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Historicism and Fascism in Modern Italy by David R. Roberts

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watched per week) remains the highest in Europe, in contrast to low levels of computer and Internet use. Scarpellini suggests this may have to do with issues around cost and computer literacy—in contrast to the rapid spread of the "cheap" and "simple" mobile phone. I wonder whether the explanation is not more prosaic, namely, the poor service provided by the state telephony company SIP and its failure to invest in telecommunications infrastructure.

As the final chapter makes clear, Italy is now firmly inserted into the affluent society that covers most of the West, sharing similar consumption practices and concerns. One critique of the book would be that this transnational dimension is underproblematized, particularly in terms of its cultural dimensions. Surely a key component of the revolution in youth consumption since the 1960s, for example, was the sense that this offered not only generational differentiation but also entry into a culture that was not nationally bounded.

One might also wonder whether in focusing on four eras of expansion of consumer society, Scarpellini has not overlooked the importance of Italy's wartime experiences in determining attitudes and practices toward consumption among both the public and the state that endured long after the end of the conflicts themselves. Yet the most significant criticism of this book cannot be of its author, who has delivered a very stimulating synthesis of the evolution of Italy's material culture of consumption, but of the publishers, who have chosen not to provide any illustrations of this whatsoever.

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Historicism and Fascism in Modern Italy. By *David D. Roberts*.
Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007. Pp. vi+370. Can$80.00 (cloth);
Can$35.00 (paper).

Since the late 1980s, scholars of fascist Italy have become increasingly preoccupied with the intellectual and cultural foundations of Mussolini's regime. Beginning with *The Syndicalist Tradition and Italian Fascism* (1979), David D. Roberts was one of the first historians to engage the fascist intellectual tradition head-on, challenging the view (according to Norberto Bobbio's famous formulation) that "where there was culture there wasn't fascism, and where there was fascism there wasn't culture." With *Historicism and Fascism in Modern Italy*, Roberts offers a series of reflections on the historiographical questions with which he has wrestled over the past three decades. The book reprints several influential journal articles from recent years, as well as other works (lectures, conference papers, articles previously available in Italian only) that are available to a wider audience for the first time.

The unifying theme of the collection is the relationship—personal, intellectual, and political—between Italy's two leading intellectuals of the early twentieth century, Benedetto Croce and Giovanni Gentile. The two philosophers had much in common. Both were southerners (Croce was Neapolitan, Gentile Sicilian); both emerged out of the idealist tradition of Hegel, Kant, Schelling, and Hegel, with a specifically Italian inflection influenced by Giambattista Vico; and, crucially for Roberts, both undertook a fundamental rethinking of idealism that led them to a "radical and thoroughgoing historicism" (41). In reaction to what they saw as the spiritual vacuity of contemporary positivism, Croce and Gentile rejected all totalizing and teleological frameworks, whether Hegelian, Marxist, or liberal. Instead, they insisted on the strict contingency of history, a "perpetual incompleteness of the world" (41) that demanded both agency and responsibility. For Gentile, this call to action was answered by Benito Mussolini. Fascism's rejection of individualism and materialism, its unity of "thinking and doing" (134), and its vision of a totalitarian ethical state offered a novel response to the crisis of modern society. Appropriately, Gentile became the regime's first minister of education from 1922 to 1924, and as its leading intellectual light, he ghostwrote Mussolini's definition of Fascist doctrine for the *Enciclopedia Italiana* of 1932. Indeed, he stayed loyal to the Duce to the bitter end, following him to the Nazi-backed Republic of Salò until he was killed by partisans in 1944. Conversely, Benedetto Croce became arguably the most high-profile intellectual opponent of the regime, both at home and abroad. While Croce shared Gentile's criticism of liberal democracy, his historicist response entailed freedom and openness, informed by humility, an almost "tragic sense" (65) of human agency, and a faith in the ultimately providential power of history. For this reason, he famously regarded fascism as a "parenthesis" in Italy's otherwise healthy historical development. Yet, as Roberts demonstrates, this response proved inadequate to many after the Second World War, and Croce's influence among philosophers and historians waned dramatically.

The dynamic between Croce and Gentile is the central current running through the various essays in *Historicism and Fascism in Modern Italy*. Roberts sets the Italians' ideas in relief against more familiar theorists of both historicism and totalitarianism, from Hayden White and Carlo Ginzburg to Hannah Arendt and Vaclav Havel. He also examines the reception of both figures in North America and the dismissal of their intellectual lineage in postwar Italy. Despite its title, this work is not principally devoted to fascism, either as a generic category or in its specifically Italian incarnation. Still, a consistent thread throughout is Roberts's insistence that, as with Croce and Gentile, fascism and its progenitors must be understood as meaningful responses to the crisis of liberal modernity. In this way, he challenges the commonplace dismissal of fascism as devoid of ideological substance, as well as challeging those (e.g., A. J. Gregor) who saw Mussolini's regime largely as a "developmental dictatorship" scrambling to "catch up" with the modern world. Roberts is particularly critical of Zeev Sternhell's argument that fascism—and its corporatist and syndicalist tributaries—were essentially expressions of a cultural revolt against Enlightenment rationalism. In his view, fascist ideology must be taken seriously not just for its mythical or aesthetic dimensions but as a coherent and "serious" (197) set of values that responded to the shortcomings of liberalism and parliamentary democracy. This point in turn dovetails with another recurring theme, namely, "why Italy matters" (36), and its place within the wider framework of European intellectual history. As Roberts notes, the terms "fascism" and "totalitarianism" originated in Italy, but the peninsula is marginalized in broader discussions of these phenomena (as, e.g., in the work of Arendt). Borrowing Eric Hobsbawm's characterization of modern Italian culture as "both extremely sophisticated and relatively provincial" (7), he seeks to negotiate between its peculiarities and its innovations. For Roberts, Italy's ambiguous position in relation to European modernity generated a succession of imaginative and groundbreaking responses, from futurism, syndicalism, and fascism to the radical historicism of Croce and Gentile.

In sum, this book is a complex, challenging, and wide-ranging contribution to several overlapping historiographical discussions. That said, it is not intended for the uninitiated, and nonspecialists would do well to begin with Roberts's monographs *Benedetto Croce and the Uses of Historicism* (1989) and *Nothing but History: Reconstruction and Extremity after Metaphysics* (1995). Nor will it necessarily win over those who (in the author's own words) see the Croce-Gentile debate as "merely an inconsequential move within the abstruse intellectual game that philosophical idealism . . .

perhaps [has] always been" (121). Given that many of the essays cover much the same thematic terrain, the book is also highly repetitive both conceptually and in its language. Nevertheless, Italianists and students of modern European intellectual history alike will find it a worthy and provocative addition to their fields.

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Italian Neofascism: The Strategy of Tension and the Politics of Nonreconciliation. By *Anna Cento Bull.*
New York: Berghahn Books, 2007. Pp. x+182. $70.00.

Anna Cento Bull's *Italian Neofascism: The Strategy of Tension and the Politics of Nonreconciliation* is a detailed and informative narrative that describes forms of political violence in postwar Italy. In spare and unforgiving prose, Bull takes a disciplined approach to right-wing terrorist events that occurred between the mid-1960s and early 1980s. She probes the etiology of a form of political violence, known colloquially as *stragismo*. The word is taken from the Italian word *strage* and translates as "massacres" in English.

An introductory chapter provides background on the landscape of Italian terrorism—a useful exercise even for those more familiar with Italian postwar history than many readers of this book will be. Bull identifies three strands of political violence in Italy. The first, the form that she focuses on in the book, is the series of bombing attacks on public spaces that ended up killing innocent civilians. The attacks began in 1969—the most famous of which is the bombing of a bank in the Piazza Fontana in Milan. *Stragismo* continued into the 1980s and included the 1980 bombing of the central railroad station in Bologna, as well as a 1984 bombing of a train filled with Christmas travelers as it sped between Bologna and Florence.

The second type of political violence consisted of "plots" to destabilize the Italian government carried out by agencies such as the secret services that Bull glosses over. The third form is left-wing terrorism. These were targeted attacks against members of the "power structure" by extremists who saw no option but violence in light of the corrosive power of capitalism. The Red Brigades who carried out the kidnapping and murder of Italian Prime Minister Aldo Moro were among the most extreme groups. But there were other groups of varying degrees of radicalism, such as Lotta Continua ("the struggle continues") who did little more than organize large protest events that in some instances ended up in armed conflict with the police. In contrast to the perpetrators of *stragismo*, the left radicals, members of the generation of 1968 who participated in events that led to violence and death, were eventually revealed and brought to justice.

The extreme right activists behind *stragismo* are the perplexing center of the story that Bull seeks to tell. Local knowledge and mass media, as well as some contributions from Italian social science, have elucidated much of what is known of *stragismo*. Little has been written in English, so in this sense, Bull covers new ground. There are two salient reasons for this lacuna: the first, which this book does not completely overcome, is the fact that despite numerous criminal trials, it is has never been possible to identify definitively who the perpetrators of the *stragismo* crimes were and to bring them to justice. The aim of *stragismo* was secrecy, innuendo, confusion, and fear. Networks of terrorists working in small groups throughout Italy carried out the attacks. Confessions were obtained and rescinded. Handwritten notes left in someone's apartment that may or may not have implicated some particular person in violent events served as evidence