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**An H-Diplo Review Essay**

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**Benjamin G. Martin. *The Nazi-Fascist New Order for European Culture*. Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2016. ISBN: 9780674545748 (hardcover, \$39.95/£28.95/€36.00).**

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German brawn and Italian brains will build the New Europe, augured one (Italian) author in the wake of Nazi Germany's military victory over France in 1940.<sup>1</sup> In actual fact, the Germans decided to build a German Europe but not tell anyone about their plans so as not to make everyone, including the Italians, their enemies. A couple of years later, another Italian observer compared the Germans to "armored children" and their European culture to a minestrone, that is, "a soup of common places on the gifts of Europe to civilization" (265). It is thus easy to think of the Nazi-Fascist new order for European culture as a farce. And perhaps we historians should more faithfully record the inanities and follies of power-of vainglorious leaders like Propaganda Minister Josef Goebbels, of scheming middle-level functionaries—they came in droves—who wanted to take over the world, of greedy and/or spineless artists like Richard Strauss or Knut Hamsun, and, more commonly seen among Italians, of cunning tricksters like the journalist Giovanni Ansaldo, who penned the above quotation.

The likes of Ansaldo are the spice in this study of the efforts of Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany to create a new cultural order in Europe. Its author, Benjamin Martin, emphasizes the violent takeover and remodeling of cultural institutions, the recasting of transnational legal and economic structures, as well as the orchestration of a transnational, European market for cultural goods. This approach fits well the recent upswing of interest in interwar Internationalism, much as it coincides with the rapidly growing literature on nationalist International(ism) as a powerful, and in its time remarkably attractive, counterforce to imperial(ist), cosmopolitan, and Bolshevik Internationalism.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Concetto Pettinato, *La Francia vinta* (Milan: Istituto per gli studi di politica internazionale, 1941). Cited on 165.

<sup>2</sup> Daniel Laqua, ed., *Internationalism Reconfigured: Transnational Ideas and Movements between the World Wars*, *International Library of Twentieth Century History* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2011); Daniel Gorman, *The Emergence of International Society in the 1920s* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Glenda Sluga, *Internationalism in the Age of Nationalism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013); Glenda Sluga and Patricia Clavin, eds., *Internationalisms: A Twentieth-Century History* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge

Martin's book can be read as a tale of the spectacular froth of high nationalist fantasy, low bureaucratic backstabbing and, for the most part, mediocre art involved in the Nazi-Fascist exchange, against the background of the victory and defeat of two brutal regimes. The subject of the study is the politics of creating a Nazi-Fascist order of culture in Europe, with a focus on music and film and a secondary emphasis on literature. Martin provides an altogether accurate, if brief picture of the Italian scene, but he is less concerned with the arts than with the infighting in building an anti-internationalist (anti-French and anti-American) institutional infrastructure under Italian and German auspices, respectively. Among the surprising side-aspects of this story, we learn quite a bit about the role of law and lawyers among scheming functionaries in the formation of the Nazi-Fascist cultural infrastructure for Europe.<sup>3</sup> We also learn, though not quite enough, about European-wide collaboration in attaining this new order for European culture.<sup>4</sup> This focus leads Martin to conclude (as others have with respect to the more treacherous territory of economic policy as well as occupation)<sup>5</sup> that the Nazis proved immensely successful and attractive at the height of their power, 1940-1942, but were their own worst enemies in their relentless and ham-fisted quest for unequivocal (racial) superiority, which alienated the very populations they wanted to win over. The more easy-going and initially more equivocal Italians were, by contrast, simply not powerful enough to maintain control. The resulting paradox should interest students of 'hegemony.' In order to dominate, nations impose their will by making clients into stakeholders. The Germans did not want to share; the Italians did not have the power to share.

Martin's study demonstrates the initial advantage the Italian Fascists enjoyed in the international cultural arena with a program that attempted to make inroads and possibly turn a Paris-dominated internationalist culture scene in their own favor and fend off American mass culture.<sup>6</sup> Venice was the place to meet and

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University Press, 2017). See also Daniel Hedinger, "The Imperial Nexus: The Second World War and the Axis in Global Perspective," *Journal of Global History* 12:2 (2017): 184-205; Reto Hofmann, "The Fascist New-Old Order," *Journal of Global History* 12:2 (2017): 166-83; Sven Reichardt, "Globalgeschichte des Faschismus: Neue Forschungen und Perspektiven," *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* 42/43 (2017): 10-16. On the Soviet Union: Katerina Clark, *Moscow, the Fourth Rome: Stalinism, Cosmopolitanism, and the Evolution of Soviet Culture, 1931-1941* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011).

<sup>3</sup> See also Madeleine Herren, ed. *Networking the International System: Global Histories of International Organizations*, Transcultural research—Heidelberg studies on Asia and Europe in a global context. (Cham: Springer, 2014); "'Outwardly... an Innocuous Conference Authority': National Socialism and the Logistics of International Information Management," *German History* 20:1 (2002): 67-92.

<sup>4</sup> For example: Andrew Higson and Richard Maltby, eds., *"Film Europe" and "Film America": Cinema, Commerce and Cultural Exchange, 1920-1939*, Exeter studies in film history (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1999); Marijke de Valck, *Film Festivals: From European Geopolitics to Global Cinephilia*, Film culture in transition. (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2007).

<sup>5</sup> Stephen G. Gross, *Export Empire: German Soft Power in Southeastern Europe, 1890-1945* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

<sup>6</sup> On French Internationalism, see Jean-Jacques Renoliet, *L'Unesco oubliée: la Société des nations et la coopération intellectuelle, 1919-1946*, Publications de la Sorbonne. Série internationale (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1999).

celebrate and advance the image of Fascism as a haven for all that was modern and masculine.<sup>7</sup> Even more impressively, Martin captures the ruthless, rabidly intolerant, power-grabbing advance of pettifogging minions in the Nazi regime and the relentless thirst for domination of their superiors. Because the main subjects are music, film and literature, the sheer brutality of Nazi functionaries in asserting their claims to power and their insistence on exclusion stands out even more clearly. The Europe of culture they set out to create obliterated entire nations (Poles and Czechs), eliminated (Vichy) France as a viable participant, and excised Jews and any form of what the Nazis defined as Jewish influence. What emerged was a violently truncated Europe in 1940/1941, but the most telling detail is that the future order, after final victory, was to have been far worse. The Europe of nations was a conceit according to Hitler “to get all we can out of them” (186).<sup>8</sup> Even Nazi-Fascist collaboration was conditional.<sup>9</sup> The argument about the radicalizing, violent nature of Nazi rule is, of course, well known. But from the vantage of the seemingly peripheral subject of Europe’s beaux arts, the relentlessness of Nazi aggression, often masked by deceptive tactics of concession, comes out with stunning clarity.

In fact, ‘peripheral’ is an inadequate characterization for these culture wars. We do not think of composers or film-makers or even mighty producers as makers of power-politics. But the new Order of Culture for Europe was neither about aesthetics or copyright or divas and starlets nor about Volk, Heimat, folklore, or regional style, though all of this was the subject of much debate and, no doubt, behind-the-scene gossip. The issue at stake was who controlled Culture and, by controlling Culture, identity in Europe, and how and in which form and by whom this identity would be expressed and, equally important, circulated.

This was a veritable battlefield. The deep structure of the Nazi-Fascist New Order for music, cinema, and literature was a revolt against the takeover of cultural life and the alienation of identity spreading all over Europe, a revolt that had found its leaders in Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. This is the story of the rejection of a transnational aesthetic, a cosmopolitan outlook and lifestyle, as well as a commercialized (entertainment) culture, as articulated in a rapidly growing ‘internationalism’ of European societies. This rejection was captured in a grand variety of widely shared enemy-memes, which mingled black jazz and sexuality with Jewish commercialism and mobilized both against a-tonal music and avant-garde literature and other such *bêtes noires* of supposed authenticity. Typically, however, Fascists and Nazis could never quite agree on what exactly they were opposed to. While Fascists were more tolerant of modernists, leading Nazi fanatics were, as we know, both more violently exclusivist and more hypocritical, secret admirers of a Hollywood they professed to loath.

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<sup>7</sup> Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities : Italy, 1922-1945*, Studies on the history of society and culture (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

<sup>8</sup> Robert Edwin Herzstein, *When Nazi Dreams Come True : The Third Reich's Internal Struggle over the Future of Europe after a German Victory : A Look at the Nazi Mentality, 1939-45* (London: Abacus, 1982).

<sup>9</sup> Andrea Hoffend, *Zwischen Kultur-Achse und Kulturkampf : die Beziehungen zwischen “Drittem Reich” und faschistischem Italien in den Bereichen Medien, Kunst, Wissenschaft und Rassenfragen*, Italien in Geschichte und Gegenwart (Frankfurt am Main and New York: P. Lang, 1998); Lutz Klinkhammer, Amedeo Osti Guerrazzi, and Thomas Schlemmer, eds., *Die “Achse” im Krieg : Politik, Ideologie und Kriegführung 1939-1945*, Krieg in der Geschichte (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2010).

But merely puncturing the double-standards of ideology does not get us far. The naked hatred of certain kinds of sounds and images suggests that deeper and more emotional layers of the individual and collective self are involved. Nazi-Fascists and their like-minded collaborators all over Europe aggressively fought for control over what should be considered right or wrong, beautiful or ugly, honorable or despicable. The platitudes that were expended in defense of this righteous order should not deceive. This was a struggle over life-orientations – literally: sense-security like sounds, images, colors, and smells one could recognize and tolerate – that in the hands of the Nazis became a merciless battle of subjugation and extermination. As behooves the author of a first book, Martin is somewhat cautious in his argumentation and somewhat more preoccupied by the lawyers more than the divas; but the revolt against *Überfremdung*, the alienation of one's own (individual and masculine, as well as collective and national) sense of self is at the heart of the matter.

The battle over sense-security is the deep source of Nazi-Fascist power-politics, which exerted an enormous European-wide attraction, as did the dream of a new European order of national cultures. But the Nazis' utter disregard for these Europe-wide aspirations, despite their tactical concessions, is as remarkable as their ability to evoke them. Their deadening effect on art is especially visible, audible and readable in their effect on art under Italian fascism.<sup>10</sup> The Nazi-Fascists were highly capable destroyers, but singularly inept rulers.

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<sup>10</sup> The newest example is the exhibition *Post Zang Tumb Tuuum. Art Life Politics: Italia 1918-1943*. Fondazione Prada, Milan. February 18–June 25, 2018. <http://www.fondazioneprada.org/project/post-zang-tumb-tuum-art-life-politics-italia-1918-1943/?lang=en>.