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Conclusion

It is good to give materialist investigations a truncated end.
—Benjamin (*Arcades*, [N9a, 2], 473)

Throughout this book we have analysed structural, practical and conceptual intersections between the fields of architecture and the novel during the Fascist regime, as these emerged in literary and cultural debates. In other words, we have analysed how the field of architecture impacted on that of the novel and vice versa, by looking at them both from a theoretical and a practical point of view. This book responds to the need to identify and theorize underlying points of contact between different artistic forms and their development during the Ventennio, to demonstrate their significance not simply as discrete artistic phenomena, but rather as part of a system of the arts, which was integral to the dictatorship and to its legitimization as a totalitarian apparatus.

Our argument was that the aesthetic urgency of reconstituting the novel converged with that of rebuilding a new architecture to create an *arte di Stato*, which could sustain the anthropological revolution initiated by the Fascist regime. Such convergence was guided by some key principles

which could give coherence and consistency to the whole project. In this respect, one central point we wish to draw attention to, by way of conclusion, is how similar discursive patterns and programmatic claims were consistently reiterated across different, frequently disconnected, fields. These concerned the need to reconstruct the Italian novel and to reconfigure the aesthetic practices of architecture by rationalizing its structures and languages in order to represent the nation, and more particularly the Fascist nation. Politically, the arts could sustain the regime when they created artworks which announced precisely this rationalized, anonymous and unmediated relationship between the individual and the State. The novel and architecture, by following such a political and aesthetic trajectory, had a particularly important role to play in supporting the regime in its creation of collective spaces where the new relationship between subjectivity and objectivity could be articulated. Moreover, both projects were driven not only by a constructive and rationalizing effort, but also by a moral imperative. The call for a new morality and ethics in the arts was directed at writing a national literature and constructing buildings, which were in contact with the everyday reality of the Italian citizen and of the Fascist New Man.

If the regime allowed a certain degree of 'pluralism or eclecticism', it nonetheless wanted to fashion an *arte di Stato*, which systematically called for contributions by artists working in every field, with virtually no exclusions; and most artists accepted to embark on such a messianic mission. As a result, a definition of Fascist art was never properly formulated, although ample space was given to—often inconclusive—debates about it. One of the few firm points in these debates was the call for 'art as action' by Bottai. This action, as we have argued, translated into support for the new novel and the national publishing industry, and for the new architecture.

As demonstrated in Chap. 3, the book market was growing in response to an increase in the reading public. There was, however, a gap in the publishing field since Italian novels were not really addressing readers' aesthetic demands. Translations of captivating foreign novels were instead. While the national literary field remained quite fragmentary yet driven by the desire to build a new novel, translations were, in fact, the leading phenomenon in this respect because of their modern topics and clear

prose. The theoretical debate on the novel revolved around the definition of realism and how to write in such a way that enabled the novelist to communicate with the reader. As we have seen, realism assumed different meanings, from Bontempelli's theorization of magical realism to the idea of social realism upheld by the youth culture generated within fringes of the regime. But the common denominator was the need to 'build' a national novel, which was perceived not only as still lacking within the national paradigm, but also as lagging behind to other major European countries, such as France, Germany and England, which could champion a long novelistic tradition.

This constructive desire, again driven by a social mission, resurfaced in the architectural world, where young architects strove to produce a theoretical map to reshape and rejuvenate the discipline. For the most part, they conceived of their mission as a social one, in the sense that they wanted to use their skills to transform the social sphere through the design of buildings, which could perform the specific function of directing the collective ethos of the citizens. This is why architecture often aspired to become the official *arte di Stato*: architects believed that they could create new spaces for the individual made collective, and shape new communities. The Fascist project of moulding the New Man, the ultimate result of its anthropological revolution, and a process to which the arts had to contribute linked all these endeavours.

The second part of the book examined the manifestations and realities of these cultural developments. The journals *900* and *Quadrante*, to which an entire chapter was dedicated, were foundational in constructing a theoretical paradigm intersecting the novel and architecture in the conception of a State art that could support the regime and its modernizing mission. Their initiators and directors, Bontempelli and Bardi, were key figures in these crucial attempts at building a Fascist modernity in which the arts would feature prominently, and would be a foundational part of a new, rationalized and collectivist society. The debate on realism was vivid in many quarters of the Fascist intelligentsia, but more so on its cultural fringes and in its youth culture. Realism was a wide-ranging concept, which was applied to various phenomena, often with the aim of finding a new paradigm for a new culture, in a not dissimilar fashion to what the new architecture was trying to achieve. When referred to in the

context of the novel, however, realism meant a rationalized prose style, an adherence to everyday reality and a collective ethos. The realist novel no longer had to focus on the subject but on subjectivity made collective. Finally, the last chapter sheds light on how these shared constructive principles worked out in practice, in the conception of novels and buildings between the late 1920s and the late 1930s. Novelists and architects worked to apply the principles of reconstruction, aesthetic rationalization, morality, functionalism and engagement with an envisioned mass public, achieving different results in their respective fields, but largely pursuing shared goals and ideals.

To expand the reach of our argument, we have linked this book to another project entitled *The Dialectics of Modernity*, which comprises a website-database where other relevant data written up both as theoretical, interpretative hypotheses and as short essays, which analysed individual artefacts are stored. The book might, or might not, be read in conjunction with the website-database, but in both scenarios readers can access information in nonlinear fashions. From the book chapters, readers can move to the artefacts explicitly linked to the book, or alternatively they can decide to navigate the other artistic fields visualized in the website-database to provide further information on the Fascist system of the arts.

This slim book has covered quite a lot of ground and with its direct links to a website-database has multiplied its access points in a labyrinthine fashion. It has nonetheless reached a fairly straightforward main conclusion as far as two key areas of Italian culture of the time are concerned: the arts made a crucial contribution to supporting the Fascist regime in building its totalitarian apparatus, and they did so not by acting in isolation, but by moving according to a set of principles regulating what one can legitimately define as a system of the arts. Finally, we can desume that the arts were fundamental to paving the Italian way to totalitarianism because they contributed substantially to its very 'definition' as an anthropological revolution to create a New Man. And, crucially, the arts have done so in fields as diverse in their theory and in their practice as the novel and architecture, for they operated both according to the logics of State art but also according to a distinctive drive towards experimentalism.

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