

International workshop organized by Hannah Malone and Christian Goeschel
Freie Universität Berlin Berlin, Fabeckstraße 25, 14095
Holzlaube, room number 2.2051
21–22 March 2019

Comparing the cultural history of Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany



Wall hanging, "Rome-Berlin", 1936-9, Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin

Workshop objectives

The regimes of Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany were bound by ideological, diplomatic, cultural, and eventually, military ties. Although those ties wove deep connections between the two countries, the histories of interwar Germany and Italy have largely been written following parallel lines. Attempts to compare the two countries are relatively few and present methodological problems. Since the early 2000s, however, there has been a renewed interest in the relationship between Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany, as evidenced by recent work on the comparative history of Europe's principal fascist regimes, and new transnational studies on Italy and Germany in the 1930s and '40s. Despite these contributions, conversations between historians of Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany still happen quite rarely, perhaps because of the specialized nature of academic networks. Hence, this workshop aims to bring together historians of Fascism and National Socialism with the objective of fostering exchange and collaboration. It will offer a forum in which historians of Italy and Germany can compare findings, draw parallels, and discuss common concerns.

The workshop is part of a wider project in order to establish an international network on the comparative history of Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. The groundwork for this project was laid in a preliminary workshop that we held at the University of Cambridge in June 2017, and which focused on the challenge of reconnecting the social and political histories of interwar Italy and Germany. At the workshop in Cambridge, it became clear that most comparative studies of Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany concentrate on the political and social spheres, in part because they are driven by efforts to define generic fascism in political thought. This approach is of limited use when looking at the culture. This is why, at this workshop, we will focus specifically on new directions in the cultural history of the two regimes. Contextualized with questions of power and propaganda, cultural perspectives expose significant points of contact between Italy and Germany, which have often been overlooked. Sessions will encompass both comparative and transnational approaches to art, architecture, music, theatre, craft, aesthetics, literature and other areas of culture, with a particular attention given to cultural diplomacy and propaganda. At the end of the workshop, a discussion will provide an opportunity to reflect on the methodological challenges facing the field. These include practical difficulties, such as disciplinary boundaries, separate networks, and linguistic knowledge, but also epistemological questions about the specificity of national contexts, the uniqueness of National Socialism, and the existence of distinct historical paths. The workshop looks at how these theoretical questions might be addressed by comparing the ideology, aesthetics, functions, and styles of the Fascist and Nazi regimes.

Programme

may be subject to minor changes

Thursday 21 March 2019

15.00–15.30 Introduction

Christian Goeschel (University of Manchester) and Hannah Malone (Freie Universität Berlin)

15.30–17.00

Chair: Oliver Janz (Freie Universität Berlin)

Marla Stone (Occidental College), ‘Collaboration and Conflict: The Wartime Culture of Display in Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany’

Robert Gordon (Cambridge), ‘Pasolini in Weimar 1942’

Grazia Sciacchitano (University of St Andrews), ‘Comparing Dictatorships: The Challenges of The Field’

17.00–17.30 Coffee break

17.30–18.30

Chair: Arnd Bauerkamper (Freie Universität Berlin)

Helen Roche (University of Durham), ‘“Als Jungmann einer Nationalpolitischen Erziehungsanstalt interessiert Italien, weil es heute das Land ist, das in seiner Politik am festesten an Deutschland geknüpft ist”’: Nazi elite-school pupils as youth ambassadors between Fascist Italy and the Third Reich’

Patrick Ostermann (Technische Universität Dresden), ‘The Catholic Fascists’ Ambivalent View of Germany’

Friday 22 March 2019

9.30-11.00

Chair: Christian Freigang

Kate Ferris (University of St Andrews), ‘Using Alltagsgeschichte to understand cultures of the ‘everyday’ in fascist Italy (and elsewhere).’

Joshua Arthurs (West Virginia University), ‘From the Monumental to the Everyday: Shifting Perspectives on the Cultural History of Italian Fascism’

John Foot (Bristol University), ‘Microhistory, Fascism and Nazism: Everyday Life and Violence’

11.00–11.30 Coffee

11.30-13.00

Chair: Christian Goeschel (University of Manchester)

Giulia Albanese (University of Padua), “‘La lezione italiana’”: Representing and promoting fascism abroad in the 1920s’

Mercedes Peñalba Sotorrio (Manchester Metropolitan University), ‘From one war to another. Nazi propaganda in Spain during World War II’

Christian Fuhrmeister (Zentralinstitut für Kunstgeschichte, Munich), ‘Art History, Art Protection, and Propaganda – re-assessing German and Nazi initiatives in Fascist Italy before and after 1943’

13.00–14.30 Lunch break

14.30-16:00

Chair: Lucy Riall (European University Institute, Fiesole)

Carmen Belmonte (American Academy Rome), ‘Dealing with a Difficult Heritage: Fascist-era Monumental Art in Italy’

Clare Copley (University of Central Lancashire), “‘Guilty buildings’”? Responding to the built legacies of Fascism and National Socialism

Daniela R. P. Weiner (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill/ Fulbright Graduate Fellow, Georg Eckert Institute for International Textbook Research), ‘Educational Transferences: Comparisons of the Textbook Revision Processes in Allied-Occupied Italy and Germany, 1943-1949’

16:00-16:30 Coffee

16.30-17.00 Closing discussion

Abstracts

in order of programme

Marla Stone (Occidental College), ‘Collaboration and Conflict: The Wartime Culture of Display in Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany’

The exhibition, a flexible, mobile, modern, and, potentially, “total work of art” that could fulfill an array of functions, was a central weapon in the Fascist and Nazi cultural crusade. The very possibilities embedded in the exhibition as a cultural form -- its ability to contain and propagandize any message, to direct the gaze, to control the narrative, and to regulate emotions – made it a ubiquitous presence in the Fascist and Nazi cultural landscape.

While historians and art historians have looked closely at the many exhibitions organized by the Nazi and Fascist regimes, from the *Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution* (1932) to the *Degenerate Art Exhibition* (1937), the exhibitions on which the two regimes collaborated between 1939 and 1942 have been little studied. This presentation focuses on exhibitions jointly-produced or jointly-promoted by the two regimes during World War II, looking for the points of aesthetic and ideological commonality and conflict. Exhibitions which travelled between Italy and Germany during the war, such as the National Socialist Exhibition (*Mostra Nazionalsocialista*, 1939), the Anti-Bolshevik Exhibition (*Mostra Antibolscevicca*, 1941), and the Exhibition of Italian Soldier Artists (*Mostra degli artisti Italiani in armi*, 1942-43), reveal ideological flashpoints around religion, censorship, and the role of the artist under fascism, as well consensus around a vision of fascism’s enemy which these exhibitions hoped to mobilize the population against.

Robert Gordon (Cambridge), ‘Pasolini in Weimar 1942’

Pier Paolo Pasolini was 20 years old in 1942 and a student at Bologna University. He took an active part in the work of the GIL and Fascist student cultural circles, and through these, he attended the youth congresses of European culture in Axis Europe held in Weimar and then in Florence in 1942 to mark the twin ‘Ponte culturale’ established between the two cities. On his return, he wrote an account for a Bologna journal reflecting on national and European culture, tradition and youth, in the light of his experience. The congress was also the subject of an 18-minute Istituto Luce ‘cronaca cinematografica’, which lays out the propaganda purpose and practices of the events. This paper uses the documentary and Pasolini’s reflections on Weimar and Florence to examine intersections between Fascist and Nazi culture in the early war years, on youth culture and literature, on an idea of European culture actively pursued in these years (explored recently by Martin 2017), and on Pasolini himself as an instance of a nascent anti-Fascism within the matrix of national and international Fascist youth organisations.

Grazia Sciacchitano (University of St Andrews), ‘Comparing Dictatorships: The Challenges of The Field’

Comparative history brings many advantages to historical investigations: new questions emerge and reveal connections, bounds, similarities and distinctive characters. Yet comparing case studies is not exempt from theoretical or practical difficulties and obstacles. In some case, when these issues remain unresolved, they can pull multi-cases studies outside of the comparative framework and towards “parallel lines” of analysis, or worse it can cause one the case studies to be abandoned.

My presentation aims to discuss and stimulate a debate on the challenges set by comparative history and how approach them. I will argue that the starting point must be a rediscovery of the archives and a step by step construction process of historical investigation that is able to maintain a balance in the development of each case research. I will address the discussion mostly from a practical perspective, examining the main problems faced over the course of an investigation. In particular, I will do so by going through the accomplishments and pitfalls that I experienced during my PhD research on Italy and Spain and the new challenges set by my postdoctoral investigation within the framework of the ERC project Dictatorship as Experience: A Comparative History of Everyday Life and The 'Lived Experience' of Dictatorship in Mediterranean Europe (1922-1975).

Helen Roche (University of Durham), “Als Jungmann einer Nationalpolitischen Erziehungsanstalt interessiert Italien, weil es heute das Land ist, das in seiner Politik am festesten an Deutschland geknüpft ist”: Nazi elite-school pupils as youth ambassadors between Fascist Italy and the Third Reich’

This paper will explore the role played by pupils of the Nationalpolitische Erziehungsanstalten (aka Napolas), the Third Reich’s most prominent elite schools, as youthful ambassadors between Hitler’s Germany and Mussolini’s Italy. Italy was one of the most frequent destinations for several-week-long extended trips by Napola-pupils, who would often be quartered with (or compete against) members of the GIL. The aim of these visits was a form of soft “cultural diplomacy”, whereby potentially useful contacts and acquaintances could be fostered, and the youth of each nation could gain an appreciation of the other’s customs and political ideals. These trips became especially important after the outbreak of World War II, when Italy remained one of the relatively few foreign countries which it was possible for Napola-pupils to continue visiting, due to the Axis alliance.

Drawing on a number of first-hand accounts written at the time by Napola-pupils who travelled to Italy as part of this programme of trips and exchanges, some of which were published for wider consumption in school newsletters, and some of which are based on personal diary entries, the paper will explore the ramifications of this form of youth diplomacy, and the success (or otherwise) of the schools’ Italian “missions”.

Patrick Ostermann (Technische Universität Dresden), ‘The Catholic Fascists’ Ambivalent View of Germany’

Light is shed on the pivotal role that the Catholic-fascist group of intellectuals around the Germanist Guido Manacorda (1879-1965) played owing to their closeness to Mussolini, Bottai, and other grandees of the fascist regime, among others in education, propaganda, and science. In diplomatic history, Manacorda takes the dubious credit of having prepared Italy’s rapprochement to the “Third Reich” as the “Duce’s” intermediary in several audiences with Hitler in 1935/37.

The Catholic fascists’ system of thoughts that arose in the 1930s was shaped by the self-image of a “Romanità” inspired by Catholicism and reflected in the public image of the “Germanesimo.”

While the group rejected National Socialism and its racism as pagan up to 1935, their perception then changed fundamentally. In 1941, they claimed that the Germanic and the “Weltanschauung romana” perfectly matched each other in the alliance of the Axis.

Among other things, the Catholic fascists stabilised the regime as follows:

1. the Catholic fascist intellectuals actively supported fascism in many European capitals through their para-diplomacy and cultural propaganda.
2. by effectively formulating fascist validity claims with the support of Giuseppe Bottai with regard to the „Nuovo Ordine.“
3. by the fact that Pasquale Pennisi claimed in his Catholic fascist racial doctrine that the Italic-Roman race was superior over the Aryan-Nordic race and thereby disputed the validity of the Nazi-raciology as the core of the Nazi Weltanschauung.

Joshua Arthurs (West Virginia University), ‘From the Monumental to the Everyday: Shifting Perspectives on the Cultural History of Italian Fascism’

Since the early 1990s, the historiography of Mussolini’s Italy has been dominated by “culturalist” approaches that explore Fascism’s efforts to cultivate consent, inculcate faith, and effect a totalitarian transformation through a form of “sacralized” or “aestheticized” politics. This literature has fruitfully mined various forms of cultural production to better understand the Fascist project and its relationship to modernity; however, it has also been criticized for 1) taking the regime’s claims at face value and, concomitantly, 2) failing to assess the complex ways in which ordinary Italians responded to these overtures.

To transcend the monolithically “totalitarian” conception of Fascist culture, this paper proposes a new perspective informed by *Alltagsgeschichte*, or the history of ‘everyday life.’ Well-established in the historiography of Nazi Germany (Peukert, Lüdtko) and the Soviet Union (Fitzpatrick), this approach is only starting to be translated into the Italian context. Rather than confining its analysis to official aesthetic artifacts, everyday history understands culture in its semiotic, anthropological sense, as an array of meaning-making processes. Mussolini’s regime attempted to build a new “meaningful universe” for Italians to inhabit, from gestures and

language to monuments and mass rallies; but how did historical subjects navigate this symbolic landscape?

To illustrate this new approach, I reflect on my own intellectual trajectory and draw on my current research into popular responses to the fall of Mussolini in July 1943. This moment – in which the regime’s symbolic universe came crashing down – provides an ideal vantage point from which to examine the complex ways in which Italians adopted, avoided, played with and subverted Fascism’s cultural project. I also consider the ways in which an Italian *Alltagsgeschichte* can facilitate new comparative approaches to the study of fascism and totalitarianism.

Kate Ferris (University of St Andrews), ‘Using *Alltagsgeschichte* to understand cultures of the ‘everyday’ in fascist Italy (and elsewhere).’

The history of ‘everyday life’ within a dictatorial system, of the ways in which everyday worlds, worldviews, social-cultural practices and relationships were subjectively experienced, were affected and shaped by dictatorship and in turn themselves affected and shaped (albeit often in limited ways) the contours of the ‘actually-existing’ dictatorship, was pioneered by West German *Alltagsgeschichte* historians of Nazi Germany in the 1980s and 1990s. In the past decade and a half, historians of fascist Italy have drawn inspiration from the work of Alf Lüdtke and other *Alltagsgeschichte* historians (as well as from Italian microhistory and Anglophone ‘history from below’) in order to reframe the research questions, methodological approaches and conceptual tools they apply to the Italian fascist past, in part for the “escape hatch” these offer from the vexed debates on consent and consensus for fascism which had dominated much of the Italian historiography.

This paper will explore some of the ways in which approaches and tools inspired by *Alltagsgeschichte* can augment and complicate our understanding of everyday ‘cultures’, of the social and cultural practices and beliefs enacted and felt by ordinary’ Italians in their day to day lives under fascism. As such, it understands ‘culture’ in its broad anthropological sense of denoting the entanglements and parameters of our meaningful and meaning-making thoughts, values, actions and practices, along the lines of Geertz’s “webs of significance” and Ginsburg’s “flexible and invisible cage”. In addition, the paper will point to the fruitful ways in which this comparative frame might be further extended to other mid 20th century dictatorships, focussing on those in Spain, Portugal and Greece.

John Foot (Bristol University), ‘Microhistory, Fascism and Nazism: Everyday Life and Violence’

This paper, based around ongoing research, will first look to explore some methodological, theoretical and historiographical issues around the study of fascist and Nazi violence (more specifically, Italian fascism) and the concepts of everyday life and micro-history. I will also discuss the use of the label ‘civil war’ as applied to the 1918-1922 period in Italy and to periods

in German history. Finally, I will introduce some archival material recently consulted in Florence and suggest some ways in which this material illuminates or changes current understandings about post-war violence in Italy and how it could be utilised for further historical research an enquiry (including that relating to the rise of Nazism). This is an open-ended discussion paper of a project which is just beginning and is aimed at provoking discussion rather than providing any definitive answers.

Benjamin Martin (Uppsala University), ‘(Fascist) Ideas via (European) Institutions: Transnational and Relational Approaches to Nazi and Fascist Cultural Politics.’

In this paper I reflect on the methodological challenges that I met in working toward my book, *The Nazi-Fascist New Order for European Culture* (2016). Interested in Nazi and fascist visions of “European” culture—and having located evidence of the success of these visions in attracting intellectuals outside of Italy or Germany—I found the historiography on the cultural politics of the Nazi and Italian fascist dictatorships to have reached a kind of dead end. Scholars documented differences of opinion among Nazi and fascist publicists and officials, only to conclude that these had little bearing on policy. The strictly national contextualizations offered in many studies of Nazi or fascist cultural policy and cultural producers seemed unable to make sense of, or account for, Nazi or fascist “European” initiatives as anything other than cynical propaganda (if they noted external cultural outreach at all). Eager to access what the regimes did about culture, not just what some of their self-appointed intellectuals wrote and said about it, I found a focus on institutions to be of great help. My search for broader contexts in which to understand Nazi-led “European” cultural institutions led me to explanatory models derived from relational sociology. These methods ended up offering me an unexpected basis on which to work out a transnational approach to the subject matter.

Giulia Albanese (University of Padua), “La lezione italiana”: Representing and promoting fascism abroad in the 1920s’

In October 1922 the Fascist March was envisaged as the solution to a domestic political conflict and there was no ambition to present it as a political model for the transformation of liberal regimes throughout Europe. However, what took place in Italy immediately gripped the attention of governments, the media and public opinion in Europe and beyond.

The aim of this paper is a preliminary analysis of which were the means through which fascism became a popular political possibility in Western Europe in the 1920s and the ways in which the different political contexts in which this idea was spread affected its representation and success.

Mercedes Peñalba Sotorrio (Manchester Metropolitan University), ‘From one war to another. Nazi propaganda in Spain during World War II’

By 1941, the German Embassy in Spain was the Reich’s largest, with 500 people working in Madrid and 42 consulates on Spanish soil. Such attention devoted to a technically neutral

country is striking, especially after plans to conquer Gibraltar gave way to more pressing matters such as the expansion of Lebensraum toward the East. This, however, seems less surprising if we consider that objectives pursued by Nazi Germany in Spain went far beyond securing Spanish participation in the conflict, from protecting economic assets in the Peninsula, to preventing Britain and France from expanding their influence on the peninsula, ensuring the supply of raw materials to the war effort, and turning Spain into a bridgehead for German interests in North Africa and Latin America. Intense propaganda campaigns were deployed in pursue of said objectives. Moreover, both these campaigns and tight Nazi-Falangist relations raised concerns in Fascist Italy, who had witnessed how Spanish fascists and conservative politicians now favoured Nazi Germany, instead of Italy, as a model for the rebirth of the nation. This highlights not only Spain's role in the conflict but facilitates a more nuanced analysis of Nazi-Fascist relations, while confirming that fascist and para-fascist movements cannot be studied in isolation.

Christian Fuhrmeister (Zentralinstitut für Kunstgeschichte, Munich), 'Art History, Art Protection, and Propaganda – re-assessing German and Nazi initiatives in Fascist Italy before and after 1943'

This paper attempts a comparative view of various “areas of practice” (Bourdieu) in the cultural field. More often than not, researching and protecting cultural heritage is intricately intertwined with cultural diplomacy and propaganda. Looking at German institutions in Fascist Italy is a case in point, as we can discern several options: embracing vs. circumventing racial ideology, contextualizing aesthetic phenomena vs. isolating them in order to emphasize nationalistic patterns, etc.

In particular, I want to compare Fascist and Nazi views and approaches regarding art, the art market, the role of museums, and art looting – delineating differences, similarities, and parallels. Finally, the paper will explore the collapse of the joint dreams for ruling the continent after September 1943, and how this affected the cultural sphere in the two Italian territories (Regno del Sud and Repubblica Sociale Italiana).

Carmen Belmonte (American Academy Rome), 'Dealing with a Difficult Heritage: Fascist-era Monumental Art in Italy'

This paper focuses on monumental works of art related to Fascist propaganda and investigates the evolving history of their reception and preservation in Italy starting from the fall of the regime. The works (monumental paintings, sculptures, reliefs) and their iconographies will be analyzed in their relationship with the architectural and urban environment, investigating the ways in which these anachronic presences might be negotiated within a democratic state. The cultural biographies of selected works of art in the *longue durée* permit to examine the artistic and political debates concerning the censorship and obliteration of fascist propaganda in the ambiguous transition between Fascism and Republic. The analysis of the subsequent methodological discussion (started in the 1980s) regarding the preservation and restoration of

these politically-charged works casts a light on the peculiarities of the Italian history and management of Fascist-era cultural heritage and fosters a comparative perspective with Germany's management of heritage from its National Socialist past.

Clare Copley (University of Central Lancashire), “Guilty buildings”? Responding to the built legacies of Fascism and National Socialism

The 1990s saw an intensification of public discussions over the built legacies of both Italian Fascism and German National Socialism. In Italy, these were framed by a broader rethinking of the Fascist period whereas in Germany, unification and the return of the German capital to Berlin led to renewed debates about how Germany should respond to its past.

Despite attempts by some academics and politicians in each country to develop coherent narratives around the two regimes, the range of experiences and memories of the Third Reich and the ventennio respectively have precluded the development of a common understanding of what occurred under each regime or how they should be remembered. In both Italy and Germany, as different actors and groups have sought to assert their own particular understanding of the past, the built environment has proven to be a key arena within which memory contests have been fought.

This paper will use post-1990 debates over the built legacies of Fascism and National Socialism in order to explore these contests. In particular, it will focus on high-profile Fascist / National Socialist buildings which have gone on to be reused in the democratic Italy / Germany. It will examine the processes of rewriting and erasure undergone by these sites, the ways in which these processes have been communicated to the wider public and popular responses to them.

Daniela R. P. Weiner (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill/ Fulbright Graduate Fellow, Georg Eckert Institute for International Textbook Research), ‘Educational Transferences: Comparisons of the Textbook Revision Processes in Allied-Occupied Italy and Germany, 1943-1949’

At the end of the Second World War, education was seen as a powerful tool in the remaking of postwar Europe. Accordingly, the occupying powers promoted the publication of new textbooks as a task of paramount importance because, as American official Thomas Vernor Smith wrote, “We cannot allow them to go ahead with the poison that forced us to conquer them.” Despite the fact that some of the same individuals were involved in reeducation projects in Italy and Germany, there have been few comparative studies on the two cases. My paper attempts to address this deficit and the question: How did the reeducation and, more specifically, the textbook revision process in occupied Italy, which began in 1943, compare to and influence the later reeducation efforts in occupied Germany? I argue that Italy was in many ways a testing ground for reeducation policies later premiered with greater efficacy in occupied Germany and that the individuals involved in reeducation in these countries saw the Italian and German reeducation processes as inextricably linked. Thus, it behooves us to consider both cases, not in isolation, but as part of a greater process of reeducation and postfascist coming to terms with the past.