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Staging Fascism: The Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution

On the morning of 28 October 1932, the tenth anniversary of the fascist assumption of power, Benito Mussolini inaugurated the most enduring propaganda event of the fascist dictatorship. As the Duce reviewed the assembled guards of honour and passed the cheering crowds to open the doors of the Mostra della rivoluzione fascista, the Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution, fascism invited Italians and foreigners alike to experience and participate in the regime’s self-representation. The Mostra della rivoluzione fascista recreated, through a mélange of art, documentation, relics and historical simulations, the years 1914 to 1922, as interpreted by fascism after ten years in power. The exhibition’s twenty-three rooms focused on each year from the beginning of the first world war until October 1922 and culminated in a Sala del Duce, Room of the Duce, and a Sacrario dei Martiri, Chapel of the Martyrs.

The fascist regime, in staging its story and exposing as many citizens as possible to it, sought validation for its rule as it entered a second decade in power. After the political consolidation of the late 1920s, the Italian fascist dictatorship had broadened its focus to include the nation’s cultural and social institutions. The years after 1928 witnessed fascism’s consensus-building programmes, such as the draining of the Pontine marshes, the construction of the fascist ‘new towns’, the fight against tuberculosis and infant mortality. In this context, the Mostra della rivoluzione fascista constituted a mass culture referendum on fascism to date.

The Mostra della rivoluzione fascista was a popular and critical success, attracting over 2,800,000 visitors in its two-year run. In its triumph, it offers a case study of fascist culture in its period of greatest mass support and clues to an understanding of public responses to

that culture. The national Fascist Party produced a propaganda event which both met its own political need for legitimation and responded to the cultural needs of a broad cross-section of the Italian public. Three elements of the exhibition account for its reception: the iconographic and aesthetic; the national cultural; and the organizational. Examination of the mechanism of ‘aesthetics’, ‘national culture’ and ‘mass culture’ reveals the ways in which fascism produced a propaganda exhibition that received critical and popular acclaim, while eliciting some of the consensus the regime sought.

The *Mostra della rivoluzione fascista* represented a critical moment in the relationship between fascism and culture. Since its first cultural interventions in the late 1920s, the fascist dictatorship had shown itself to be a tolerant patron without a singular vision of an ‘art of the state’ or an ‘art of fascism’. Artistic expression, as long as it did not threaten the dictatorship, was allowed relatively free rein.¹ The regime failed to designate a particular aesthetic and, instead, patronized a range of movements from the avant-garde to the retrograde. For Italian fascism, an interest in underwriting a ‘cultural renaissance’ and in preventing the creation of an artistic underground overrode the need to censor the arts.

From its conception by Dino Alfieri, director of the Milanese Institute of Fascist Culture, the Mostra was to be more than an exhibition. The proposal approved by Mussolini in July 1931 proclaimed that the exhibition would not ‘take historical re-evocation as a goal in itself’.² It would not be a ‘simple exhibition’ nor ‘show’, but something which ‘will be deeply felt by the people in their souls, thirsting for light, love and drama’.³ In May 1932, from the *Palazzo delle esposizioni* in central Rome, Alfieri and his assistants began to co-ordinate the ‘collection of the most important and significant relics, photographs, pamphlets, autographs, artifacts, newspapers, and publications’.⁴ Private citizens and organizations rallied to the call and sent in clippings, photos and mementoes. At the ‘closing of acceptances’ in late September 1932, Alfieri announced the receipt of 18,400 artifacts through the mail.⁵ This organizational technique involved a vast number of people from various constituencies and gave the impression that many and varied hands had produced the *Mostra*. If a Senator or a local fascist leader sent in a clipping or photograph, he had personally contributed to the regime’s reproduction of itself and was, therefore, central to the construction of fascism.
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Teams of ‘historians’ and artists designed each exhibition room. For the show’s organizers, this collaboration allowed ‘all the skills [to] intersect, as all the elements — historical and representational — blend into a harmonious whole’. However, the historians and artists came from very different sources: the historians from the ranks of the Fascist Party, especially early adherents. Rather than as commendation for service to the Fascist Party, artists were chosen by reputation and by the principle of consensus through diversity. In addition to seeking the participation of artists from a range of movements, Alfieri hired the most prominent artists he could attract. The party newspaper proudly described them as ‘an array of artists of the avant-garde’. The desire to forge a cultural and propaganda experience not associated with earlier epochs and that had a revolutionary narrative drove the dictatorship to offer its self-representation in a mixed, but avant-garde aesthetic.

An invitation to work on the Mostra della rivoluzione fascista was a challenge to breathe life into the artifacts of fascism, to recreate them as relics, spiritual objects and inspirational touchstones. Artists from a range of schools and histories accepted the call. The predominant Italian artistic movements were represented: Futurism, Novecento, Rationalism and Neo-Impressionism. The Futurists, still carrying the banner of having been Italy’s first modern avant-garde movement, gave the exhibition its abstraction. The Rationalists contributed their interest in modernist architecture and the architectural language inherited from the Bauhaus and Le Corbusier. Offering their commitment to indigenous Italian aesthetic forms, the Novecento was represented by figures such as Mario Sironi and Achille Funi. Artists who associated themselves with modernism but without strict allegiances to a particular movement also participated. In addition, assignments at the Mostra were given to young, unestablished artists, such as Antonio Santagata. Other artists received assignments based on their success in the fascist-co-ordinated exhibition system. For example, Arnaldo Carpanetti’s victory in a 1930 Venice Biennale competition sponsored by the National Fascist Party led to a commission. However, despite an attempt to include younger artists and newcomers worthy of the regime’s reward, the list of contributors read like a roll-call of prominent inter-war Italian artists.

Despite differing artistic allegiances, the artists shared a common approach to the exhibition. Much of the art of the Mostra della rivoluzione fascista centred on repeated, simple architectonic forms, such as triangles and circles, of photomontage, extracted slogans and
enlarged photographs. The artists believed in the malleability of artifacts and the possibility of using modernist art forms such as collage and photomontage to make the objects speak a number of messages. The exhibition appropriated the Futurist innovation of plastica murale — the use of three-dimensional design and multimedia projections which rendered the walls ‘plastic’ and moving. Plastica murale offered a range of expressive and illustrative possibilities through the use of numerous materials and techniques. An interest in stretching the boundaries between ‘art’ and ‘objects’ allowed the artists’ varied styles to blend and produce a coherent whole. The blurring of the distinction between ‘art’ and ‘artifacts’ gave the show its spiritualized character and its shape as a total experience, a fascist Gesamtkunstwerk.

The exhibition played out a cycle of crisis, understanding and resolution. Its itinerary carried the visitor around the side rooms of the palace and then down the grand central halls. The first fourteen rooms, circling the edges of the palace, traced Italian intervention in the first world war, the post-war crisis, the rise of fascism and the fascist victory. After the depiction of the fascist take-over, the exhibition abandoned a chronological approach and the rooms in the centre of the building — the Salon of Honour, the Gallery of Fasci and the Chapel of the Martyrs — dealt with timeless topics. As the fascist coup symbolized the end of history and a resolution of all national conflicts, the rooms which followed its depiction suspended time. Five parts of the exhibition emerged as the most evocative: the façade, the Room of 1922, the Room of the March on Rome, the Salon of Honour and the Chapel of the Martyrs. These five spaces, with their complicated texts, articulated the core of the show.

Rationalist architects Adalberto Libera and Mario De Renzi began their work on the façade by recovering the nineteenth-century beaux arts face of the Palazzo delle Esposizioni. They replaced the heavily ornamented façade of 1882 with a Rationalist metal mantle. Over a 38-metre long ‘Pompeian’ red metal archway, stood the words: MOSTRA DELLA RIVOLUZIONE FASCISTA in red letters, above which rose four metal stylized fasci. These imposing fasci stood 25 metres high and were made of ‘oxidized and polished copper sheets, over a scaffolding of steel’. On either side of the building stood two, 6-metre tall Xs, also constructed from sheet metals. The rectangular archway led into an atrium surrounded by arches which swept the visitor into the exhibition.
Alfieri had taken a risk in choosing Adalberto Libera to design the façade and the Chapel of the Martyrs. By 1932, Libera, together with Giuseppe Terragni, was the most vocal exponent of the Italian Rationalist movement in architecture. In 1928, he had been a motivating force behind the creation of the Movimento Italiano per l’Architettura Razionale (MIAR). The Rationalists, who rejected both Futurism’s dependence upon the individual creative act and the Novecento’s emphasis upon tradition and ornamentation, celebrated functionalism and the new materials brought by technology, such as concrete and reinforced steel. As the façade of the exhibition demonstrated, the Rationalists applied the lessons and materials of industrial design to new uses. The Rationalists unabashedly located Le Corbusier’s Vers un architecture and Walter Gropius’s International Architectur at their inspirational core. Libera sought an architecture at once contemporary, vibrant and useful as propaganda. According to his biographer, Libera saw his architecture as ‘a great “container” of symbolic messages, as a monumental envelope and organizer of basic iconographic material, objects and significant ideas’.

The Mostra’s guidebook celebrated the façade as a hymn to modernity and as ‘a moment in the cycle of the creation and definition of new expressions’. The façade’s audacity and potency, most critics agreed, represented a starting-point for discussions of the Mostra della rivoluzione fascista. ‘You are grasped, as if into the mouth of an immense machine’, wrote one critic. ‘[Y]ou are constrained by a superior force which convinces you that there has been a revolution in Italy’. For the reviewer in the weekly magazine Il Popolo d’Italia, the façade represented ‘the enormous weight of fascism which throws itself on the paths of history to influence all’. Calling it ‘perfect’, another observer compared the fasci to ‘huge, ancient, and proto-Roman towers’. Margherita Sarfatti found the entrance one of the strongest elements of the exhibition, ‘with its clean vertical lines of ascension and action, of domination, audacity and empire’.

The façade, like the exhibition itself, presented a mix of concurrent messages. The long rectangular arch over a bank of doors beckoned to be entered. At the same time, the immense fasci dominating the skyline of the crowded Roman shopping district humbled the spectator. In contrast to the urban commercial surroundings, the stark metal simplicity of the façade made a bold statement about the regime’s power. The bare machine-like fasci advertised the regime’s decision to represent itself as modern, while the reconstruction of a
triumphal arch out of the four column-like *fasci* stressed fascism’s identification with the past. Moreover, the primary iconographic elements of the façade, the *fasci* and the Roman numeral X, harkened back to Imperial Rome, while the stark, stylized *fasci* evoked images of modern war, such as bayonets.¹⁹ The façade can be read as a fascist symbolic universe: the eye first caught the metal *fasci* proclaiming the power of the state, then the X which announced the state’s temporal reign, and finally the title of the exhibition, which announced the regime’s revolutionary founding myth.

Rationalist architect Giuseppe Terragni designed the liturgically central room detailing the period from the beginning of 1922 until the March on Rome. The ‘Room of 1922’ carried the spectator from the chaos and disintegration of the earlier rooms, which chronologized the war and post-war period, into an environment of hopefulness and possibility, but continued struggle. This room depicted the critical months prior to the fascist take-over and was, thus, central to maintaining the pace of the show. Cut diagonally by a wall and surrounded by semi-circles of display cases, the room was a frenetic mass of interconnecting photomontages, collages, cut-outs, all on the diagonal.

The themes of Terragni’s room ranged from the continued martyrdoms of fascist squad members, to accelerating parliamentary crises, to the birth of the first fascist para-state organizations. Below the canvas-draped ceiling hung an enormous X, for year 10: ‘This model is completely covered in socialist and anarchist flags, placed in semi-darkness. These flags, demonstrating that all real effective force of the subversive parties ended in 1922, are nailed to the frame by daggers illuminated by reflectors.’²⁰ One side of the diagonal wall narrated the fascist punitive actions of 1922, with clippings and artifacts. Above the display hung a series of merging profiles in which Mussolini’s black profile fused with the silver outline of Italy, all framed by the words ‘Organization of the Forces of the Young’.²¹ This collage symbolized the emergence of the institutions of the nascent fascist state out of the internecine strife of 1919–22 and created the iconographic conflation of ‘Italy–Mussolini–Fascism’. Another segment of the wall bore Mussolini’s slogan, ‘The Last May 1st!’, which announced fascism’s triumph over communism and socialism. This phrase was attached to a cut-out figure pushing away the crutch of socialism. In the adjacent corner stood a ceiling-high figure composed of a prison-suit of metal strips, entitled, ‘The Worker Ensnared by Strike-Mania’. Terragni’s photomontage of the
burning of the headquarters of the socialist newspaper, Avanti, blended photographic collages with silhouettes of flames. The ‘Room of 1922’ reached a climax with a panel called ‘Adunate’ (Mass Meeting). The lower section bore airplane propellers constructed from photographs of mass rallies. These propellers faced diagonally up toward hundreds of plaster hands, all pointing to the sky in a disembodied Roman salute.

For some reviewers, the ‘Adunate’, celebrating the dynamism of the masses, was Terragni’s most impressive work: ‘The sea of hands tensed for the oath and the Roman salute represent the rising tide of fascism’.22 Others labelled Terragni’s ‘dynamic disposition’ of artifacts as his most memorable contribution.23 Terragni succeeded in his aim to present the hope of fascism, after the chaos of 1920–1, according to one writer, who claimed his work ‘gave . . . a flaming impression to whomever . . . crossed the threshold of [the Room of] 1922’.24

Terragni saw his influences as a mix of Futurism and the international avant-garde or, as Cesare De Seta writes, his architecture located itself ‘in a space between the three co-ordinates of Futurism, Constructivism and Rationalism’.25 Further, Terragni understood the Mostra della rivoluzione fascista ‘to be a revolutionary act’, ‘violently anti-academic’.26 Like Libera and De Renzi, the modernist architects who designed the façade, much of Terragni’s career focused on government commissions and public architecture, such as war memorials and exhibition pavilions. He won critical acclaim in 1936 with the completion of the Casa del fascio in Como, a three-storey building he built as an ‘open container’ based on clean, functional lines.27 Terragni also won competitions for the never constructed Palazzo Littorio (1934) and the completed Palazzo dei Congressi (1940) for the planned Esposizione Universale di Roma (Universal Exposition of Rome).28

Contemporary critics stress Terragni’s avant-garde internationalist influences and his ability to apply the agitational techniques of the European avant-garde to the right-wing authoritarianism of fascism. Terragni borrowed photomontage from German Dadaism and Constructivist design from Constantin Melnikov and El Lissitsky, the Soviet Futurist Constructivists. The ‘collective sea of affirming hands’ of Terragni’s ‘Adunate’ panel closely paralleled a poster by the Soviet Constructivist, Gustav Klutsis, for the 1927 Soviet elections. Klutsis’s poster showed a mass of hands against a red background, moving in a diagonal tide toward the top of the space, all raised in
collective affirmation. In both works, the disembodied hands moved in common patterns against similar red backgrounds.29

From Terragni’s Room of 1922 the viewer moved into a series of rooms constructed by Mario Sironi. While Rationalists, such as Terragni and Libera, executed important elements of the show, Sironi constructed the exhibition’s most emotionally potent rooms — those dedicated to the March on Rome, the ‘Arrival of Fascism’, the Salon of Honour, and the Gallery of Fasci. Sironi’s stature as leader of the Novecento and longstanding illustrator for Popolo d’Italia influenced his assignment of the ‘most imposing’ elements of the show.30 Sironi began his career as a Futurist, studying under Giacomo Balla, signing his first Futurist manifesto in 1915 and serving alongside the Futurists in the Lombard Cyclist Battalion during the first world war.31 Sironi’s early work and urban landscapes of the 1910s and 1920s bore a Futurist imprint, which he later blended with metaphysical inspirations. His style in the 1930s was characterized by heaviness and monumentality. Sironi’s high profile, commitment to the regime and evolving style throughout the fascist period have led some scholars to see him as the paradigmatic ‘fascist artist’.32

Sironi divided the Room of the March on Rome into two sections, the first of which addressed the National Fascist Party Congresses prior to 28 October 1922. The remainder of the room dealt with the March on Rome itself. Sironi combined the solid architecturalism and rejection of ornamentation of the Novecento with constructive elements taken from the international avant-garde. From Soviet Constructivist El Lissitsky, Sironi appropriated the notion of creating an internal, self-enclosed environment. Sironi acknowledged his debt to the Soviet Constructivist, citing the Soviet pavilion at the 1928 Cologne exhibition as his primary source for the formal organization of the Mostra della rivoluzione fascista.33

Sironi merged the symbols of fascism with those of the Italian nation-state. The ceiling was tricolour, as was the colour scheme of the entire room. The wall facing the entrance displayed three images: white letters with red borders, declaring LA MARCIA SU ROMA, below a bas-relief of a stylized eagle in flight which supported a relief of the national flag adorned with the cross of the House of Savoy. Together, the shapes of the flag and the eagle produced the silhouette of a fascio. This three-dimensional trilogy of the ‘Fascism–Imperial Eagle–Italian Flag’ projected the unity of the old and the new and offered a message of stability and consolidation. The head of the eagle projected off the wall and into the exhibition ‘as a premonition of the
imminent arrival of destiny’.\textsuperscript{34} On the floor below the \textit{plastica murale} stood a machine-gun, which ‘the victory has by now relegated to a purely decorative function’.\textsuperscript{35} Bare except for two images, the opposing wall was Sironi’s most powerful. A three-dimensional, wall-length Roman sword, engraved with the intersecting words DUX/ITALIA shattered the red chain of socialism which hung in pieces from the wall. The Roman sword, the symbol of Italy united to its Duce in a resurrection of Roman glory, smashed the stranglehold of socialism. The room’s immense, overpowering yet minimal images presented an austerity that offered the viewer a respite, an opportunity to feel the unifying and restorative powers of fascism.

The Room of the March on Rome led into Sironi’s ‘grave and silent’ Salon of Honour.\textsuperscript{36} He based the Salon of Honour around an exedra dominated by a statue of Mussolini bursting out of the wall. This militant statue showed a solid and armed Mussolini standing guard over the room. Below the statue stood enormous sanserif letters DUX. The statue/DUX combination overlooked the ‘den’, the ‘severe cell’ of the first seat of \textit{Il Popolo d’Italia}, the room’s real focus.\textsuperscript{37} Inside the exhibition room, Sironi built a simple, square building to house the recreation of Mussolini’s office from 1914 until 1920. The building’s only ornamentation were plain pillars clothed in reproductions of \textit{Il Popolo d’Italia} and a simple doorway through which the relics were observed. The reconstituted office offered a slice of fascism in its radical phase: Mussolini’s paper-covered desk strewn with hand-grenades and a carelessly placed revolver; behind the desk hung a black flag with skull and cross-bones. The bare architecture of the Salon of Honour, with its dual focus on first, the image and the word of Mussolini as authoritarian consolidator and second, an environmental recreation of Mussolini as radical revolutionary leader, gave the cult of Mussolini a symbolism.

Sironi’s aesthetic, with its emphasis on volume, rough-cuts and monumental scale, had an ‘archaeological’ dimension. The rough-hewn Roman sword, the chiselled DUX, the hall of \textit{fasci} all harkened back to a mythic age. The grand scale and ‘archaeological’ feel gave Sironi’s rooms a sense of timeless authority — authority connected to a mythologized Italian past. Sironi built the ‘cell’ to house Mussolini’s office in a heavy, chiselled, pre-Roman style. Such a construction implied that the Duce was not associated with a particular historical period, but rather belonged to all time.

The Chapel of the Martyrs, by Adalberto Libera and Antonio Valente, completed the core cycle of the exhibition. Here the viewer’s
experience climaxed with a moment of mourning and tribute to fascist martyrs, now the nation's martyrs. The minimalist circular room focused on a simple, large cross inscribed with the words, 'Per la patria immortale' (For the immortal fatherland). Lit from above with theatrical emphasis, the metal cross stood on a 'blood red' pedestal. As if in response to the inscription on the cross, the walls repeated the word, presente, referring to the living memory of the fallen. The fascist anthem 'Giovanessa' was quietly played in the room, as a disembodied chorus of the dead.

The Chapel of the Martyrs elicited emotional and impassioned responses in reviewers, who emphasized the religious catharsis it offered. In Il Popolo d'Italia, Ottavio Dinale composed a hymn to the room:

In the Sacristy is the mysticism of the Revolution.
In the Sacristy is the inextinguishable flame.
In the Sacristy is the heart of the Nation.
In the Sacristy are the roots which locate Mussolini and fascism in time and space.

In the charged atmosphere of the Chapel, the viewer could release the pent-up passions aroused in the earlier rooms. 'The heart beats faster', wrote one critic, 'and tears come to the eyes in the Chapel.'

The Chapel offered a physical location for the 'cult of sacrifice and death', a central tenet of fascist ideology. The bloody shirts and relics of the fascist martyrs figured prominently in the display rooms: the Chapel of Martyrs provided the spectator with a moment of release and prayer for the anger produced by the soiled relics.

The dictatorship's self-representation in a modern aesthetic has produced a debate among post-war and contemporary scholars of culture in the fascist era. What did the regime hope to gain by giving such visible commissions to the most modern movements in Italian art and architecture? What did the decision to represent itself in a Futurist/avant-garde aesthetic imply about the regime and about fascism's relationship to the arts? There are many readings of the choices for the construction of the Mostra. However, a reading which associates the varied 'modern' choices with the larger environment of aesthetic pluralism reveals the way in which the regime encouraged the broad participation of 'the best' and 'the brightest' and inverted commonly-held assumptions about modernism.

While many modernist movements, from the Futurists to the Rationalists, claimed victory based on their special status at the
**Mostra della rivoluzione fascista**, the regime proved the ultimate victor by refusing predominance to a single group, while encouraging the participation of many. Fascism used the ‘vehemence’ of the Futurists, the ‘spirituality’ of the Rationalists, the ‘order’ of the Novecento, and the ‘simplicity’ of the strapaese. By picking and choosing aesthetic elements, the regime resolved the problem of having to present a single identity. Fascism projected a malleable, undefined image of itself which could be read as simultaneously revolutionary and authoritarian, changing and stable, urban and popular.

The art of the **Mostra della rivoluzione fascista** represented above all fascism’s successful co-opting of both modern aesthetics and modern artists. By allowing itself to be represented in a range of imageries, the dictatorship avoided alienating the majority of working artists. Fascism’s encouragement of a significant cross-section of the art world created a situation in which many avant-garde artists offered their services to the regime and worked out their aesthetic theories in government- and party-commissioned projects. The ease with which the dictatorship attracted the allegiance of prominent modernists confirmed the mutual legitimation implicit in the relation between fascism and the arts. While artists legitimated the dictatorship by working on its projects, fascism offered artists wrestling with questions of grand-scale and public applications of their experimental aesthetics the opportunity to realize them, at a price. The price was the construction of work which celebrated the dictatorship and its projects.

The dictatorship allowed artists to use such forms as Constructivist exhibition design, originally created to break down social hierarchies, in the construction of fascism’s self-representation. The Bauhaus’s shocking use of typography, photomontage and advertising techniques in exhibition design and the Constructivist recreations of environments were originally designed to herald a new social order and threaten existing hierarchies. The use of these forms at the **Mostra** gave material expression to fascist hierarchies.

The accommodation between artists of the avant-garde and fascism can be labelled ‘fascist modernism’ — the use and blending of various modernist aesthetic developments in the fascist project. Given the compromise over content, modernism lost the critical edge it had developed as an international movement and became a container for the regime’s varied and contradictory messages. For some of the artists of the **Mostra della rivoluzione fascista**, fascism’s
patronage of new and experimental art forms gave modernism a unique opportunity for official legitimation.\textsuperscript{44} As the publication of avant-garde architecture, \textit{Casabella}, pointed out:

The support of the National Government for the forms of the avant-garde is another sign of the exceptional atmosphere that is developing in Italy: all other so-called official art which the other governments of the world adopt . . . for events of this type are usually as retrograde and bourgeois as can possibly be imagined.\textsuperscript{45}

With its visible patronage of modernism, the Mussolini dictatorship became one of the first national governments to offer official sanction, commissions and space to avant-garde artists and architects.

Many artists committed themselves to the evolution of an experimental official art. Sironi’s \textit{pittura murale} and Terragni’s exhibition design expanded conceptions of public art. In his championing of mural painting and bas-reliefs, Sironi sought an art which could be socially functional, modern and fascist. Sironi and Terragni saw no contradiction between modernism and fascism and spent large periods of their respective careers searching for formulas adequately modern and fascist.

Thus, the regime’s choice of a non-aligned modern aesthetic for its self-representation resulted in a fruitful selection. This choice both attracted prominent artists and architects and found widespread resonance among critics and the public. The dynamism, sense of experimentation and newness brought viewers into the event, made them privy to a daring experience and offered an image of fascism as unafraid to cut new ground. Further, the regime’s mobilization of new aesthetics could be read as a fascist innovation, since they were not associated with pre-existing élites.

With the exhibition, the fascist dictatorship hoped to underwrite the first event of a shared national culture. The regime sought a cultural experience which resonated — albeit in different ways — with a significant cross-section of the Italian population from a range of regions and classes. In its desire to forge new cultural identifications and elevate new symbols, the fascist regime stressed a unified national Italian identity. Fascism, as Victoria de Grazia has argued, appropriated the Risorgimento discourse of ‘making Italians’. ‘Coming to power with all the rhetoric of an unfulfilled Risorgimento tradition’, writes de Grazia, ‘fascist and nationalist ideologues continuously
paid homage to the idea of a unified and unifying national culture. The promotion of the *Mostra* as an event of a national culture fits into fascism’s ‘artificial creation of a sense of overriding national identity’. With this appropriation of pre-existing discourse, fascism found responsive audiences, ready to have ‘Italianness’ imposed upon them. This willingness of many spectators to read themselves into the recomposed history of the *Mostra* testifies to the regime’s identification of cultural gaps and attempts to fill them.

Especially in government publications, reviewers mirrored this concern. ‘The visitors’, declared one observer, ‘were a mass of people from all sectors, all ages . . . all classes and all regions of Italy.’ The exhibition ‘captured the soul of the worker, the aristocrat, the professional, the student, the adult and the young’, echoed Francesco Barone. One returned expatriate thanked the exhibition for his rekindled patriotism and dedicated his pamphlet on the *Mostra* to ‘You who have returned from lives far away — finally made Italians by the Duce’. He added that he had been ‘re-Italianized’.

The *Mostra* worked to solidify a fascist and Italian identity by means variously identified as ‘the nationalization of the masses’ and ‘the invention of tradition’. The massification of the March on Rome implied in the exhibition aspired to turn the fascist assumption of power into a shared ‘public cult’. The ritualization of the day on which fascism took the reins of government tied the participant to the experience on an emotional level, using the mystification of the historical event to create a common community. Cornelio Di Marzio, a visible and high-ranking cultural bureaucrat, believed the *Mostra* could elevate the participant from alienation into collective experience. ‘From the most distant homes’, he wrote, ‘will arrive this sign of collective participation in a movement which, between the poles of authority and sacrifice, has offered its martyrs and its Duce.’

In the creation of a new national symbolism, the *Mostra della rivoluzione fascista* borrowed from both the secular rituals of the French Revolution and the religious ones of Christianity. The rhythm of the exhibition — crisis, understanding, redemption — paralleled the Christian liturgy, while the secular religion of the state and the canonization of its symbols built on the legacy of the French Revolution. The celebration of the ‘glorious dead’ combined a Catholic reverence for martyrdom with the nationalist celebration of allegiance to the *Patria*. The exhibition was repeatedly described in language such as, ‘an act of faith and homage to the Fallen’ and ‘an exaltation of even the most anonymous sacrifices’. *Il Popolo d’Italia*
declared that, for the people, ‘it’s a solemn rite, exalting the spirit of the Revolution and the sacrifice of the Martyrs, who died for them’. 57

As most blatantly demonstrated by the Chapel of the Martyrs, fascism borrowed from Gabriele D’Annunzio the technique of linking secular symbols — like the flame — to those of traditional Christianity. 58 D’Annunzio had used Christian symbols alongside their secular counterparts at the national festivals at Fiume. The flame and the metal cross of the Chapel offered a national liturgy with a Christian ichnography. This co-mingling provided the viewer with a familiar symbolic universe and pre-existing responses to draw upon: one visitor fell on bent knees and prayed in the Chapel of the Martyrs. 59

While fascism enthroned a new national symbolic universe at the Mostra, it also conflated the national cult with the fascist cult. The Mostra used the national symbols of the tricolour and the cross of Savoy together with the fascio and images of Mussolini. This fusion implied fascism had a past connected to the Italian nation state. The new symbolic world merged with the re-interpretation of the past offered by fascism. Using the French example, fascism retroactively restarted the calendar in 1927, making 28 October 1922 the first day of the first year of the new calendar — I. I. I. Fascism declared it would replace old allegiances and create new Italians with a new collective history. In this way, ‘fascistization’ was inextricably bound to ‘nationalization’.

History became myth in the depictions of both the Italian victory of 1918 and the fascist one of 1922. The rooms on the first world war glorified Italy’s war experience as its moment of national regeneration and self-assertion. The show idealized trench warfare and the community of self-sufficient soldier-heroes it forged. The exhibition offered visions of the enemy which consisted of all the political parties of the left and centre which had resisted the inevitable fascist victory. The parliamentarians were decrepit and ineffectual; the socialists and communists were evil seducers of the workers. A sculpture in Room B showed a stylized image of a worker being crushed by volumes of Marx, Engels and Bebel. 60 Fascism emerged as the only force able to redeem the nation from the ravages of class conflict and replace it with a national community. The simultaneity and timelessness of most of the displays spiritualized the history depicted. The exhibition confused past and present as history became an explosion of images, relics and symbols. Chronology fell prey to the trajectory of national fulfilment. Nationhood, declared the
Mostra, would be forged from the swirling images of the past. Risorgimento rhetoric blended into the D'Annunzian cult and all climaxed in the victory of fascism. The narratives of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were inverted to become precursors to fascism. The only fixed point around which the viewer could hold was Mussolini, the fulfilment of the national past.

An essential anti-positivism emerged from the failure to distinguish between the relics and the created artwork which encased them. For example, an anti-Bolshevik display in Room E blended photographic fragments, sculpture and prose.61 Photographs of Italian communists mingled with scenes of famine, alongside an enlarged Popolo d'Italia headline, ‘Contro La Bestia Ritornante’ (Against the Recurring Beast). The entire construction burned in a fire-red glow. Such displays were disorienting. Were the photographs documentary evidence or part of the artwork? Were they to be taken more or less seriously than the howling monster next to them? ‘War’, ‘Nation’, ‘Victory’, read the exhibition, were all emotional concepts redefined and rematerialized under fascism?

While the exhibition offered a mythologized image of the past and the enemy, images of the future were essentially ambiguous and contradictory. The Mostra’s text left the viewer in tension: it offered simultaneous images of revolution and consolidation and it celebrated fascism in its movement phase while also elevating the cult of Mussolini. The contradiction between authority/order and continued change pervaded the show. The stark severity of the façade, the Salon of Honour, the Chapel of the Martyrs and all the stairways, halls and corridors implied stasis and order; the frenetic photomontages and emphasis on the continued struggle stressed movement. The enemy — socialists and communists — were depicted as defeated, but their repeated appearance in each room hinted that vigilance could not be abandoned. The relics of the fascist martyrs and the ‘captured’ mementos of the enemy were a reminder that ‘this is a past which has not set’.62 The spectator was to exit the Mostra della rivoluzione fascista rekindled and ‘as ready as before to defend the Revolution and its Leader, even with bloodshed’.63 Ultimately, the Mostra offered an unresolved mélange of narratives and messages.

Above the central ideological narratives rode a series of tensions and ambiguities, the irresolution of which played an essential function in the exhibition’s success. The confusion of imageries and narratives allowed the viewer to feel as though a choice were being made when, in fact, the disorientation precluded intellectual choice.
The confusion implied that an experience had taken place; the spiritualization and emotionalization of the past led the spectator to believe it a fundamental experience. The source of the intense and emotional experience was recent national history, still fresh in most spectators’ memories and, thus, easily reconverted into a shared national memory.

The aesthetics of the Mostra and its elevation of a discourse of national culture blended into the third factor defining the exhibition: its use of spectacle and mass culture. To stress the drama of the occasion, Mussolini simultaneously inaugurated the Via dell’Impero (the Imperial Way), the fascist-constructed grand concourse linking the central monuments of Imperial Rome, and the Mostra della rivoluzione fascista. He opened the Mostra at 11 am in conjunction with a carefully staged ceremony. Accompanied by prominent fascist officials, the Director of the party and Alfieri, Mussolini reviewed a guard of honour 180 strong, outside the exhibition. In the atrium, a group of Giovani Avanguardisti and Balilla (fascist youth organizations) recited the fascist decalogue to Mussolini. A collection of special guests, consisting of sansepolcristi (veterans of fascism’s founding rally in 1919), federal secretaries, members of the Fascist Grand Council and government officials greeted the Duce in the Salon of Honour, where Achille Starace, the Secretary of the Fascist Party, refrained from making a speech because the Mostra ‘speaks eloquently for itself’. Alfieri reserved the first afternoon from noon until 5 pm for special guests, such as senators, deputies, party officials and ‘personalities of the political and art world’. In addition, fascist luminaries, members of the royal family, the Royal Academy and a large contingent of journalists attended the first afternoon. For this opening afternoon, Alfieri’s office distributed 23,784 tickets.

According to Il Popolo d’Italia, a crowd gathered outside the show waiting for the doors to open to the public at 5 pm, after which the influx of visitors remained uninterrupted until midnight. The exhibition remained open to the public every day of the year, including Christmas and New Year’s Day. In response to the crowds, the Mostra often closed as late as 11.30 at night.

Popular reaction to the Mostra della rivoluzione fascista exceeded all official forecasts and expectations. Attendance steadily increased and remained so intense throughout the exhibition’s planned six-
month run that the Party initially extended the closing date from 21 April 1933 to 31 July 1933 and, finally, to 28 October 1934. Attendance figures supported assertions of widespread interest: in the first seven months (29 October 1932 to 23 May 1933), 1,236,151 visitors attended the exhibition and by the closing date of 28 October 1934, 3,854,927 spectators had passed through the exhibition’s entrance. Between the opening date in October 1932 and November 1933, the Mostra showed a profit of 15,410,151 lire.

In order for the exhibition to be a tool of legitimation and consent, the regime had to expose large audiences to it. The Fascist Party used the techniques of mass culture and a developing commercial tourist industry with great skill, courting spectators with an incentive policy which included travel discounts, organized group excursions, and rotating guards of honour. For the exhibition’s two-year duration, any visitor who had his or her train ticket validated at the exhibition’s ticket office was eligible for a 70 per cent train fare discount. The discounted tickets were valid for thirty days for those coming from abroad; twenty days for those arriving from stations farther than 400 kilometres away; ten days for those within 151 to 400 kilometres, and five days for those within 150 kilometres of Rome. In addition, sixteen steamship companies, such as Lloyd Triestino and the Societa di Navigazione Tirrenia, offered discounted passages with reductions of between 30 and 50 per cent.

According to the discount system, visitors would pay at the Mostra’s ticket office for a bollo or stamp, which would entitle them to the reduced train fare. Thus, a spectator availing himself of the discounts would buy a train ticket, a verification stamp and a ticket to the exhibition. The layout of the Mostra, with the ticket office at the back of the second floor, required the visitor to tour (or at least walk through) all the rooms before validating his or her train ticket. At a price of two lire, the entrance ticket itself remained within the purchasing power of most Italians and just under the average price of a cinema ticket.

The discount policies revealed the organizers’ interest in attracting a large and varied audience. The regime, in its attempt to cater to the cultural needs of those arriving in Rome for the Mostra, underwrote a sophisticated programme of commercial tourism. The dictatorship encouraged middle-class tourism within Italy and focused it around official cultural events. As the middle classes began to develop identities as consumers and tourists, the dictatorship eagerly catered to these emerging identities. The discounted fares entitled visitors to
discounts at the theatres, zoos and spectacles of the capital. Thus, a tourist could combine national, patriotic duties with cultural experiences. By joining its propaganda needs to support for an emerging tourist industry, the regime offered something to business, as well as spectators. Further, the linking of visits to the Mostra with those to the zoo or theatre encouraged people to experience other aspects of the burgeoning national culture.

The regime had wisely anticipated that incentives would be necessary to lure large audiences. The discount policy worked. In February 1934, while the possibility of extending the Mostra’s closing date was being discussed, Fascist Party Secretary Achille Starace commissioned a report on how many visitors had taken advantage of the travel discounts. The figures bespoke the success of the discount policy: between 1 and 16 January 1934, an average of 3,491 people per day visited the exhibition; of these an average of only 631 did not have discounted train fares. 84 Eighty-two per cent of those visiting the exhibition did so with discounted fares.

Widespread use of the discounts cannot be read simply as support for the dictatorship or its policies, since the discounted train fares also brought visitors whose primary interest was the 70 per cent fare discount. The cheap train fares encouraged foreign tourists, such as Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre, to visit the exhibition. De Beauvoir wrote in her memoirs: ‘That year [1932] Mussolini had organized in Rome a “fascist exposition” and, in order to attract foreign tourists, the Italian railroad company offered them a seventy per cent discount’. 75 ‘We profited from it without scruples’, concluded de Beauvoir. After a visit to Rome, de Beauvoir and Sartre ‘cast a glance’ at the exhibition ‘in order to validate our tickets for the discount’. 76 Thus, even opponents of fascism found themselves exposed to its incentives and propaganda.

As Barbara Allason wrote in her memoir, Memories of An Anti-Fascist, she toured the Mostra and left ‘with peaceful awareness of having earned the discount’. 77 With the passage of time, the system became less rigid and, as Allason noted, ‘things became simpler . . . it was enough to go to the office at the entrance and pay for a ticket to the Mostra . . . and the clerk would kindly stamp the ticket for the entrance and exit’. 78

By May 1933, news of ‘abuses committed at the ticket office’ reached the organizers. 79 Apparently, in some cases employees validated train tickets without the purchase of an entrance ticket and without proof of a visit to the Mostra. In addition, ‘hotel guides,
interpreters, and tourist agents’ validated the train tickets of entire groups based on the purchase of a single exhibition ticket. Most probably, an unacknowledged policy regarding validations existed between ticket office personnel and tourist agents. Given the range of motivations for travel and tourism, the success of the travel incentive as an indication of the widespread attraction of the *Mostra* must be mitigated by acknowledgement of other inducements, such as travel and business.

While the discounted train fares encouraged middle-class spectators sufficiently well-off to travel regularly, organized group excursions brought constituencies to the *Mostra* which might not have attended otherwise. The groups brought to the show on organized excursions were often those most regimented by fascism, such as schoolchildren and soldiers, or those the regime felt most in need of exposure to the propaganda, such as workers. Organized excursions to Rome for the *Mostra della rivoluzione fascista* came from schools, fascist mass organizations, factories and veterans’ clubs, among others. Applications for group discounts in May 1934 included 121 Franciscan priests from Milan, 42 workers from the FIAT factory in Livorno, 453 *Giovani Fascisti* from Sessa Aurunca, and 750 farmers from Treviso. In some cases, groups received discounted or free entrance tickets and in others the price of the *bollo* was deferred.

With special trips and tours of Rome, the fascist regime courted the consent, or at least attempted to neutralize the dissension, of the asset unconverted. It also hoped to reward the dutiful. Veterans and fascist officials and organizations, such as the *Dopolavoro* and the *Organizzazione Nazionale Balilla*, received special priority for government and party contributions to group trips. Such excursions, in addition to their obvious propaganda value, were part of fascism’s reward system. However, more problematic groups such as workers or more marginalized constituencies also experienced privileged treatment. The textile factory, Ditta Tondani, brought 1,500 of its workers to Rome for a two-day tour, which included a visit to Party Secretary Starace. Workers from the SNIA synthetic fibres factory in Rome, the dockyards of Castelmare di Stabia, the Folck iron and steelworks in Lombardy and the glassworks of the Società Veneziana Industrie Vetrarili all collectively visited the exhibition. Problematic groups from the physical and economic margins of Italian society received special treatment: Mussolini paid 2,000 lire towards the travel of 300 *dopolavoristi* from Zara, the disputed Italian linguistic
and ethnic territories under Yugoslav control.86

Requests for special group excursion tickets poured into the offices of the Fascist Party. The Fascist Party, as sponsor of the exhibition, found itself exhausted of funds and had to deny many appeals for special discounts. In March 1933, Starace wrote to all Secretaries of local Fascist Federations, asking them to stop sending groups to the Mostra.87 In the same month, Mussolini declared an end to excursions of more than 500 people; the Ministry of the Interior sent urgent telegrams to all the prefects of the country commanding them to cancel all organized trips, by order of the Duce.88

Rotating guards of honour mounted the steps of the Mostra every day from its inauguration to its closure, in an additional attempt to have the exhibition touch the lives of many and varied people. Duty to the dictatorship and financial need were reasons cited for guards’ assignments. In some instances, party organizers offered only funds for travel assistance, while in others, the party paid a stipend to those standing guard.89 Alpine guards, dockworkers from Genoa, Milanese municipal electrical workers, fascist militia units, army and navy units, doctors’ fraternities and members of the Italian Academy all stood guard at the exhibition.90

A government publicity campaign reached out to those the dictatorship wanted to draw into the Mostra. Since Italy was a nation with an underdeveloped radio industry, the regime depended on visual advertising in public spaces. The exhibition press office printed 100,000 posters to be installed in four postings between September and December 1932.91 Trains, buses, ships, airplanes, trams and taxis displayed 1,330,000 placards.92 The advertising campaign targeted regional and inter-city transportation, in an effort to reach the middle and working classes. The show’s publicity campaign aimed at both Italians and foreigners. In addition to train and steamship discounts available to foreigners, with special discounts for foreign honey-mooners, the exhibition offered French, German, Spanish and English translations of the guidebook and a special catalogue.93

Advertising its presence and activism was a central aspect of fascism’s cultural politics. The event itself existed in large part to be reproduced through the print and film media. Fascism hoped to expand the national culture-appreciating public beyond those actually in attendance. The regime also used press coverage to show its appropriation of public space: repeated images of mass ‘fascist’ exhibitions reinforced a view of an activist, interventionist dictatorship.
While the regime sponsored travel incentives, group excursions, publicity and advertising, the Mostra also produced less obviously orchestrated responses. Assertions of spontaneous public reactions abounded, particularly in the official press, such as Il Popolo d’Italia’s claim that visitors were rendered ‘silent’ by the Chapel of the Martyrs. In some cases, workers took voluntary pay deductions in order to participate in the event: in November 1932, the workers and office employees of the Società Edison made a two-day trip to Rome to visit the Mostra. The corporation covered half the costs of the trip, while the workers paid the other half through ‘small withholdings from their monthly salary’. It is impossible to determine to what extent these workers accepted such pay deductions out of a desire to see the exhibition or out of an interest in visiting Rome or out of subtle coercion. While the regime certainly underwrote some of the popular response, the fact that more than 75 per cent of the visitors were not in organized groups indicates a level of non-coercive interest.

The commercial market is a valuable determinant of popular success. By October 1933, aspects of the Mostra della rivoluzione fascista had become such desired cultural images that private firms reproduced pirated and illegal postcards. The Milanese police department reported that two firms had produced postcards of the exhibition’s façade and sold them without the permission of the Mostra which held the rights to the images. The Roman police office discovered another company committing the same crime by illegally reproducing the Mostra’s logo. One private firm asked Giovanni Marinelli, the PNF administrative secretary and Mostra liaison, for permission to print luggage stickers bearing a reproduction of the façade. Such pirated products supplemented the ample reproductions of images of the Mostra to be found on official postage stamps, commemorative coins and in the best-selling exhibition catalogue. The interest of private firms in risking illegality in order to produce postcards of the Mostra attests to the exhibition’s selling power, the diffusion of its images and the broad market which must have existed for such images.

Unofficial responses included dramatic and emotional pilgrimages to the Mostra. A number of individuals, apparently out of unsolicited enthusiasm for fascism, arrived at the Mostra on foot or by bicycle. More than 129 ‘pilgrims’ walked from points as distant as Berlin, Udine, Reggio Calabria and Turin. Another forty-nine people bicycled to Rome from locations as diverse as Paris and Palermo.
These dramatic pilgrimages were undertaken primarily by Italian and European fascists in a show of support for the dictatorship, such as the twelve young French fascists who bicycled from Paris or the three Italian fascists who walked from Venice.

The *Mostra della rivoluzione fascista* marked the heyday of aesthetic pluralism and fascist cultural patronage. Through a policy of aesthetic diversity and experimentation, the fascist regime succeeded in enticing a number of the best Italian artists into official culture. Government promotion of a modern representational language led to a vibrant, provocative exhibition which, in turn, encouraged mass support. The dictatorship discovered an exhibition formula, mixing avant-garde aesthetics with commercial tourism and a rhetoric of national culture, which catered to a wide range of cultural tastes. Fascism had turned its act of self-representation into a national spectacle.

Notes

1. In recent years, an acceptance of fascism’s eclectic arts patronage has entered the discourse in a number of fields from art history to film criticism. For the visual arts, Laura Malvano described the multiplicity of imageries supported or accepted by fascism and fascism’s changing use of those imageries: Laura Malvano, *Fascismo e la politica dell’immagine* (Turin 1988). The notion of fascist artistic pluralism came into general acceptance with the 1982 Milan exhibition *Anni Trenta: Arte e cultura in Italia*, cat. exh. (Milan 1983).


Film studies have produced a series of works detailing the varied forms the cinematic arts took during the fascist era. See Gian Piero Brunetta, *Cinema italiano tra le due guerre* (Milan 1975); James Hay, *Popular Film Culture in Fascist Italy* (Bloomington, Indiana 1987); Marcia Landy, *Fascism in Film* (Princeton 1986); Riccardo Redi (ed.), *Cinema italiano sotto il fascismo* (Venice 1979); Elaine Mancini, *Struggles of the Italian Film Industry during Fascism, 1930–1935* (Ann Arbor 1985).

On literary culture during fascism, see Ruth Ben-Ghiat, ‘The Politics of Realism: *Corrente di vita giovanile* and the Youth Culture of the 1930s’ in *Stanford Italian Review*, VIII 1–2 (1990), 139–64.


3. Ibid.


9. In addition to having the opportunity to contribute to a national event and to put aesthetic formulations into practice, artists were paid for their work on the *Mostra*. Alfieri paid 673,886 lire to the artists out of a total 8,875,979 lire allotted to mounting the show. ‘La Mostra della rivoluzione fascista — Situazione patrimoniale al 22 Novembre 1933’, ACS, PNF Direttorio — Ufficio Stralcio, busta 271.


13. Ibid., 18.


29. Gustav Klutsis’s poster was shown and discussed by Margarita Tupitsyn at the 1990 College Art Association meeting (15 February 1990).


33. Mario Sironi, ‘L’architettura della rivoluzione’, *Il Popolo d’Italia*, 8 November 1932. Sironi had designed the interiors of the Italian Press Pavilion at the 1928 Cologne and 1929 Barcelona international exhibitions; it was in Cologne that he saw El Lissitsky’s constructions at first hand.


35. Ibid., 195.

36. Ibid., 211.

37. Ibid., 215.

38. Ibid., 227.


40. Usellini, ‘La Mostra’, 249.


44. As of 1930, very few governments had offered official support to the European avant-garde, with the inconsistent exception of the Soviet Union in the 1920s and certain local governments under the Weimar Republic. For more on the question of European governments and the avant-garde, see John Willet, *Art and Politics in the Weimar Period* (New York 1978).


47. Ibid., 21.


51. Ibid., 9.


61. Ibid., 114.

64. ‘Mostra della rivoluzione — La cerimonia inaugurale’, Il Popolo d’Italia, 30 October 1932.
65. Ibid.
67. ACS, PNF Direttorio — Ufficio Stralcio, busta 271.
68. Ibid.
69. Gian Capo, ‘La mostra della rivoluzione (da Via Nazionale a Via dell’Impero)’, Illustrazione italiana, 28 October 1934, 667.
70. Verbale, 7 November 1934, ACS, PNF direttorio — Ufficio Stralcio, busta 271, fascicolo 3; Memo, 28 October 1934, ACS, PNF Direttorio — Ufficio Stralcio, busta 273.

72. ‘Riduzioni del 70 per cento sulle FF.SS. per la Mostra della rivoluzione fascista’, Il Popolo d’ Italia, 21 October 1932.
74. Letter, 5 February 1934, Alfieri to Starace, ACS, PNF Direttorio — Ufficio Stralcio, busta 273.
75. Simone de Beauvoir, La force de l’âge (Paris 1960), 178.
76. Ibid., 179. De Beauvoir found the ‘exposition fasciste’ less than convincing, claiming, ‘Nous jetâmes un coup d’œil sur les vitrines où étaient exposés les revolvers et les maquettes des “martyrs fascistes”’. 
78. Allason, Memorie di un’anti-fascista, 125.
80. Ibid.
81. The Archivio Centrale dello Stato has a document collection containing requests for assistance from groups desiring to attend the Mostra: ACS, PNF Direttorio — Ufficio Stralcio, busta 271, fascicolo 2.
82. Ibid.
83. Ibid.
84. Memo, 15 July 1933, Mario Chieso, Prefetto di Como, to PCM, Gabinetto, ACS, PCM (1934–36), 14.1.1593.
85. ACS, PCM (1934–36), 14.1.1593; PNF Direttorio — Ufficio Stralcio, busta 271.
86. Letter, 18 May 1933, Prefetto di Zara to PCM, ACS, PCM (1934–36), 14.1.1593. As with many of the regime’s cultural incentives, the group visits were reported in the party newspaper, as evidence of government interest in the people.

88. Memo, 5 April 1933, Arpinati, Ministero Interno to Prefetto Regno; telegram, 31 March 1933, Arpinati to Regno, ACS, PCM (1934–36), 14.1.1593. A group of 500 workers from Terni had organized a trip to the Mostra for April 1933 which had to be cancelled.

89. Letter, 4 June 1934, Carlo Peverelli to Marinelli, ACS, PNF Direttorio — Ufficio Stralcio, busta 271. In this case, Marinelli responded that all the party could offer the lawyers’ group were discounts on the entrance tickets and nothing on the bollo. Marinelli explained that suspension of the bollo was offered ‘only to large groups of workers’.


91. ACS, PNF Direttorio — Ufficio Stralcio, busta 273.

92. ACS, busta 273. Alfieri spent 427,037 lire on advertising and publicity, out of a total budget of approximately eight million lire. ‘La Mostra della rivoluzione fascista — Situazione patrimoniale al 22 Novembre 1933’, ACS, PNF Direttorio — Ufficio Stralcio, busta 271.

The connection between the state railways and cultural institutions under fascism was central: not only did the major discount programmes come from the railways, but, as the experience of the Venice Biennale and the Mostra della rivoluzione fascista demonstrated, much of the publicity took place in railway stations. For example, posters and copies of the Mostra catalogue were permanently on view in Italian train stations.

93. Francesco Gargano, Italiani e stranieri alla mostra della rivoluzione fascista (Rome 1933).


96. ACS, PNF Direttorio — Ufficio Stralcio, busta 272.


98. Letter, 6 October 1933, Questore di Roma to Marinelli, ACS, PNF Direttorio — Ufficio Stralcio, busta 272.


100. The most reproduced images came from the non-chronological elements of the show: the façade, the Chapel of Martyrs and Sironi’s Gallery of Fasci.

101. Professor Jeffrey Schnapp tabulated these figures from ACS, PNF Direttorio — Ufficio Straiclo, busta 273.
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