

and cultures inherited from the nineteenth-century. Yet, the concepts of “mass society” and “mass culture” have not provided the best predictions about the future of modernity in the late twentieth century. “Fordism” has given way to flexible production. The monolithic “mass” marketing of entertainment that appeared to be the inescapable consequence of an expanding “culture industry” has now dissolved into much more complex (and constantly changing) amalgams of mainstream and niche marketing.

Since Kracauer wrote this book, cultural studies and the “history of everyday life” (*Alltagsgeschichte*) have also taught us to read “modernity” in different, perhaps less pessimistic ways. The homogenizing effects claimed for twentieth century modernity and increasing globalization, have not prevented individuals and groups from defining and redefining their identities and interests in complex and changing ways – gender, class, race, religious and other differences have by no means been submerged in a shared collective “mass” identity. Though leisure and entertainment may often, as Kracauer suggests, function as avenues of escape from the monotony of work, the meanings of both work and leisure are not solely determined by either the employers or the culture industry. They are also actively constructed by ordinary people’s attempts to “assert themselves” (*Eigensinn*).

Cultural historians are still struggling to find a vocabulary that can serve as an adequate alternative to the compelling imagery of “mass society” and “mass culture.” Quintin Hoare’s subtle translation of Kracauer’s *The Salaried Masses* and Inka Mülder-Bach’s excellent introduction allow us to see the original language of “mass culture” in the process of formation. This alone will make this slender volume indispensable to anyone interested in the history of cultural theory.

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Matthew Affron and Mark Antliff, eds., *Fascist Visions: Art and Ideology in France and Italy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

Art and fascism seem a strange mix, especially to those historians whose work explores the conflicts between the European avant-garde and conventional artists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Such studies have stressed a fundamental dichotomy between modernist art and traditional art, and between modernism and nationalism — a dichotomy that separates categories of progressive art (read good) from art associated with regressive political movements (read bad). Research on art under Nazism would seem to confirm this type of judgment; after all, the works of so-called “degenerate” artists like Beckmann, Jawlensky, Dix, and Grosz were far superior in quality

to the Arno Breckers and Josef Thoraks of the Third Reich. But *Fascist Visions: Art and Ideology in France and Italy*, edited by Matthew Affron and Mark Antliff (the latter an art historian at Queen's University) tells quite a different story; here we have a fascinating collection of eight articles, exploring the complexity of fascist aesthetics — including the incorporation of modernism within fascist art.

The articles in this collection divide neatly into an equal number of studies on art in fascist Italy and essays on art and art history in France from the 1920s through to Vichy; the subjects covered include French art critic Waldemar George, writer and performance artist Valentine de Saint-Point, Le Corbusier and the French fascist party, Italian art theorist Ardengo Soffici, and the preeminent artist of Mussolini's state: Mario Sironi (whose painting *The White Horse* illustrates the cover of this book). One of the most compelling articles is by historian Marla Stone; entitled "The State as Patron: Making Official Culture in Fascist Italy," it traces the relationship between artists and fascism in Italy from 1925-1943 and highlights several of the main themes of the book as a whole.

Stone reveals that the fascist dictatorship in Italy encouraged all sorts of artistic styles — neo-classical, impressionist, futurist, abstract — and, unlike Nazi Germany, did not impose restrictions on modernist painting. Furthermore, the categories of "degenerate art" and of aesthetic eugenics, so central to Nazi culture, were missing here. The regime was concerned, above all, to win the support of artists, and thus the relationship between art and state allowed artists greater autonomy than in Germany. Admittedly, the Italian fascists sought legitimization and hoped for the evolution of a culture that could celebrate the new fascist era, but the promotion of aesthetic pluralism is arresting. So too is the fact that the state offered extensive funding to artists, without dictating what they should produce. From 1930-1937, in particular, the state encouraged the creation of a fascist modernism that drew upon neo-impressionism and futurism, expressed in a variety of genres: portraits, still lifes, landscapes.

Notably, artists avoided creating explicit fascist messages in their works, although occasionally — as in the painting by Arnaldo Carpenetti, *Incipit novus ordo* — hymns of reverence to the leader did appear. I found this work, completed in 1930, extremely interesting. The style is akin to Germany's *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity) of the 1920s in its cool and detached character, showing an assembly of blackshirts on the march, automatons of order and discipline in serried vertical ranks, visually contrasting with an impassioned and chaotic crowd that fills much of the painting. In the upper right, facing the crowd, is Mussolini: he is set apart as a strong, resolute, and yet seemingly isolated figure — the messiah rescuing his nation. Like Carpenetti, other artists of Italy responded positively to the welcoming arms of the state, participating in cultural events and showing little evidence of opposition to the Mussolini

regime. A change did occur after 1937, as Italy moved closer to the Nazi state, and to war. Critics of modernism now called for an art expressive of fascist goals, and the state began to solicit works from younger artists dedicated to fascism. Neo-classical styles became more common, and paintings of fascist themes — including racial ideas — were applauded by fascist officials.

Despite this final development in Italian fascist art, much of the art and architecture produced in Mussolini's Italy was the creation of independent artists allowed to pursue their aesthetic interests creatively. Indeed, what remains with me after reading this essay is the 1932 architectural design of the facade for the main pavilion of the Venice Biennale of International Art — the location for the regime's biannual art exhibitions. The previous facade had followed the traditions of Renaissance design, displaying Corinthian pilasters and ornately designed towers; the new facade stripped away the ornamentation and introduced clean lines and a flat roof, with four simple columns supporting the word *Italia*. The look is modernist, even while incorporating elements of classicism, and speaks to the regime's pluralistic approach to art. With examples such as this, it becomes harder to dismiss all fascist art as banal propaganda, without any aesthetic value. While I would argue that political art reached its apogee on the left — in Berlin Dada and the brilliant photomontages of John Heartfield — it is clear that some of the fascist art and architecture featured in this book deserves further study. I would highly recommend *Fascist Visions* to scholars and students of both fascism and twentieth-century culture.

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Molly Ladd-Taylor and Lauri Umansky, eds., *"Bad" Mothers: The Politics of Blame in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: New York University Press, 1998).

We all know about wicked stepmothers. We were raised on stories of them, our hearts breaking deliciously as we heard how they sent their pure and good stepdaughters to sweep cinders or to have their hearts cared out by tender-hearted woodsmen who risk death rather than obey the unnatural parent. Ever-present in these stories — although we never saw her — was the saintly (dead) mother. We knew that had the mother lived, the lovely daughter would have grown up in light and sunshine and endlessly rosy days. The prince who comes to carry her away is just the sort of boy mother would have chosen for her. In fact, she probably did.

I wonder how many girls dream of growing up to be that perfect mother, and how many boys dream of marrying her. How many girls and boys, that is