Refueling the Fascist Revolution:

Art, the Avant-Garde, and the Italian Fascist State, 1936-1943

Matthew Grumbach

UC Berkeley Sociology

Abstract: This paper asks why that fascist state continued to support the avant-garde during the totalitarian phase of Italian fascism when civil society experienced increased repression (1936-1943). Contrary to their conventional portrayal as exclusively promoting neoclassical styles in accordance with Nazi cultural policy, Italian fascists sponsored avant-garde and modern art and did not institute prescriptive cultural policies. Using archival methods, I present novel evidence that shows how the fascist state continued to acquire avant-garde art during the later years of the regime, even in the face of a conservative backlash. I find that investment in the avant-garde stemmed from the contradictions of the dual state, particularly the problem of sustaining the fascist movement and preventing bureaucratization after the seizure of power. Fascists in the cultural bureaucracy believed art could help reinvigorate the fascist movement in power. At the same time, they also believed that in order to capture art's unique vitalistic energy, the state had to limit its intervention in the creative process and, thus, they upheld non-prescriptive patronage practices that benefited the avant-garde. Taken together, my findings specify how fascism engaged with art and artists—with implications for our understanding of visual art in mass politics. Specifically, I use the Italian case to reassess Bourdieusian and Gramscian accounts of the state, the role of art in society, and the avant-garde, arguing that Gramscian theories have greater applicability while Bourdieusian theories have limited explanatory power for understanding the state-backed mobilization of art and the transformative project of the avant-garde in the early 20th century.

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"It is necessary to inscribe the artistic problem within the framework of the inalterable needs of the political body of the state."[1]

-Giuseppe Bottai (Bottai 1940:123).

"Creation is an incommunicable and inviolable internal fact; to try to encroach on artists is to cross a threshold that cannot be crossed by anyone other than the artist himself."

-Marino Lazzari (Lazzari 1940:22)

Introduction

The year 1936 was a turning point that inaugurated fascism's totalitarian phase following several years of strong internal consensus (Aquarone 1965; De Felice 1981; De Grand 1982:101-102; De Grand 1991; Gentile 1995; Gentile 2008; Paxton 2004:164-171). The invasion of Ethiopia in October 1935, the creation of the propaganda ministry in 1937, the ratification of the 1938 anti-semitic racial laws, and the 1939 Pact of Steel alliance with the Nazis were some of the bellwether events that demarcated the regime's new interventionist, totalitarian profile. This increasingly nationalistic and patriotic atmosphere impacted the cultural sphere (Tarquini [2011]2022:128-163; Malvano 1988:184-195). Not only did prescription, repression, and censorship increase, antisemitic journalists and fascist leaders aligned with National Socialism set off a culture war and contested long-standing fascist norms, advocating for the state to adopt coercive and prescriptive cultural policies similar to the Nazis (Stone 1998:177-221). Despite these changes, the relations between the state and avant-garde artists did not fall apart. Rather, I present novel archival evidence showing that the regime expanded its financial and institutional support of the avant-garde after 1936. Why did the regime continue to invest and support the avant-garde during the totalitarian phase of fascism?

[1] All translations my own.

In the first empirical section of this paper, I examine how state support for the avant-garde increased during Giuseppe Bottai's tenure as the Minister of National Education (1936-1943). My analysis focuses on the Ufficio per l'Arte Contemporanea (UAC) (1940) and the Premio Bergamo (1939-1942), two lesser-studied initiatives that Bottai and his allies oversaw. Exhibition and acquisition records show that the state patronage system benefitted the avant-garde. My findings challenge accounts that associate the regime's support of the avant-garde with the revolutionary phase of fascism, when fascists rose to power and deployed the iconoclastic, modernizing language of futurism (1919-1922) (De Grazia [1981] 2002:187; Ferrari 2011:374). My findings also show that the fascist state supported both new and old generations of the avant-garde, countering claims that the regime reneged on its aesthetic principles, privileged youth, and abandoned established artists in the late fascist period (Stone 1996:216-221).

In the second empirical section of this paper, I examine how officials discussed art and artists under fascism and defined the parameters of state intervention in the arts. I argue that cultural policy and the support of the avant-garde were inextricably linked to the dual character of the fascist state, the contradictions of which emerged during the conflict over the normalization of fascism in the mid-1920s (Fraenkel 1941; Aquarone 1965; Gentile 1995; De Grand 1982). My analysis shows how Bottai and his allies sought to mobilize the avant-garde to help resolve the contradictions of the dual state. Specifically, these officials believed that art production could support the vitality of the fascist movement after the seizure of power and forestall bureaucratization while asserting that capturing art's unique vitalistic energy necessitated preserving the relative autonomy of art. Thus, policies based on non-prescription were seen as the only way to leverage art to help sustain the fascist movement in power. I end this section by examining conjunctural factors, considering how the setbacks of other cultural and educational

initiatives and the arrested development of the corporative system elevated the importance of the visual arts and avant-garde artists to reinvigorating the fascist movement.

Examining the state patronage system and cultural policy during the repressive context of the twilight of fascism (1936-1943) provides analytical leverage to specify why the regime supported the avant-garde and protected the autonomy of the visual arts. This case study also has a theoretical payoff and suggests that Bourdieu's theory of the artistic field and its relation to the state is historically specific and not broadly generalizable. Taken together, my findings affirm the continued relevance of Gramscian theories of the state, art, and culture, especially for the study of visual art and mass politics. In the following section, I discuss how these two theoretical approaches address the intersection between the state and culture, the role of art in society, and the avant-garde.

Bourdieu's Theory of the State, Art, and the Avant-Garde

Bourdieu does not identify the state with coercion, emphasizing that state formation involves the concentration of economic, cultural, informational, and symbolic capital over and above the repressive instruments of the army and the police (Bourdieu et al. 1994, Bourdieu [2012]2014). The state therefore becomes "the central bank of symbolic capital" and is both the central node within the field of power and a "meta-field" that conditions other fields and leverages "meta-capital" over all other species of capital (Bourdieu 1994, 2015). As opposed to physical force, the state first and foremost exercises symbolic violence by constructing and controlling the definition of reality and the taken-for-granted conceptual schemas we use to understand the social world (Bourdieu et al. 1994:3-4; Bourdieu [2012]2014:4,216). Conflict within the state is distinct because it is not about the accumulation and monopolization of capital but rather "the power to dictate the dominant principle of domination" and "the legitimate principle of legitimation"

(Bourdieu [1989]1996:264-266,388; Bourdieu et al. 1994:4-5). The state unifies national culture through commanding demographic data, standardizing language, and controlling the school system (Bourdieu et al. 1994:7-8). Besides identifying the importance of educational institutions, Bourdieu does not draw a connection between cultural capital objectified in art and the formation of national cultures.

Like the state, the artistic field is located within the field of power and polarized around economic and cultural capital. The artistic field emerged as an autonomous field in the late 19th century when it developed a "pure" form of aesthetic judgment and forsook economic and political concerns, artists rejecting market forces, political affiliations, and the established institutions of artistic consecration (Bourdieu [1992]1996; Bourdieu 1993). According to Bourdieu, the avant-garde occupies the subfield of "restricted production"/"small-scale production"/"pure production" wherein art making is oriented towards other artists and intra-subfield competition as opposed to financial success or critical acclaim (Bourdieu [1992]1996, 1993). Diametrically opposed to the economic pole, the avant-garde represents the apotheosis of the "winner loses/loser wins" logic, creating subversive and iconoclastic works that do not confer any immediate rewards (Bourdieu [1992]1996:21,63,81-85,91,121-125,157-158,252-256; Bourdieu 1993:39,154,169). In summation, the artistic field is a "world apart" and the proponents of "art for art's sake" advocate ethical and political neutrality (Bourdieu [1992]1996:75-79,110-111,136-137,141; Bourdieu 1993:200).

Like his theorization of the state, Bourdieu understands art through the prism of domination. In *Distinction*, he writes, "art and cultural consumption are predisposed, consciously and deliberately or not, to fulfil a social function of legitimating social differences," thereby obscuring and reproducing class hierarchies (Bourdieu [1979]1984:7). Education and the slow

processes of acculturation determine artistic competence which in turn makes possible aesthetic appreciation: "works of art only exist for those who have the means of appropriating them, that is, of deciphering them" (Bourdieu and Darbel [1969]1990:39). Thus, "only a few have the real possibility of benefitting from the theoretical possibility, generously offered to all, of taking advantage of the works exhibited in museums" (Bourdieu 1993:234). In this model, museums are nominally public because they are "almost exclusively the domain of the cultivated classes" (Bourdieu and Darbel [1969]1990:14). "It goes without saying" that museums exclude the working classes and when they do visit, they feel unease and unworthiness (Bourdieu [1992]1996:289-290; Bourdieu 1993:257; Bourdieu and Darbel [1969]1990:48-55). Museums also function as sites of consecration and legitimation that "conserve the capital of symbolic goods" while simultaneously (re)constituting the "pure gaze" by sacralizing art and obscuring the socio-historical genesis of artistic production and aesthetic appreciation (Bourdieu 1993:121; Bourdieu [1992]1996:293-294). Given the exclusionary constitution of art and museums, we would not expect them to play a significant role in mass political movements or nation-state formation.

Gramscian Theories of the State, Art, and the Avant-Garde

Gramsci advanced the idea of the "integral state," a conceptualization of the state that encompasses civil society and does not reduce the state to its political-juridical and repressive instantiations (Gramsci 1971; Buci-Glucksmann 1980; Thomas 2010; Sassoon 1980). Schools play a central role in this schema, but they are not the only sites where the state exercises power and touches society: "every state is ethical in as much as one of its most important functions is to raise the great mass of the population to a particular cultural and moral level…The school as the positive educative function, and the courts as a repressive and negative educative function, are the most important state activities in this sense: *but, in reality, a multitude of other so-called private*

initiatives and activities tend to the same end" (Gramsci 1971:258, my emphasis). On the one hand, the theory of the integral state moves beyond the monopolization of violence, which is useful for eschewing stylized accounts of fascism. Carrying forward Gramsci's theory, Poulantzas argues against reductive analyses of fascism that reduce the state to the "repression-prohibition"/"ideology-concealment" couplet as it obscures how "the state also acts in a positive fashion, *creating, transforming and making* reality" (Poulantzas [1978]2014:30-31, author's emphasis; See also Poulantzas [1968]1978:299-300). On the other hand, the theory of the integral state allows us to locate numerous points across civil society through which hegemony is exercised. According to Stuart Hall, "Gramsci understands that politics is a much expanded field…the sites on which power is constituted will be enormously varied" (Hall 1988:168). These observations suggest that the artistic field, rather than being set apart from politics, can emerge as an arena of conflict that is tied to the state and enmeshed with strategies of national unification.

For Gramsci, culture could be repressive and stupefying, could help unify the nation-state and build hegemony, and could advance revolutionary aims. Like many writers of his time, he was concerned with the failure of Italian national unification and the hermetic cosmopolitanism of intellectuals that sealed them off from the masses (Gramsci 1971:18,130-133,204,421; Gramsci 2000:369). Italy's incomplete bourgeois revolution meant that the state was unable to express a "national-popular collective will" (Gramsci 1971:131). In a country where dialects, folklore, and peasant mysticism remained prevalent, the inability of the state to express a unifying "conception of the world" and advance a new form of "civilization" not only hindered national unification, but also disorganized the masses and hardened the "Stone Age elements," "stratified deposits," and "fossilized and anachronistic" ways of thinking that clouded their consciousness, the "bizarre combinations" that blocked them from having a systematic and coherent worldview (Gramsci

1971:324-325; Gramsci 2000:361). Despite these backwards conditions, Gramsci observed that the fascist movement and avant-garde art were unsettling the weight of tradition. Fascism had a "progressive" moment because it "[shattered] the stifling and ossified state structures" (Gramsci 1971:223). Likewise, the avant-garde Futurists "destroyed spiritual hierarchies, prejudices, idols and ossified traditions…*They have grasped sharply and clearly that our age, the age of big industry, of the large proletarian city and of intense and tumultuous life, was in need of new forms of art, philosophy, behavior and language*" (Gramsci 2000:74, author's emphasis). Furthermore, he followed the Proletkult movement in Soviet Russia, where avant-garde artists were working to help construct a new, proletarian culture in the wake of revolution (Gramsci 2000:70-71). Ultimately, for Gramsci, art was tied up with "the struggle for a new culture, that is, for a new moral life," and therefore was pertinent to questions of the state, national culture, and hegemony (Gramsci 2000:395).

Comparing the Two Theoretical Literatures

Before turning to my empirical argument, I highlight relevant similarities and differences between these two theoretical approaches. Both theorists do not limit the state to force and violence. However, Bourdieu's conception of the artistic field as a "world apart" obscures relations between art, culture, and the state whereas Gramsci's model of the integral state helps bring these interconnections to the fore. While both thinkers consider language to be a cornerstone of national culture, Gramsci is much more attentive to the intersection between literature, art, and national culture whereas Bourdieu emphasizes schools, language, and civic rituals (Bourdieu et al. 1994). Both theorists identify the link between culture and domination, recognizing how culture can facilitate social reproduction and secure class domination. But if inherited cultural traditions and folklore stunted the consciousness of the masses, Gramsci also saw that art could function to break

these settled ways of perceiving the world. For him, the avant-garde performed such a function, clearing the way for a new civilization and a new conception of the world. Thus, while Bourdieu and Gramsci both observe how the avant-garde innovates and transgresses established traditions, they view this iconoclasm differently. For Bourdieu, avant-garde iconoclasm is about stance-taking and competition within the subfield of "small-scale production." Avant-garde artists only produce for other avant-garde artists, not a mass audience, and are also disengaged from contemporary political and social concerns as they strive for novelty (Bourdieu [1992]1996:121,124,157-158). For Gramsci, avant-garde iconoclasm has a political basis and transformative potential, destroying ossified traditions so a new world could emerge. This destruction was not an esoteric matter, but according to Gramsci, found support among workers (Gramsci 2000:75).

Fascist Support of Avant-Garde Art During the Twilight of Fascism, 1936-1943

In this section, I trace the development of fascist cultural policy and the expansion of state patronage of avant-garde art in the late 1930s and early 1940s. Although fascists came to a consensus about art in 1926-1928 and rejected prescriptive and censorial art policies, cultural policy remained somewhat inchoate, failing to enunciate a positive vision of fascist art as the state patronage system underwent rapid and chaotic growth. Given these unresolved issues, when the longtime fascist and former futurist Giuseppe Bottai came to power as Minister of National Education in 1936, he sought to cohere and centralize the state patronage system and protect its standards of quality. In the ensuing years, Bottai and his cadre of officials at the Ministry of National Education developed new institutions dedicated to art and acquired vast amounts of avant-garde art. Before turning to Bottai's development of the state patronage system and fascist support for the avant-garde, I explore key moments that shaped cultural policy in the early fascist period. Fascists began debating art and culture as soon as they came to power. However, there were

many false starts and ambiguities, which later informed the art initiatives that Bottai and his allies spearheaded in the late 1930s.

Although Mussolini supported the avant-garde, fascist cultural policy was not unilaterally formed from the top-down. It emerged from debates within the regime and among its supporters in the pages of the leading fascist cultural magazine, *Critica fascista* (1923-1943). Bottai founded *Critica fascista* as a vehicle for building the new fascist ruling class, the magazine providing an example of the kind of debate that Bottai wanted to foster within the fascist party (De Grand 1982:42; Malgeri 1980:LXXII). These debates played a significant role shaping government policy. The magazine played host to a debate about fascist art in 1926 and 1927 that clarified the regime's aesthetic principles and established that fascist art needed to be socially engaged but not didactically propagandistic (Billiani and Pennacchietti 2013:16-18,19-24; Tarquini [2011]2022:65-68; Salvagnini 2000:346-347). The debate remained incomplete because the artists and intellectuals who participated mostly offered negative examples, stating what art should *not* look like, but neither offering clear guidelines for making the new art of fascism nor providing a plan proposing how the state should engage with and support art production (Billiani and Pennacchietti 2013:19-24; Ben-Ghiat 2001:25-26; Salvagnini 2000:347). Fascist art was "not Romantic ([Alessandro] Pavolini); not academic, and against any style taking inspiration from past traditions, like neoclassicism ([Anton Giulio] Bragaglia); not decadent ([Umberto] Fracchia); not cosmopolitan and not 'French' ([Curzio] Malaparte)" (Billiani and Pennacchietti 2013:21). The fascist art survey was formative and represented a win for the avant-garde and modern art because it rejected prescription and censorship, but it generated ambiguities that Bottai would later seek to resolve.

Bottai's response to the results of the fascist art debate foreshadowed his reconfiguration of the state patronage system once he was installed as the Minister of National Education in 1936. First, he asserted that state needed to intervene in the arts and could not take a hands-off, "agnostic" approach, criticizing the "bad fascist taste" that prevailed at the time and the "hideous pseudo-artistic gimmicks" that adorned fascist gathering places (Bottai 1992:74). He also outlined a path forward by delineating the functions of the two central nodes of the state patronage system: the syndicates and the Accademia d'Italia. While the syndicates were essential to the formation of new generations of artists, matters of selection and quality needed to be left to the experts (Bottai 1992:75). Bottai argued that the Accademia d'Italia should be entrusted with the task of protecting artistic standards and recognizing excellence, but he did not want the institution to be a static, bureaucratic governing body: "The Academy of Italy must be anti-academic. It must be anti-parasitic and anti-static, dynamic, industrious, creative. We think, in short, that the Academy of Italy should be the organ of the Fascist Revolution in the field of art...In short, the Academy of Italy should represent a kind of *Ministry of Italian Culture*" (Bottai 1992:76,78, author's emphasis). The modifiers Bottai used to describe the Accademia d'Italia are significant and he would use the same anti-bureaucratic language years later to frame his discussion of the activities of the Ufficio per l'Arte Contemporanea (UAC). Ultimately, his response to the survey results provides a kind of roadmap that not only foreshadowed the initiatives he would advance at the end of the 1930s, but also discloses deep concerns about the weaknesses of the syndicates, the upkeep of artistic standards and quality, and finding solutions to prevent bureaucratic inertia from taking hold of state institutions.

The recommendations Bottai laid out at the end of the *Critica fascista* art survey never came to fruition in the intervening years, leaving the state patronage system without a unified

direction. The state patronage system that evolved in the wake of the fascist art debate was vast, pyramidal, and hierarchical, allowing artists from different movements and with different levels of experience to participate and reap benefits (Stone 1998:30-31; Vivarelli 1993:24). The explosive growth of the mostre sindacali and the regional art exhibitions began in 1928 and 1929. These shows occupied the bottom rungs of the system and were intended to develop talent across the provinces and provide material support to artists at the local level while insulating them from market forces (Salvagnini 2000:12-25; Stone 1998:25-28; Malvano 1988:37,39-41). The Accademia d'Italia sat atop the state patronage system and fascists hoped it could function as their institutional anchor in elite culture. Margherita Sarfatti, the lead backer of the Novecento art movement, cultural empresario, and once lover of Mussolini, came up with the idea for the Accademia in 1926, but it was not inaugurated until 1929 (De Grazia 1992:230,251; Malvano 1988:35-36; Ben-Ghiat 2001:24-25). Both levels of the state patronage system had major issues. There was an overabundance of mostre sindicali, which often featured artworks of questionable quality and lacked cohesiveness (Salvagnini 2000:16,18-22,350; Cioli 2011:210,224-226; Vivarelli 1993:24; Malvano 1988:40). The Accademia had the opposite problem: the institution was "more hypothetical than real," known for its illustrious members and handing out awards but little else (Salvagnini 2000:379; Ben-Ghiat 2001:24,138; Tannenbaum 1972:292). Faced with disorganization at multiple levels, Bottai's chief objectives as Minister of Education (1936-1943) were to unify the state patronage system and to increase state intervention through a centralized government body.

Thus far, I have examined the aesthetic principles of Italian fascism and how the state patronage system that Bottai inherited was underperforming and did not exemplify Italian greatness. These weaknesses informed his policy agenda, but increasing interchanges between

Italian fascists and Nazis were also significant. The shifting cultural reality in Europe following the rise of Nazi Germany generated new pressures and convinced Italian fascists like Bottai to put culture on a war footing, shifting to a more active, transformative, and interventionist phase of activity they called "cultura-azione" (Mangoni 1974:307-309,333-339; De Grand 1978:258-259,273-277; Ben-Ghiat 2001: 25, 183-185; Panicali 1978:22; Malgeri 1980:LXXIII; Billiani and Pennacchietti 2013:25-26). Looking to Germany, Bottai and other Italian fascists were deeply impressed and, in fact, quite envious of the relative success of the Nazis' integral and molecular approach to culture, believing that their interventions were at a more advanced stage than cultural programs in fascist Italy: "According to Bottai, fascism achieved the revolution of the state and politics over the course of the 1920s-30s, but it still failed (in the early 1940s) to penetrate deeply into the lives of the people, because it did not produce (unlike in Germany) a *Weltanschauung*; it had not itself become an ideology, a worldview, 'Kultur'" (Panicali 1978:41; See also D'Elia 2019:155). The inability of the fascist revolution to comprehensively transform culture and provide a unified program that touched all levels of society combined with the pressures and competition provoked by the alliance with Germany led Bottai to call for the intensification of state intervention in the realm of culture and a new wave of fascistization (Malvano 1988:184-186). But as I will show, state intervention in the artistic field would look different in Italy than it did in Germany.

While the cultural revolution may have appeared more comprehensive and far-reaching in Germany, Italian fascists like Bottai still opposed Nazi cultural policy on aesthetic grounds and their persistent support of modernism frequently came into conflict with the racialized ideas about art that the Nazis imposed on international cultural organizations (Martin 2016:35-36,43,80-81,129-130,220). Bottai along with Italian writers and critics disliked the provincialism of the German model of nationalistic cultural production and were unimpressed with the folkloric styles

on display at international gatherings organized by the Axis powers (Martin 2016:222,255-256,259). Bottai criticized the art he saw on a visit to Munich in 1941, writing in a letter to Mussolini: "In Munich I was able to realize concretely [...] the results of the Nazi regime's art policy. Less than modest; even mediocre. It is curious to note that what is considered 'National Socialist realism' yielded exactly the same results as 'socialist realism,' applied by the Soviets to their art" (Bottai 1982:515n143). Whatever cultural model Nazi Germany offered was imperfect. Bottai believed that increased state intervention, mass mobilization, and the flourishing of high-quality, modernist art was not only possible, but the only path forward.

Geopolitical pressures combined with the need to resolve the deficiencies of the state patronage system help explain why the cultural bureaucracy underwent significant growth in the late 1930s. The fascist state increased the personnel at the Directorate General of Antiquities and Fine Arts from 1936 to 1940 and passed a record number of art initiatives in 1939 (Salvagnini 2000:386). The budget of the Ministry of National Education and the Directorate General of Antiquities and Fine Arts also increased significantly from 1935 to 1941 (See table 1). With these resources at his disposal, Bottai moved to assert control over matters of art across Italy when began his tenure heading the Ministry of National Education. Although fascists from competing fiefdoms within the state blocked key pieces of legislation that the Ministry of National Education advanced, Bottai and his closest deputy, the Director General of Antiquities and Fine Arts Marino Lazzari, circumvented these obstacles and successfully established a new government body dedicated to art (Salvagnini 2009).

Table 1 Budget of the Directorate General of Antiquities and Fine Arts and the Ministry of National Education 1935-1941 (Salvagnini 2000:398)

	Antichità e Belle Arti	**Ministero Ed. Nazionale**

1935/36	L. 44.884.630 = 100	L. 1.526.563.491 = 100
1936/37	L. 45.746.136 = 101,9%	L. 1.564.204.064 = 102,4%
1937/38	L. 46.999.315 = 104,7%	L. 1.713.618.140 = 112,2%
1938/39	L. 49.720.613 = 110,7%	L. 1.879.103.160 = 123%
1939/1940	L. 50.277.740 = 112%	L. 1.934.343.112 = 126,7%
1940/41	L. 57.498.440 = 128,1%	L. 2.119.312.321 = 138,8%

The Directorate General of Antiquities and Fine Arts established the Ufficio per l'Arte Contemporanea (UAC) in 1940, giving Bottai and Lazzari more unilateral control over the state patronage system. The office took a multifaceted approach to supporting artists, ranging from creating welfare programs to developing initiatives to strengthen the art market and help private collectors. Institutional records delimit three core activities: "(a) assistance activities; (b) encouragement activities; (c) activities aimed at promoting greater knowledge of contemporary Italian art and raising the level of public taste" (ACS 2627 Busta 11). This last branch of activities constituted the "fulcrum of the office" and included state acquisitions of art (ACS 2627 Busta 11). The records of acquisitions are not exhaustive, but the available evidence shows that the fascist state supported early modernism as well as both the new and old generations of the avant-garde (See table 2). The UAC tended to acquire paintings and sculptures, even as murals and frescoes became more prominent mediums over the course of the 1930s (Malvano 1988:62-70,175-184; Cioli 2011:183-207; Braun 2000:158-186). The marked preference for painting was advantageous for avant-garde artists who were unable to adapt to the monumental scale of murals and shows how the state patronage system was not solely oriented towards monumentalism (Salvagnini 2000:424-425; Malvano 1988:165). Another clear trend is that the UAC collected works by both established and emerging artists. The UAC acquired paintings by Telemaco Signorini (1853–

1901), Giuseppe Abbati (1836–68), and Serafino De Tivoli (1826-1892), members of the Macchiaioli group that painted in a style akin the French impressionists and were active in the latter half of the 19th century. Old leaders of the Italian avant-garde such as Umberto Boccioni (1882-1916), Ardengo Soffici (1879-1964), Mirko Vucetich (1898-1975), Gino Galli (1893-1944), and Gino Severini (1883-1966) were also represented in the state acquisitions. Other acquisitions reveal that the UAC was up to date with new artistic developments. The office collected works by artists from the Scuola Romana movement including Mario Mafai (1902-1965) and Scipione (1904-1933) and artists from the Corrente group including Giacomo Manzù (1908-1991), Luigi Broggini (1908-1983), and Renato Guttuso (1912-1987). The Scuola Romana was known for its expressionist style and for rejecting the visual language of Novecento, which had long benefited from state patronage and was considered by some to be the official art of fascism (Cioli 2011). The Corrente group followed suit and not only embraced new visual styles, but also became a locus of antifascism (Colombo 2019; Duran 2014). Overall, fascist patronage remained pluralistic and the state maintained strong ties to the avant-garde

Table 2 State Acquisitions of Contemporary Art, 1935-1950
(ACS 2627/Busta 331, Busta 331bis)

Early Modernists

Group/Movement	Artist	Medium	Year Acquired	Amount (Lire)
Macchiaioli	Telemaco Signorini	Painting	1940	8,000
	Telemaco Signorini	Painting	1941	15,000
	Giuseppe Abbati	Painting	1941	17,000
	Serafino De Tivoli	Painting	1940	5,500
	Giovanni Fattori	Painting	1940	40,000
	Giovanni Boldini	Painting	1943	25,000

Old Avant-Garde

Group/Movement	Artist	Medium	Year Acquired	Amount (Lire)

Futurism	Umberto Boccioni	Painting	1940	10,000
	Ardengo Soffici	Painting	1942	10,000
	Mirko Vucetich	Sculpture	1941	2,000
	Gino Galli	Painting	1943	1,500
	Gino Severini	Painting	1943	10,000
Novecento	Arturo Martini	Sculpture	1944	26,000
	Lorenzo Viani	Painting	1942	9,000
	Lorenzo Viani	Painting/drawing	1941	2,000
	Lorenzo Viani	3 paintings	1937	3,500
	Lorenzo Viani	3 works	1938	5,600
	Emilio Sobrero	Painting	1942	3,000
	Emilio Sobrero	Painting	1941	1,200

New Avant-Garde

Group/Movement	Artist	Medium	Year Acquired	Amount (Lire)
Scuola Romana	Mario Mafai	2 Paintings	1940	5,500
	Scipione	Sketch	1943	4,000
Corrente	Giacomo Manzù	Sculpture	1941	7,480
	Luigi Broggini	Sculpture	1942	5,000
	Luigi Broggini	Sculpture	1941	4,000
	Renato Guttuso	Painting	1941	6,000
	Renato Guttuso	Painting	1939	2,500

In addition to acquiring art, the UAC established new art institutions in major Italian cities called the Centri di azione per le arti (action centers for the arts). These centers were the other core initiative of the UAC's third branch of activities elevating artistic consciousness and taste. The first center opened in Milan in November 1940 and was followed by a center in Palermo that opened in January 1941 and a center in Turin that opened in March 1941 (ACS 2627 Busta 11; Lorandi et al. 1993:40-41; Vivarelli 1993:32). The Centri di azione per le arti were part of a concerted effort to extend the UAC's geographic reach and bring programs into the south of Italy, the country's underdeveloped zone where fascist initiatives and organizations frequently ran aground and found low mass support (Tannenbaum 1972:121,174; De Grazia [1981] 2002:125-126). Avant-garde artists participated in the exhibitions organized by the Centri di azione per le arti and were integral to the UAC's mission introducing the masses to new artistic trends (See table

3). The Centri di azione per le arti were also supposed to help revitalize and modernize stagnant art institutions. One internal document stated, "Such centers, which should be given rigorous critical guidance, should allow Italian galleries the dynamism that they unfortunately lack today" (ACS 2627 Busta 11). The talk of dynamism recalls Bottai's vision for the Accademia d'Italia that he shared at the end of the *Critica fascista* fascist art debate and speaks to deeper questions about the role of art under fascism that I address in the following section. Ultimately, the Centri di azione per le arti successfully brought avant-garde art to the country's periphery and helped art institutions update their programs and stay informed about new artistic developments.

Table 3 Centri di azione per le arti Exhibitions (ACS 2627 Busta 11)

Center Location	**Artist**	**Avant-Garde Generation**	**Movement/School**
Milan	Sciopone	New	Scuola Romana
	Carlo Carrà	Old	Novecento
	Leo Longanesi	New	
	Mino Maccari	Old	Strapaese
	Giacomo Manzù	New	Corrente
	Mirko Basaldella	New	Scuola Romana
	Giorgio Morandi	Old	Novecento
	Pio Semeghini	Old	Novecento
	Orfeo Tamburi	Old	
	Arturo Tosi	Old	Novecento
	Domenico Cantatore	New	Novecento/Corrente
	Giuseppe Migneco	New	Novecento/Corrente
	Arturo Martini	Old	Novecento
	Massimo Campigli	Old	Novecento
	Renato Guttuso	New	Corrente
	Gino Pancheri	New	Novecento
	Rodolfo Castellana	Old	Futurism
	Luigi Spazzapan	Old	Futurism
	Carlo Dalla Zorza		
	Bruno Calvani	New	Novecento
Turin	Pio Semeghini	Old	Novecento
	Orfeo Tamburi	Old	
	Leo Longanesi	New	
	Mino Maccari	Old	Strapaese
	Giacomo Manzù	New	Corrente

	Ottone Rosai	Old	Novecento
	Gino Pancheri	New	Novecento
	Paolo Ricci	New	Corrente
	Attilio Podestà		
Palermo[2]	Renato Guttuso	New	Corrente
	Pio Semeghini	Old	Novecento
	Giacomo Manzù	New	Corrente
	Carlo Carrà	Old	Novecento
	Arturo Martini	Old	Novecento
	Marino Marini	New	Novecento
	Renato Birolli	New	Corrente
	Mario Mafai	New	Scuola Romana/Corrente
	Giuseppe Santomaso	New	Corrente
	Franceso Menzio	New	Grupo dei Sei
	Giorgio de Chirico	Old	Metaphysical Painting/Novecento
	Enrico Paulucci	New	Grupo dei Sei

The Ministry of National Education also supported the avant-garde through the Premio Bergamo, a prize competition dedicated to painting that was under the UAC's semi-official control. Bottai and Lazzari helped found the Premio Bergamo in 1939 in collaboration with officials from the Bergamo tourist board and the local arts syndicates. The Premio Bergamo had open themes over the course of its four editions, differentiating it from other major art exhibitions during the twilight of fascism. Starting in 1936, the head of the national fascist art syndicate Antonio Maraini began to impose a more coercive patronage style at the Venice Biennale that favored young artists without institutional recognition, prescribed themes, and dedicated central exhibition space to competitions for frescoes and bas-reliefs instead of sculpture and painting (Stone 1998:196-221). Maraini, though a successful and established cultural organizer, was skeptical of avant-garde art and acquiesced to the demands of conservative forces in the late 1930s (Stone 1998:56,58). The Premio Bergamo also diverged from the Premio Cremona, the competition that the Naziphile

[2] This is a partial list. The center in Palermo organized a single exhibition in July 1942 that featured twenty-one living Italian artists (Salvagnini 2000:398n55; Vivarelli 1993:32).

provincial squad leader Roberto Farinacci founded in 1939 to enact his antimodernist version of patronage (Malvano 1988:59-61,186-188; Stone 1998:179-186). Farinacci's competition promoted a naturalist realism inspired by Nazi cultural policy. Given these challenges to the regime's aesthetic principles and the backdrop of the culture war, the Premio Bergamo was put under a microscope and faced attacks from Naziphile journalists affiliated with Farinacci as well as Catholic clerics (Papa 1994:47; Galmozzi 1989:40). The fourth edition of the competition was mired in controversy after Renato Guttuso's painting of a crucifixion scene modeled after Picasso's *Guernica* won the second prize of L. 25.000 (Duran 2020; Pucci 2020) (See appendix). Clergy members deemed the painting sacrilegious and blasphemous in a series of newspaper articles and had it moved to a discreet location at the exhibition venue (Stone 1998:189; Forgacs and Gundle 2007:222-223; Papa 1994:60; Galmozzi 1989:91-92). The Guttuso scandal was not necessarily surprising. The Premio Bergamo's open themes attracted young avant-garde artists who pushed the boundaries of art under fascism. Besides Guttuso, other members of the Corrente group and the Scuola Romana such as Renato Birolli, Giuseppe Capogrossi, and Albino Galvano were all recognized with prizes. Some of these artists were known antifascists and later became central figures in postwar Italian art, the Premio Bergamo functioning as an incubator of the neo-avant-garde. The fascist state appeared willing to overlook nonconformism and antifascism if artists advanced new currents and helped fascism realize its modernizing project.

The archival evidence I presented in this section shows that the fascist state supported the avant-garde through official and semi-official channels during the twilight of fascism from 1936 to 1943. In the late 1920s, fascists came to the consensus that art should not be reduced to propaganda, but did not enunciate a positive vision of fascist art with clear guidelines. Despite these lingering ambiguities, the state patronage system went through a period of rapid growth.

However, it was not until Bottai became Minister of National Education in 1936 that the state patronage system matured and began to have a clear direction. Bottai centralized the state patronage system by establishing the UAC under the auspices of the Ministry of National Education and the Directorate General of Antiquities and Fine Arts. The UAC facilitated state acquisitions of avant-garde art and created programs that showcased different generations of the avant-garde, bringing cutting-edge art to cities in the north of Italy as well as Palermo, Sicily. The Premio Bergamo also reflected Bottai's vision of state patronage and became an important incubator of the neo-avant-garde. The Premio Bergamo shows that the fascist state was willing to take risks and court controversy in its efforts to establish links to the new generation of the avant-garde. Comparing these different competitions and initiatives, we see that Bottai did not accede to conservative forces, nor did he institute prescriptive patronage practices like Maraini and Farinacci had done. Furthermore, Bottai and his allies continued to support painting and sculpture, mediums that were losing ground to muralism and other monumental forms of art during the late fascist period. Bottai continued to create opportunities for the many avant-garde artists who worked in painting and sculpture, allowing them to show their work in official exhibitions and receive state support without having to alter their art making practices and adapt to muralism.

Why Italian Fascism Supported the Avant-Garde: The Demands of the Fascist Movement-State and Conjunctural Pressures

To explain fascist support for the avant-garde, this section reexamines the conflict over the normalization of fascism in the mid-1920s and its relation to art and culture. When Bottai started to expand and centralize the state patronage system, he came into conflict with the same fascists he had opposed during the conflict over the normalization of fascism, namely the provincial fascist squad leaders Robert Farinacci and Renato Ricci. The opposition between Bottai and Farinacci (and to a lesser extent Ricci) that defined the culture wars of the late 1930s and early 1940s,

therefore, can be understood as a transmutation of the factional conflict that erupted after the seizure of power as the fascist movement confronted transforming the state structure. In these later years, the conflict reemerged over the question of prescription and the limits of state intervention in the artistic field. After the March on Rome, Bottai contemplated how to sustain the fascist movement while building out and taking control of the state. The question he faced was: how do you incorporate the fascist movement into the state without bureaucratizing the movement and extinguishing its vitality? To counteract bureaucratization and movement collapse, Bottai believed fascism needed to become a "permanent revolution" supported by institutions that could build new leaders and instill fascist consciousness. Art was one such institutional arena, but Bottai and his allies asserted that the utility of art to the continuity of the fascist revolution was conditional on the relative autonomy of art. In other words, the fascist state could not encroach on artistic labor processes if it wanted to capture the dynamism of art and reconstitute the permanent revolution of fascism. My analysis shows that fascist support of the avant-garde was an expression of the contradictions of the fascist movement-state. In the end of this section, I examine how due to conjunctural crises and the pressures of wartime mobilization, art went from being an auxiliary to a primary engine of the permanent revolution of fascism in power.

To contextualize the late 1930s fascist culture wars, we must reclarify the positions of the normalization conflict and address the subtle similarities between the Bottai's faction and the provincial squad leaders. Commonly referred to as the "intransigents," the provincial squad leaders idealized violence and counted on the fascist militias to reconstitute the fascist movement in power (De Grand 1978:54). Supported by rural industrialists and big land owners, they represented agrarian interests and viewed the rural provinces as the spiritual heart of Italian culture and the backbone of fascism (Mangoni 1974:94-95,104-105,108-113; De Grand 1982:43-44; Tannenbaum

1972:50-52). The provincial squad leaders also wanted to subordinate the state to the party and identified fascism as a movement, not as a regime. They vehemently opposed conservative Nationalists who sought to restore the pre-fascist state such as Luigi Federzoni and Alfredo Rocco (Riley 2010[2019]:54-55,59; De Grand 1982:72; De Grand 1978:35-36,58; Mangoni 1974:68-69; Gentile 1982:232-238). Scholars refer to Federzoni and Rocco as "normalizers" or "technocrats," and sometimes lump Bottai into this group. However, Bottai critiqued and fought against any reversion of the fascist state to the "coldly administrative" form of the prefascist state (Panicali 1978:9,31,45). Lyttelton also notes that he saw the dangers of subordinating the party to the state, pointing to a convergence between Bottai and the squad leaders:

> "There was a curious apparent convergence between the 'revisionist' [normalizer] and the 'integralist' [intransigent] or revolutionary points of view; for either, it seemed that fascism, as a political force, could recover its vigor (whether as a legal or a revolutionary movement), only if is regained its independence from the government. Thus the complaint of the revisionist Bottai that the 'confusion, rather than connection, between the actions of the party and the Government, has caused the party to be corrupted, in ideals and practice by the necessary diplomacy of the art of government', was taken up by the extremist *Battaglie Fasciste*" (Lyttelton 1966:89).

Furthermore, in Gentile's analysis of the normalization conflict he specifically counterpoises Bottai (pro-movement) and Rocco (pro-regime) (Gentile 1982:232-238). Given the inconsistencies and ambiguities of these conventional historiographical categorizations, how do we more accurately account for the similarities and differences between Bottai's vision of the fascist movement in power and the views of the provincial squad leaders?

I argue that Bottai and the provincial squad leaders were both attached to fascism as a revolutionary movement and opposed any kind of normalization that might lead to the restoration of the prefascist state. Both camps were wrestling with the tensions of the movement-state, which Paxton diagnoses as follows: "The problem for fascist regimes—a problem traditional dictators never had to face—was how to keep the party's energy boiling without troubling public order and

upsetting conservative allies" (Paxton 2004:132). Bottai and the squad leaders all wanted to keep "the party's energy boiling," but they had different methods for doing so. The provincial squad leaders' methods were primarily negative and repressive, valorizing paramilitary violence, whereas Bottai was more focused on institution building and elite formation. He was adamant that the fascist party would need to go through the state and supersede its traditional form if fascism was going to finish the work of the Risorgimento. Bottai never renounced or disagreed with the squad violence that helped secure the fascist seizure of power, but he argued that the violence of the first phase of fascism needed to be stopped (Gentile 1982:210-211). He articulated the cessation of illegal, extrajudicial violence as a passage from the negative moment to the positive moment of fascism, from destruction to construction, from negation to affirmation (Mangoni 1974:66,69; Panicali 1978:15-17,22). "*The 'fait accompli' of the conquest of power embodied, in short, our revolutionary power, which must be made explicit by translating ideas into institutions*," wrote Bottai in *Critica fascista*. "*We do not have power because we have made the revolution, but we have power because we must make the revolution* (Mangoni 1974:98, author's italics). For him, the real revolution came after the seizure of power and would unfold slowly, transforming modes of living and thinking; its success would depend on fascism's ability to exercise state power in a positive and constructive, not just repressive fashion (Panicali 1978:19; Malgeri 1980:XXXVIII-XLI).

Besides institution building, Bottai sought to instill new practices and leadership styles to sustain the vitality and continuity of the fascist movement after the seizure of power. If the fascist movement was to keep boiling and "put the regime under continuous, if sporadic, pressure," then it needed a to rid the state of its prefascist encrustations and get to work creating a new ruling class, a group of committed and competent elites who could suffuse the state with fascist ideals and

practices (Riley [2010]2019:65; Mangoni 1974:73,99; De Grand 1978:26,30,36,48-49; De Grand 1982:33,45). Bottai was convinced that internal criticism was the practice that could sustain fascism's revolutionary basis and maintain the health of the party, though he never wavered in his belief that this criticism should remain confined to the bounds of the single party (De Grand 1978:45-46,58,164; Gentile 1982:212,216-217; Panicali 1978:24-25,28-30; Ben-Ghiat 2001:22). Emilio Gentile explains, "*Fascist* criticism had the task and function of contributing to the vitality of the regime, of preventing the bureaucratic stiffening and the conservatism of the institutions, of keeping fascism on the path of a *permanent revolution*" (Gentile 1982:213, author's emphasis). The leadership quality that Bottai wanted to inject into the fascist state was "competenza" (expertise/competency). Competenza was linked to ideas of genius and initiative and extended from Bottai's rejection of the levelling effect of equality in liberal democracies and under socialism; in theory, abiding by this principle would enable the most gifted and talented to join the ranks of the "aristocracy of command" (Panicali 1978:12-13,23; Gentile 1982:224-225). Criticism and competenza were the organizational technologies that Bottai believed could keep the fascist movement alive. Like socialist cadre organization, these technologies "[coexisted] unpeacefully with both bureaucracy and technocracy" and, therefore, were vital inputs to the fascist state (Therborn [1978]2008:58).

Thus far, I have traced the broad contours of the conflict over the normalization of fascism. How were Bottai's cultural policies and ideas about art linked to the normalization conflict of the mid-1920s and the challenges posed by incorporating the fascist movement into the state and counteracting bureaucratization? Here I draw a parallel between the different visions of the movement-state and the different patronage practices advanced by Bottai and Farinacci (See table 4). In the 1920s, the normalization conflict manifested in culture as an opposition between

modernism and traditionalism, city and rural province. Although the modernism/traditionalism antagonism persisted, prescription vs. non-prescription became the primary antagonism that shaped the conflict between Bottai and the provincial squad leaders in the late 1930s and the early 1940s. Inspired by the Nazis, the intransigents felt as though the valorization of traditionalism was no longer enough; they now actively sought to use the state to impose their conservative aesthetic preferences and called for prescriptive patronage practices. The repressive measures that they wanted to institute in the cultural field were a natural extension of their framework for implementing the fascist revolution, which had always placed a greater emphasis on coercion and violence than the organizational technologies Bottai had put forward. Regarding matters of art, Bottai still pursued positive and constructive solutions to sustain the vitality of the fascist movement in power. Examining the writings of Bottai and his allies in the late 1930s and early 1940s reveals that they came to identify art as an energy source that could power the permanent revolution of fascism, but that harnessing this energy necessitated sensitive institutional practices and constrained state intervention in the artistic field. Thus, the need to protect the relative autonomy of the art foreclosed the wide adoption of Farinacci's prescriptive patronage style. The analysis that follows examines how Bottai and his allies conceived of the relative autonomy of art and its benefits for the movement-state.

Table 4 The Relation Between the Normalization Conflict and State Patronage Practices

	Content of Fascist Movement-State	**Patronage Practice**
Bottai	Positive (e.g. competenza and criticism, art, corporatism, parastate civic institutions)	Non-Prescription

Provincial Fascist Leaders (Farinacci, Ricci)	Negative (e.g. fascist militias, violence, repression)	Prescription

In Bottai's writings, he often discussed artistic innovation, the vitalistic energy of art, and the relative autonomy of art. These three axioms informed cultural policy and the practices of the UAC and were directly related to the exigencies of the fascist movement-state. Bottai viewed artistic innovation as a form of risk-taking that embodied the fascist movement. He repeatedly endorsed art that was "capable of risk and hostile to compromise," arguing that "having the courage to attempt paths never traveled" was the only way for artworks to "carry enough weight" and fulfill "the history of the fascist era" (Bottai 1940:82,182). Art needed to take risks and innovate to parallel the fascist revolution and help bring forth new forms of social and cultural life: "It is right that new forms of political life correspond with new forms of art" (Bottai 1940:181). Overly prescriptive cultural policies and the fetishization of tradition would have hampered innovation and prevented the fascist movement from transforming art, thereby limiting the revolution's reach. Given the fascist state's deep investments in avant-garde art, it is not hard to imagine that fascists believed avant-garde artists were the vanguard group creating new forms of art that carried forward the fascist revolution into the realm of culture.

References to the vitalistic energy of art appear in Bottai's discussions of mass mobilization and the state's basic needs. Under fascism, there was an expectation that artists actively participate in national political life: "the fascist state does not do aesthetics, but demands the active presence of artists in the structure of national energies" (Bottai 1940:86). Elsewhere Bottai stated, the state "asks of the artistic energies of the nation a militant participation" (Bottai 1940:53; See also Bottai 1940:115). These references to art's energy echoed broader discussions about youth mobilization

in the early 1930s and Bottai's desire to craft youth policies that could "[channel] young energies 'into a circulatory system that will conquer and dissolve any objects that would hinder its vital flow'" (Ben-Ghiat 2001:96). Bottai also viewed art as a basic necessity that differed from other commodities, often repeating a line from Mussolini about art's spiritual basis: "Art is not a luxury product, but – these are Mussolini's words – 'a primordial and essential need of life.' On this principle the Fascist state bases its art policy" (Bottai 1940:115; See also Bottai 1940:54,261-262,288). He claimed that the relationship between artists and the state was fundamentally symbiotic: "If the Fascist State has need of the presence of artists, it is no less true that artists need the assistance of the Fascist State" (Bottai 1940:148). While recognizing this essential need, Bottai did not believe that capturing artistic energy was easy to do and thought carefully about the methods the state would use to engage this "delicate sector" (Bottai 1940:33). Essentially, the fascist state needed to find a way to capture these vital energies without disrupting artistic creation.

Bottai concluded that state intervention needed to be predicated on non-prescription and sought to protect the relative autonomy of art. The state could only obtain its basic needs, capture artistic energy, and facilitate innovation if artistic labor remained semi-autonomous. Bottai stated that there could be no "absolute fusion of artistic and political interests" because a fusion "that puts the art-state relationship on the plane of everyday political action" would make works of art "unrealizable" (Bottai 1940:53). During his address at the 1938 Venice Biennale, Bottai repeated this very point, clarifying the limits of state intervention in the artistic field while underscoring the importance of art to the fascist state:

> "This is not to say, that it is necessary to go to the opposite extreme: towards an absolute fusion of artistic interests and political interests; a fusion, which puts the art-state relationship on the level of everyday political action, where the work of art is clearly unrealizable, instead, of on the historical level, where artistic facts and political facts naturally meet, because of their common premises of thought and culture and their similar significance of actuality. The very educational function of art for the masses is practically

> nullified, if art is completely subservient to their will or to the will of those who represent them; it is brought down to a level of culture below the expressive needs of the artists. The art directly manipulated by the government, as an instrument of propaganda, is not only exhausted in illustration and documentation; but, because of this expressive insufficiency, it loses all propagandistic efficacy. We believe that a good solution to the problem of the relationship between art and politics must be based on other premises than the complete absorption of art in practical endeavors, in the doctrinal positions of politics or in the rules of an official aesthetic. The primary reason for the relationship between art and the state is the living and participatory presence of the artist in the state, the inescapable necessity, for the spiritual economy of the nation, of good artistic production" (Bottai 1940:116-117).

Per Bottai, the complete fusion of art and politics would eliminate the educative function of art just as the reduction of art to simple didactic content, to illustration and documentation bereft of innovation, would void its propagandistic efficacy. The core of the matter, though, was maintaining the health of the nation's "spiritual economy," which was a direct reflection of the "lively presence" of artists in the state and "good artistic production." What the speech makes clear is that fascist cultural politics were predicated on the relative autonomy of art or, phrased differently, the fascist state only benefitted politically from art if it was not completely absorbed into or fused with the state. This contradiction shaped state intervention in the arts and foreclosed the adoption of more repressive approaches and heavy-handed policies that could have strained the relations between the fascist state and the avant-garde. While Farinacci's prescriptive patronage style corresponds with the intransigents' valorization of violence and their use of repression after the March on Rome, Bottai's affirmation of the relative autonomy of art issues from his positive vision of the fascist movement-state and finds a direct parallel in his early advocation of the relative autonomy of the party. He had witnessed how the government "corrupted" the party and, years later, he took precautions so that the state would not corrupt art production (Lyttelton 1966:89).

The relative importance of the arts to the permanent revolution of fascism must be periodized and contextualized in relation to the failure of parastate organizations as well as the wave of Catholic organizing in the 1930s. These conjunctural pressures shaped the backdrop

against which Bottai developed his arts initiatives in the late 1930s and early 1940s. Corporatism, educational reforms, and organized leisure ran into severe problems and failed to deliver by the end of the 1930s. The construction of the corporative order was completed in 1934 with the creation of the nine overarching confederations and the twenty-two corporations that represented different groups of employers and workers, but due to outside pressure from industrialists and Mussolini's own reluctance to grant the corporations too much power, most of them were functionally powerless (De Grand 1982:79-81,87-88; Setta 1986:200; Tannenbaum 1972:93). Like the corporative order, the educational system went through waves of reforms, culminating with the Carta della scuola in 1939 (Tarquini [2011]2022: 51-52,155-159; De Grand 1978: 179-180,183-184,197; De Grand 1982:145-146,148-149,192-193,203-204,212-213; De Grazia [1981]2002:188,192-193; Schnapp 2000:314; Gentile 1982:224). The southern question and uneven development, however, proved insurmountable and hindered the success of the various reform efforts. "The economic and cultural gap between these regions and the north was wider than ever;" writes Tannenbaum, "hence, the efforts of the regime to impose the standards and the values of the latter on the former largely failed in the schools as in most other agencies" (Tannenbaum 1972:174). The Opera nazionale dopolavoro (OND) was one of those agencies that encountered many of the same problems as educational institutions. The OND was formed in 1925 and was charged with organizing the leisure time of the masses through a wide variety of programs, including sports and recreation activities, arts education, folklore festivities, and other forms of entertainment. The OND made some progress nationalizing the masses, but by 1939, it was clear that it had fallen short of its political goals, neither instilling fascist principles nor ensuring that the regime could effectively mobilize the masses (De Grazia [1981]2002:224,228-229,243). Clientelism and elite control over club circles thwarted efforts to expand into the south of Italy, the

persistence of the agrarian economic structures limiting the possibilities of *dopolavoro* organizing (De Grazia [1981]2002:114-126). The growth of *Azione Cattolica* and its youth organizations could not have arrived at a more inopportune moment, as the regime was facing major organizational setbacks (Tannebaum 1972:201-204; Forgacs and Gundle 2007:248-250; Forgacs 1990:88-89; Ben-Ghiat 2001:158-159,165-167). De Grand explains, "The Church most obviously limited the regime in its control of education and youth organizations. Catholic organizations on all levels had more volunteers and motivation than the official Opera Nazionale Balilla or Gioventù Italiana del Littorio [GIL]. By 1939 only 50 per cent of those eligible belonged to the GIL" (De Grand 1991:522). As fascist educational reforms proved ineffective, youth and leisure organizations faltered, and Catholic organizing blossomed, I suggest that art came to be seen as a primary engine of the permanent revolution of fascism. The conjunctural crisis led fascists like Bottai to depend more on art to sustain mobilization and reinvigorate the fascist movement.

This section shows how Bottai and his allies believed art could help reinvigorate the fascist movement-state, supporting and mobilizing avant-garde artists to sustain the movement's vitality and to counteract bureaucratization. The aesthetic principles of innovation, non-prescription, and the relative autonomy of art were tied to Bottai's vision for the movement-state in the wake of the March on Rome, specifically the construction of a new, more dynamic state form that would not extinguish the permanent revolution of fascism. Similarly, Farinacci's prescriptive patronage practices were linked to his repressive conception of fascism after the seizure of power. Aware of the need to spur innovation and both preserve and capture art's vital energy, Bottai developed patronage practices that benefitted avant-garde artists and secured their continued participation in official exhibitions and competitions. Although fascism relied on different organizational techniques and institutional arenas to help revitalize the fascist movement after taking hold of the

state, art became more and more important as parastate organizations and educational reforms ran out of steam and failed to deliver in the late 1930s.

Conclusion

The fascist regime did not reverse its aesthetic principles or sever ties with the avant-garde during the totalitarian phase of fascism (1936-1943). The establishment of the Premio Bergamo in 1939 and the UAC in 1940 expanded the state patronage system and benefited avant-garde artists. Even amid the polarizing context of the culture wars, there was continuity in the results of the *Critica fascista* art survey from 1926 to 1928 and Bottai's legislative agenda during his tenure as Minister of Education from 1936 to 1943. According to Salvagnini, Bottai specifically worked to put the survey results into action: "Bottai's was the most coherent attempt to translate into operational terms the results of the surveys on art and artists, which took place, we have seen, from 1926 to 1928 in *Critica fascista*. In particular, he tried to develop on a juridical level the conclusions that fascism in the field of art should take to create the ideal conditions so that a new taste and a different link between art and the population would arise" (Salvagnini 2000:379). The UAC's Centri di azione per le arti supported these objectives and aimed to familiarize the masses with new artistic currents and elevate their taste. The UAC did not overlook the less developed, southern peripheral zone and established a center in Palermo. Bottai's initiatives also did not leave the countryside untouched and, with his backing, the Premio Bergamo provided a platform for the up-and-coming generation of the avant-garde to exhibit their work in a rural context, in the type of setting where the belligerent and reactionary squad leaders typically ruled. Finally, the artworks that the state acquired during these later years demonstrate that avant-garde artists remained very much at the center of the patronage system. In addition to state acquisitions, they continued to receive aid and prizes despite the criticisms of Farinacci and his Naziphile allies.

Bottai's recognition of the contradictions of state intervention in the arts and the patronage practices that he instituted at the Ministry of National Education and carried out through the UAC extended from his concerns about the vitality of the fascist movement in power. He was convinced that the fascist state needed an energy source to fuel the "permanent revolution" and stave off bureaucratization. The role of art under fascism was thus tied to the question of the dual character of the movement-state. Bottai came to view art as an exceptional commodity that had spiritual and educational value as well as vitalistic energy. Although these qualities could potentially help reinvigorate the fascist movement in power, Bottai recognized that art production was "delicate" and demanded a limited form of state intervention. If fascists were not careful, they risked disrupting artistic creation, stunting innovation, and extinguishing art's vitalistic potential. Traditionalism, didacticism, and academicism were also seen to reduce art's political efficacy. Consequently, Bottai and his allies upheld non-prescription and rejected the prescriptive practices carried out by fascists like Farinacci. This paved the way for the tight relationship I observe between the fascist state and the avant-garde during the final years of the Ventennio. Additionally, Bottai and his allies placed a premium on artistic innovation and wanted to encourage new artistic developments that carried forward the fascist revolution into the realm of culture. If the high prevalence of avant-garde artists among the state acquisitions and prizewinners analyzed above tells us something, perhaps it is that the new and the old generations of the avant-garde met political expectations and were recognized for extending the fascist revolution into the artistic field.

The archival evidence I have presented here sheds light on state-society relations in the artistic field, the case of Italian fascism helping us reassess the broad generalizability of Bourdieu's theory. I want to draw particular attention to the question of the autonomy of the artistic field. In Bourdieu's account, the artistic field formed at the end of the 19th century in opposition to political

and economic logics. In the case of Italian fascism, we see that the relative autonomy of the artistic field had a different genesis. This autonomy was also fully subsumed under politics and was protected for political reasons. The political efficacy of art, specifically its utility for sustaining the permanent revolution of fascism, could only be guaranteed through non-prescriptive policies that protected the relative autonomy of the artistic field and limited state intervention in the process of creation. Furthermore, the state asserted this autonomy, which concretized through ongoing political debates about fascist art spanning the Ventennio. This autonomy was not primarily the outcome of artists asserting their autonomy from politics and market forces and collectively recognizing "pure" aesthetic judgment as the only legitimate criteria determining symbolic capital within the artistic field. Beyond the question of autonomy, the paradox my research uncovers is that the politicization of art under fascism involved the rejection of the didactic and propagandistic art that scholars conventionally associate with authoritarian regimes. I explain this paradox by showing how the contradictions of the movement-state led Bottai to conclude that the relative autonomy of art needed to remain protected to capture art's vitalistic energy and reconstitute the permanent revolution of fascism.

Bourdieu's definition of the avant-garde also does not hold for the Italian case. For Bourdieu, the avant-garde was largely esoteric and insular, rejecting politics and official modes of consecration. However, archival records indicate that the Italian avant-garde actively participated in official competitions and exhibitions under fascism. By participating in these government sponsored events, the avant-garde was participating in what Bourdieu would call "the field of large-scale production," that is the artworks in question were put on display for a mass audience. More broadly, fascists believed the avant-garde was committed to political transformation, which accords with Gramsci's understanding of the avant-garde as well as established art historical

accounts of the avant-garde. In Bourdieu's model, the slogan "art for art's sake" represents how the avant-garde is ensconced in the subfield of small-scale production and disengaged from political and social matters. This account of the artistic field as a "world apart" and the avant-garde's isolated location within this field is diametrically opposed to Peter Bürger's classic study of the historical avant-gardes (surrealism, dada, etc.), which advances the argument that the avant-garde wanted to reintegrate art and life (Bürger 1984:47-54). Gramsci did not formulate a specific definition of the avant-garde, though his observations on the futurists and the Proletkult movement suggest that he had a nascent understanding, recognizing that the avant-garde was driven by transformative political aims. What Bürger and Gramsci describe aligns with Bourdieu's definition of "social art." For Bourdieu, "social art" primarily took the form of realism, but a wider evaluation of the avant-garde beyond the confines of 19th-century France reveals that political engaged art took many different forms. In Bottai's writings on art, political engagement was associated with innovation and mobilization. This innovation was not about unsettling tradition for the sake of novelty or intra-field competition; it had to do with extending the fascist revolution into the realm of culture and producing "new forms of art" that corresponded with "new forms of political life" (Bottai 1940:181). In this case, this conception of innovation as a necessary component of the socio-cultural revolution of fascism and the identification of innovation with the avant-garde resonates more with theories of the avant-garde that focus on the transformation of everyday life as opposed to insularity and esotericism.

Returning to the history of fascism also problematizes Bourdieu's theorization of art and museums. The fact that the fascist state made significant investments in art, and avant-garde art at that, suggests that fascists did not believe art was the sole domain of the dominant classes or that the masses could not appreciate high art. The Centri di azione per le arti broke with the model of

the museum of as a site of exclusion that "isolates and separates (frames apart)" art by bringing avant-garde art to the masses in cities across Italy, even the underdeveloped south (Bourdieu 1996:294). This is not to say that art does not at times figure into social reproduction by obscuring and naturalizing class hierarchies. Rather, my argument is that "legitimating social differences" was not the primary social function of art under fascism, which is to say that the legitimating function that Bourdieu identifies with art is more historically bounded that sociologists typically assume (Bourdieu [1979]1984:7). As the Italian case clearly demonstrates, the early 20th century was a period when mass politics and high art intersected. Evaluating art through the prism of domination and social reproduction alone cannot adequately explain widespread beliefs about the transformative potential of art that informed state policies during the fascist epoch. While Gramsci also recognizes that culture can further class domination, he also asserts that it can counteract domination. Only by acknowledging and analyzing deep convictions about the radical potential of art and other cultural forms can we make sense of the mobilization and support of the avant-garde under fascism. Gramsci also analyzed how cultural forms such as popular literature could advance national unification and help secure hegemony. Yet, Bourdieu's analysis of art limits our ability to think through such historical occurrences, the emphasis on symbolic violence and domination rendering the widespread mobilization and democratization of art in unifying state projects throughout the early 20th century unintelligible. Efforts to bring cutting-edge, avant-garde art to the masses across Italy were not the outcome of classification struggles, but rather sprang from the contradictions of the movement state, the demands of national unification, and mobilizational goals. Gramscian theory ultimately gives us better tools to analyze and understand the sometimes unexpected ideological concatenations and aesthetic strategies that defined fascism.

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Appendix

Renato Guttuso, *Crocifissione*, 1941