. 6  Futurism and the Origins of Fascism

- Futurism’s prefiguration of fascist principles (cult of youth, war, virility, nationalism, call for new cultural program); the genre of the manifesto and its relationship to art and politics; what was the avant-garde?

  - Optional: Jeffrey Schnapp, “Forwarding Address,” in *Fascism and Culture*, pp. 53-80
  - Optional: Stanley Payne, “Fascism as a ‘Generic’ Concept,” pp. 82-88
  - Optional: Tisdall and Bozzolla, “Art of the War Years and After,” from *Futurism*, pp. 177-199.
  - In class: Futurist and Dada performance/recordings

#### Tues. Sept. 11  Dadaist Dissent

- Dada’s pacifist revolt and assault on enlightenment reason, but to different ends; Wartime Zurich and neutral Switzerland; the failed German Spartacist revolution and culture; the 1920 Dada Fair and its political context; what is photomontage?

- Tristan Tzara, Dada manifesto, 1918, *The Dada reader*, pp. 36-42
- Raoul Hausmann, “Dada in Europe,” in *The Dada Reader*, pp. 92-93
- Willy Verkauf, “Dada-Cause and Effect,” from *Dada*, pp. 7-15
  - Optional: Hans Richter, *Dada: Art and Anti-Art*, excerpts
  - Optional: Ara H. Merjian, “Manifestos!”
  - In class: Dada performance/recordings
  - In class: excerpt of Julian Rosefeldt, *Manifesto*

#### Thurs. Sept. 13  The Founding of Fascism and Development of Fascist Culture

- Elaboration of Fascist cultural program following the march on Rome and the consolidation of Mussolini’s regime; Giorgio de Chirico’s cityscapes and Mario Sironi’s urban landscapes; what is totalitarianism?; continued attention to formal analysis of painting/sculpture

- Benito Mussolini, Platform of the Fasi di Combattimento (1919), pp. 3-6; and
“Postulates of the Fascist Program” (1920), pp. 7-9
- In class: formal analysis: painting/sculpture

*Due in Class: Manifesto*

**Tues. Sept. 18  Italian Fascism, between Revolution and Reaction**

- Tensions between revolution and reaction under Mussolini’s regime; the avant-garde vs. the cult of Rome; introduction to formal analysis of architecture
  - Simonetta Fraquelli, “All Roads Lead to Rome,” in *Art and Power*, pp. 130-136
  - Sergio Panunzio, “The Two Faces of Fascism,” in *Italian Fascism: A Primer*, pp. 88-93
  - Skim: Giuseppe Bottai, “Outcome of the Fascist Art Inquiry” (1927), pp. 233-239
  - Optional: Curzio Malaparte, from *Debate on Fascism and Culture* (1927), pp. 224-227
  - In class: formal analysis: architecture
  - In class: Presentation of manifestos

**Thurs. Sept. 20  Weimar Germany and the Rise of National Socialism**

- The Weimar Republic experiment and the origins of National Socialism; from the closing of the Bauhaus to the evolving Nazi cultural program; Hitler’s 1932 election speech and first speech as Chancellor (1933); basic historical and political background of Nazi party rule
  - George Mosse, “Hitler Sets the Tone,” in *Nazi Culture*, pp. 1-4
  - Joseph Goebbels on Art Criticism, and Kurt Karl Eberlein, “What is German in German Art?” (1933), in *Nazi Culture*, pp. 162-165
  - Optional: Walter Benjamin, “Theories of German Fascism,” pp. 120-128
  - In class: Clips of Hitler speeches
**Tues. Sept. 25**  
**Nazi Cinema and Spectacle: The Films of Leni Riefenstahl, Part 1**

- The objectivity or subjectivity of documentary film; what is propaganda?; Nazi film industry; Nazi theories and race and their relationship to classical antiquity; Riefenstahl’s career and its aftermath; Discussion of how to analyze film

- Watch *Triumph of the Will* at home:  
  [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GHs2coAzLJ8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GHs2coAzLJ8)

- Lutz Becker, “Celluloid Lies” in *Art and Power*, pp. 277-278


- Optional: Susan Sontag, “Fascinating Fascism” (1975), in *The Nazification of Art*, pp. 204-218

- In class: Screening excerpts of *Triumph of the Will* (1935) and discussion of Nuremberg rallies
- In class: formal analysis: film

*First Paper Due*

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**Thurs. Sept. 27**  
**Nazi Cinema and Spectacle: The Films of Leni Riefenstahl, Part 2**

- Relationship between spectacle and propaganda; mass psychology and its relationship to fascism; evolving Nazi theories of aesthetics and race

- Watch *Olympia* at home:  
  [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bNnDBAdF2sI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bNnDBAdF2sI)


- In class: Screening excerpts of *Olympia* (1938)
- In class: Excerpts of *The Great Dictator*

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**Tues. Oct. 2**  
**John Heartfield and Photomontage**

- Examination of John Heartfield’s career as he became one of the most prominent anti-fascist activists; discussion of photomontage and its relationship to modernity and politics; comparative considerations of contemporary anti-fascist art in other countries (including USA); discussion about the role of art (and collage/montage in particular) as a political weapon


- Andrés Zervigon, “The Artist of German Communism,” *John Heartfield and the
**Thurs. Oct. 4  Socialistic Realism and Anti-Fascism: Art under Stalin**

- Consideration of the doctrine of Socialist Realism and Soviet culture under Stalin as an expressly anti-fascist program; relationship of Socialist Realism to totalitarianism and propaganda; the rhetoric of labor versus the rhetoric of nation

- David Elliott, “Moscow: Introduction,” in *Art and Power*, pp. 186-188
- “1934a: At the First All Union Congress,” in *Art since 1900*, pp. 200-205

**Tues. Oct. 9  No Class ~ Legislative Day**

**Thurs. Oct 11  The Popular Front, Surrealism and Anti-Fascism: A Politics of Desire**

- Surrealism as a weapon of anti-fascist politics; the movement’s relationship to Marxist and revolutionary politics; Surrealism and anti-colonialism; Surrealism’s notion of “inner eye” as opposed to Fascist mass psychology; how was Surrealism political?

- “André Breton publishes…” in, *Art Since 1900*, pp. 190-195
- André Breton, Paul Éluard, et. al, “Don’t Visit the Colonial Exhibition,” in Caws, ed., *Surrealism*, 261-262

**Tues. Oct. 16  Debates over Fascist Culture**

- Some case studies of Fascist culture’s development in Italy

- Ruth Ben Ghiat, “Toward a Fascist Culture,” pp. 17-45
Thurs. Oct. 18  Midterm Examination

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**Thurs. Oct. 23  Museum in Motion: The 1932 Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution**

- European and American exhibition culture; Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution and its multi-media installations; comparison between 1932 and 1937 versions and what their differences say about Fascist cultural evolution; brief look at the Italian pavilion at New York 1939 World’s Fair

- Jeffrey Schnapp, “Epic Demonstrations: Fascist Modernity and the 1932 Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution,” in *Fascism, Aesthetics, and Culture*, pp. 2-32
- Optional: Vanessa Rocco, “Room O of the Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution,” in *Public Photographic Spaces*, pp. 220-255 [Excellent images]
- In class: Documentary footage of exhibition opening

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**Thurs. Oct. 25  Art, and Activism in the Spanish Civil War (1936-39)**

- The assault upon the democratically elected Spanish Republic; the notion of the “Good Fight,” the “Poet’s War” and its relationship to culture; international responses; the use of aesthetics as a weapon; the Republic’s support of avant-garde aesthetics

- Marko Daniel, “Spain: Culture at War,” in *Art and Power*, pp. 63-68
- Optional: David Garrioch, “The Historical Background,” in *The Spanish Civil War: A Cultural and Historical Reader*, pp. 3-17

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- Picasso’s mural, its origins and evolution; relationship to Picasso’s own body of work as well as art historical allusions; painting as propaganda

- Optional: Amy Goodman with Denis Moynihan, “75 Years Later, the Lessons of Guernica,” pp. 1-2
**Thurs. Nov. 1  Paris, 1937, Part II: Spectacle and Propaganda**

- The 1937 *Exposition des Arts et Techniques* in the context of pre-World War Two Europe; exhibition as a concentrated forum for the display of art’s relationship to political power; individual national pavilions and their architectural/political rhetoric; World’s Fairs and International Exhibitions

- Hal Foster, “1937a,” in *Art Since 1900*, pp. 307-309
- Optional: “Modernité à la Française,” in *World’s Fairs on the Eve of War*, pp. 7-29
- In class: screening of short documentary footage of exhibition construction
- In class: Introduction to formal analysis: architecture

**Tues. Nov. 6  From Racial Laws to Colonial Spaces**

- Hitler and Mussolini’s Pact of Steel; the introduction of racial laws in Italy and their consequences for Fascist culture; Italy’s evolving Mediterranean empire and the role of architecture in Ethiopia and Libya

- Paul Baxa, “Capturing the Fascist Moment: Hitler's Visit to Italy in 1938 and the Radicalization of Fascist Italy,” pp. 227-242

**Thurs. Nov. 8  The “Degenerate ‘Art’” Exhibition and its Context**

- The *Degenerate ‘Art’* exhibition mounted in Munich and other cities in 1937 to publicly shame artists and “purify” Nazi culture of degeneracy; the 1938 Degenerate Music exhibition

- *Degenerate ‘Art’* pamphlet (translation), pp. 1-2
- Hal Foster, “1937a,” in *Art Since 1900*, pp. 305-306
- Visit exhibition reconstruction, pp. 45-80, at:
Skim: Joseph Goebbels, “Freedom and Organization” (1937), in Nazi Culture, pp. 151-159
- Optional: reviews of recent Degenerate ‘Art’ show at Neue Galerie
- Optional: inventory documents of original exhibition, http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/e/entartete-kunst/

**Tues. Nov. 13 Eternal Cities I: Hitler’s ‘Germania’**

- Hitler’s planned capital ‘Germania’ and Albert Speer’s architectural plans for the “Thousand Year Reich”; comparison with Mussolini’s EUR neighborhood and Italian Fascist architectural theory and practice


**Thurs. Nov. 15 Eternal Cities I: Mussolini’s EUR**

- Tim Benton, “Rome Reclaims its Empire,” in Art And Power, pp. 125-128

**Final Paper Topic Due**

**Tues. Nov. 20 A Case Study**

- Readings TBA

**Thurs. Nov. 22 No class – Thanksgiving Recess**

**Tues. Nov. 27 Resistance and Realism I: Open Cities**

- Rossellini’s Rome, Open City and its treatment of Fascism, its relationship to Neorealism in cinema; the Resistance and uses of realism in different media

- Peter Brunette, “Open City,” pp. 41-60
- Christopher Duggan, A Concise History of Italy, pp. 240-244
- In class: Rome Open City (1945), Dir. Roberto Rossellini
**Thurs. Nov. 29  Resistance and Realism II: Open Cities**

- Rossellini’s *Rome, Open City* and its treatment of Fascism, its relationship to Neorealism in cinema; the Resistance and uses of realism in different media

- Peter Brunette, “Open City,” pp. 41-60
- Christopher Duggan, *A Concise History of Italy*, pp. 240-244
- In class: *Rome Open City* (1945), Dir. Roberto Rossellini

**Tues. Dec. 4  Resistance and Realism III: The Literature of Resistance**

- How did the partisan resistance use literature in its struggles against Fascism, both covertly and explicitly? How did literature use the anti-Fascist struggle? The development of Neorealism in literature and cinema

- Lucia Re, *Calvino and the Age of Neorealism: Fables of Estrangement*, pp. 11-12, 155-159, and 163-169
- Italo Calvino, preface to *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragni*
- Optional: Walter Benjamin, “The Storyteller”
*Guest lecture by Emily Antenucci*

**Thurs. Dec 6  “Fascinating Fascism”: The Rhetoric of Demonization and Perversion**

- An examination of the ways in which Fascism – particularly beginning in the 1970s – has been equated with perverse forms of sexuality, in a range of cultural texts

- Susan Sontag, “Fascinating Fascism” (1975), in *The Nazification of Art*, pp. 204-218
- Teresa de Lauretis, "Cavani's 'Night Porter': A Woman's Film?" (1976), in *Film Quarterly* vol. 30, no. 2, pp. 35-38
*Guest lecture by Matt Zundel*

**Final Paper Due**


- Luca Buvoli’s *Velocity Zero* and *A Very Beautiful Day After Tomorrow*, works which address the legacies of Futurism and its relationship to Fascism; Timur Vermes’ nov *Look Who’s Back* and the film by the same name, which treat the fictional revivification of Adolf Hitler in present-day Berlin; discussion of the resurgence of far-right parties in France, Austria, Germany, and Italy

- Christine Poggi, *A Very Beautiful Day After Tomorrow*, pamphlet
- In class: viewing of Luca Buvoli’s single-channel video, *Velocity Zero*
- In class: viewing of *Look Who’s Back* (film), excerpt
Thurs. Dec 13: Conclusion and Review

- Ruth Ben Ghiat: “Why Are So Many Fascist Monuments Still Standing in Italy?” The New Yorker, pp. 1-4

Final Exam Date TBA