

Mark Epstein, Fulvio Orsitto, and Andrea Righi, editors.
TOTALitarian ARTs: The Visual Fascism(s) and Mass-Society.
Cambridge Scholar Publishing, 2017, pp. 445.

The aim of *TOTALitarian ARTs* is to explore the connection between visual arts, mass-culture, and totalitarian societies. The book displays a rich and wide range of perspectives on the topic of totalitarianism in architecture, arts, cinema, performances, and new technologies. A very positive aspect of this book is that it addresses totalitarianism in an international context that includes not only Italy but also other European countries and South America. Given the amount of information contained in this book, this review may look at times too quick and schematic, but it is intended to give at least a sample of the different perspectives exposed.

TOTALitarian ARTs is divided into six parts. Part I is entitled Totalitarian Environment: Spaces and Images. In the first essay, “The Use and the Abuse of the Classical Fragment: The Case of Genoa and Sculptor Eugenio Baroni,” Silvia Boero examines the Italian Fascist regime’s tendency to “appropriate” Roman figurative arts for propaganda. Boero shows how the reconstruction of Piazza della Vittoria in Genoa, the Arc of Triumph and the adjacent buildings projected an image of power of Fascist Italy. Boero also explores how it was possible to transmit anti-regime content through sculptures, as is the case of Eugenio Baroni’s monument to the mutilated soldier. Maria D’Annibale, in “Fascist Ideology, Mass Media, and the Built Environment: A Case Study,” deals with the restoration of the Palazzo del Podestà in Verona; the removal of its Neo-classical façade, substituted by a fictitious recreation of the Medieval style, is an example of how the present constantly constructs and reinvents the past “according to the interests and visions of the current players” (37). Amanda Minervini, “Face to Face: Iconic Representations and Juxtapositions of St. Francis of Assisi and Mussolini During Italian Fascism,” focuses on the attempt made by Italian Fascist propaganda to transform Fascism into a “political religion.” In particular, Minervini analyzes the case of two biographies of Saint Francis published in 1926 which established a parallel between Francis and Mussolini, “even claiming that Francis’s life anticipated that of Mussolini” (49). Pierluigi Erbaggio, “Mussolini in American Newsreels: *Il Duce* as Modern Celebrity,” deals with the popularity of Mussolini outside of Italy in the 1920s thanks to two American newsreel companies, Fox and Hearst, that praised Mussolini’s charismatic

leadership and engagement with modernity. According to Erbaggio “creating a sort of American popular consensus of opinion regarding the Italian dictator” (77) was functional to the interests of financial institutions, like J.P. Morgan, which having invested substantial amounts of money in Italy were interested in giving a positive image to Fascist Italy.

Part II is dedicated to Totalitarianism and Italian Cinema. In his essay, “Pasolini’s Reflections on Fascism(s): Classic and Contemporary,” Mark Epstein examines Pasolini’s movie *Salò*, where sexuality metaphorically represents “the exploitation of human beings by other human beings” (84). Unlike other critics, who label Pasolini as a Romantic or a Rousseauian, Epstein sees this author as a materialist, in a line of thought that goes from Leopardi to Timpanaro; therefore, Epstein considers Pasolini’s interest in myth “tied to the retrospective examination and explication of the genesis of (non-economic) values (and ethics)” (95). Angelo Fàvaro’s contribution, “From Moravia to Bertolucci: The Monism of *The Conformist*—the Farce After the Tragedy” is divided into two parts. In “Part I: from Tragedy to Myth,” the writer compares Moravia’s novel *The Conformist* to its cinematic version by Bertolucci. According to Fàvaro, Moravia’s representation follows the typical structure of 19th century novels, while in Bertolucci’s movie the protagonist “follows a troubled itinerary towards confused incomprehension of himself, the world, his being in the world” (109). In the second part of his contribution, “From Treatment to Farcical Finale,” Fàvaro examines the original treatment of *The Conformist*, probably written by Moravia himself. The result of the analysis shows the differences between Moravia’s and Bertolucci’s concepts of conformism. If Moravia sees the story of Marcello as a tragedy, Bertolucci interprets it in a farcical key: at the end of the movie the spectator is left with a profound unease, mixed with the nauseating conviction that conformism “is a chameleon-like, insuperable, existential condition” (130). In “Nazi-Fascist Echoes in Films from WWII to the Present,” Fulvio Orsitto examines the transition of the Nazi-fascist imaginary in cinema after World War II in three stages: the mocking attitude, typical of the 1940s, the “rehabilitated look” of the 1950s (during the Cold War the enemy was Communism), and the “perverting approach,” where the Nazis are depicted as sexually fetishistic perverts, the premise for the *Nazisplotation* genre in the 1970s.

In Part III: Totalitarian Aesthetics and Politics, Ana Rodriguez Granell, “The Other Modernity: Fascist Aesthetics and the Imprint of the

Community Myth against the Failure of Liberalism,” analyzes the aestheticization of politics in fascist regimes showing how they are often based on the fascination for non-rational elements like affection and emotions. Granell also explores the fascist myth of “original community” viewed as “instinctive, animal pre-consciousness” (174). The aim is to present fascism not as an anomaly but as an integral part of the contradiction of modernity (176). In the essay “Thought vs. Action: Golden Age Aesthetics in French Proto-Fascist and Fascist Discourses,” Gaetano DeLeonibus examines the ideological positions of two French writers, Maurras e Drieu La Rochelle. Both these writers found a model of the perfect society in the past, but Maurras was inspired by the monarchic absolutism of the *Ancien Régime*, Drieu instead by the mystical dimension of the Middle Ages. After a close textual analysis, DeLeonibus concludes that Maurras’ and Drieu’s fascist ideas were not fully formed ideologies but aesthetic positions, inspired by a Nietzschean spiritual opposition to a time considered vulgar and decadent (197). Sean P. Connelly, “Envisioning Vichy: Fascist Visual Culture in France 1940-44,” focuses on the Republic of Vichy and how fascist propaganda substituted the revolutionary motto “Liberty, Equality, Brotherhood” with the more reactionary “Work, Family, Country.” Connelly also discusses how the regime used the figure of Joan D’Arc as a symbol of the republic: “the fascist fusion of national tradition with youthful vitality” (204). In her contribution, “Salvador Dali: The Fascist Genius,” Anna Vives explores Salvador Dali’s relationship with fascism, mainly his fascination with Hitler and his collaboration with Franco. According to Vives, who also analyzes some of Dali’s most controversial paintings, his main concern was essentially non-political; in fact, the painter mocked every form of orthodoxy regardless of its political nature. According to Vives, “Dali’s link with Fascism is a consequence of his “self-representation as a genius” (230).

Part IV of this book is entitled Totalitarian Geography. Daniel Arroyo-Rodríguez, in his essay, “The Impossible Reconciliation: Pedro Lazaga’s *Torrepartida* (1956),” examines the strategy of reconciliation of the Spanish fascist regime two decades after the Civil War exposed in the movie *Torrepartida* by Pedro Lazaga. According to Arroyo-Rodríguez, the movie humanizes the enemy, but criminalizes the political opposition movement. The aim of *Torrepartida*, and its value, for Franco’s propaganda, is “to reconcile the humanization of the enemy with the need to eliminate it” (270). In fact, even though the protagonist eventually acknowledges his errors, this realization does not eliminate the necessity of the punishment. Redemption is impossible. The essay by

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Isabel Macedo, Rita Bastos, and Rosa Cabecinhas, “Representations of Dictatorship in Portuguese Cinema,” starts with a panorama of the historical events that led to the dictatorship and offers a rather broad overview of Portuguese cinema from the 1930s to the present days (impossible to summarize here). Finally, the authors analyze two documentaries, *Lusitan Illusions* and *48* that deal respectively with the self-representation of the regime and with the reality of the political persecution of the dissidents. In a similar way, Claudia Peralta, “Looking Forward, Looking Backwards: Notes on the Dictatorship in Uruguay,” starts with a synopsis of the events that followed the military coup in Uruguay in 1972 and points out that after the end of the regime in 1983, the new political leaders decided to “look forward,” that is, not to prosecute those who tortured and killed many dissidents during the regime. Peralta mentions several documentaries that shed some light on the crimes perpetrated by the dictatorship and underlines the importance of these documentaries for the healing process of the nation because “without truth, justice is not possible” (286).

In Part V: Contemporary Forms of Totalitarian Representation, Arina Rotaru’s essay, “Totality and Destruction in Contemporary German Culture: Playing on Fascism in the Total Art of Serdar Somuncu,” discusses the work of the Turkish-German artist Serdar Somuncu and in particular his performance *Hitler Kebab*, claiming that Somuncu exposes German fascism “as an infamous and intangible property of German history” (304), and also shows how Hitler’s discourse is still perpetuated nowadays in a society “infused with paranoia against Islam and against other visible minorities such as the Turks.” (313) Maria Stopfner’s essay, “*Seit heut früh wird zurückgeschriben*: Intertextuality and Interdiscursivity in Political Comics of the Far and Extreme Right,” shows how German neo-Nazi groups use comics for Anti-semitic, xenophobic, propaganda. Stopfner analyzes a German comic book, a remake of a 1996 English booklet entitled *The Fable of Ducks & Hens*, where hens (Jews) trick a multitude of hard-working ducks (the general population) until they are defeated and banished by a group of geese (the Nazis). Stopfner focuses on intertextual references—both in words and images—that show disturbing parallels with Third Reich language and rhetoric. According to Stopfner, this comic book, in its calculated ambivalence, can be a dangerous form of propaganda even for children who are not able to catch all the hidden political references, because they still can get the ideological message: do not trust foreign “birds.” Mattias Ekman, “YouTube Fascism: Visual Activism of the Extreme Right,” takes into

consideration the strategy of dissemination of political propaganda on the internet made by Swedish far right-wing movements. Ekman conducts a quantitative analysis of 223 videos published by Swedish neo-Nazi groups divided into categories: political right-wing demonstrations, martial art performances, and humor, that is, mockery of the police or political opponents. Ekman shows how marginal groups, using platforms like YouTube, obtain a large public visibility, and make available online anti-democratic, anti-Jewish, anti-feminist content.

Part VI of the book is entitled Comparative Reflections on Totalitarian Worldviews. In his wide and well-researched essay, "Totalitarian Trends Today," Mark Epstein starts with Pasolini and his analysis on consumerism to show how the contemporary consumer society is more totalitarian than "classic" fascist regimes. According to Epstein, the elites play on the fear of terrorism to expand the repressive apparatus of the state and, at the same time, "monopolistically concentrate the sector of finance capital." (379) New totalitarianism, in his analysis, "by voiding institutions simply removes citizen access to any tools and means to redress any participation," (397) and only by "a new foundation for social, political, economic, ethical and interspecies relations" (404) could it counter the dominant thought. A second essay by Ekman "Theories of Video Activism and Fascism," examines how far right-wing movements, instead of addressing the rational level, play on the fear of global terrorism, adopting a strategy based on a "cultural politics of emotions" (411) that plays on vulnerability and "the basic desires of belonging" (413); the result is a sort of group cohesion based on masculinity, violence, and youth. In the last essay of the volume, "Deleuze's and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus* as a Theory of Fascism," Andrea Righi starts from an analysis of popular movies like *The Hunger Games* and *The Bling Ring* to conduct an exploration of fascism that is based not only on violence and oppression, but also on a wide popular consensus. How is it possible that people could desire to be oppressed? To answer this question, Righi analyzes Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus* and its focus on desire, interpreted not as a dynamic based on lack, but on desiring fluxes (ensembles of machines). Instead of viewing fascism as an imposition coming from the outside, Deleuze and Guattari claim that the masses, under a certain set of conditions, "wanted" fascism. The author discusses the "pleasure-libidinal dimension" (437) of fascism, and the fact that desire in neoliberal society is no more based on sex or passion but on life itself, in its pure senseless continuum. Righi claims that we are now witnessing "a mutation of the social complex that

is deeply *ingrained* in the dynamics of a desire that is now emptied of any passion,” (438) the nightmare sensed by Deleuze and Guattari.

Given the wide range of its analytical perspectives, *Tot-Art* is certainly recommended as an essential tool for the study of old and new totalitarianism, not only in the form of “classical” dictatorships but also in more recent and insidious resurgences through the Web.

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Roberta Ricci, and Simona Wright, editors. *NeMLA Italian Studies. The Renaissance Dialogue*. Vol. 38, 2016, pp. 245.

This monographic issue of *NeMLA Italian Studies* celebrates the 500th anniversary of the first publication of *Orlando Furioso* (1516) by drawing attention to Ariosto’s modernity. The title of the collection reflects the philosophical and organizational principle the two editors brilliantly derive from fragmentation and digression as narrative techniques in *Orlando Furioso*. Such practices, and the instability they promote, testify to an essential Renaissance feature—the dialogue among the various artistic expressions and the fields of knowledge. In the essays of this volume literature, language, philosophy, medicine, and the arts engage in a conversation that offers a more comprehensive understanding of Renaissance culture and might drive, Ricci and Wright anticipate, additional investigation into disciplinary cross-pollination.

The essays are organized in three sections. In the opening one, Ricci, “Umanesimo letterario, riforma grafica: Poggio Bracciolini editore, filologo e copista,” and Lorenzo Sacchini, “Tra latino e volgare nei *Dialoghi piacevoli* di Stefano Guazzo,” examine Poggio Bracciolini’s and Stefano Guazzo’s standpoints on the linguistic and cultural individuality of vernacular Italian in relation to Latin. Sacchini demonstrates the effects of community ethics on poetry and language in two dialogues from the *Dialoghi piacevoli* (1586)—the seventh, revolving around which language is more suitable for poetry, and the eighth, in which two new interlocutors, yet still members of an intellectual academy, like Guazzo himself, argue the spelling of the word *fedeltà* versus *fideltà* proposed by supporters of Latin. Usage among writers is offered as resolution to be complemented with knowledge of