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Reassemblage: Italy's 1930s Illustrated Magazines as Visual Archives

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The paper presents a new research project that investigates Italian photomontage through the pages of illustrated magazines published in the Thirties. These magazines - released in Milan by Mondadori, Rizzoli, Bompiani - have become a critical source to learn about an artistic practice that was pervasive at this time. Unfortunately, the original mock-ups have been destroyed, and the photographers' archives have been rarely kept together, thus these illustrated magazines offer the only context to see these works and understand the inner workings between photography, architecture, fashion, publicity, and the graphic arts. This presentation shows the early results of a larger research that aims to study the politics involved in Italian modern photography and montage through its magazine culture, taking into consideration the issues debated for the earlier Weimar culture and media.

Photomontage has often been considered a revolutionary art form geared towards social change but, in the case of Italy, it served a more reactionary political propaganda bound to Mussolini's Fascism (1922-1943) and the growing industrial capitalism. A close analysis of these works suggests a complex negotiation between the artists and the politics of this time. Undermined as reactionary and propaganda art altogether, Italian photomontage reveals a rich creative exchange between Italy and European avant-garde art (Surrealism, Dada, Bauhaus), presenting an alternative language, at times even a rupture, from the art of the regime conceived as a "return to order." This project uncovers new works and redefines some important authors like Munari, Veronesi, Nizzoli, discussing the reasons why they should be reclaimed from dusty and often inaccessible off-site storages.

Biographical Note

Maria Antonella Pelizzari is Associate Professor at Hunter College and at the Graduate Center, City University of New York. She teaches courses in the History of Photography, focusing on issues of cultural representation, historiography, and collecting. She earned her PhD in the History of Photography from the University of New Mexico (USA) and her MA in Art History from the Università di Genova (Italy). She has been Associate Curator of Photography at the Canadian Center

for Architecture (CCA) in Montreal, where she organized the exhibition and book project *Traces of India: Photography, Architecture and the Politics of Representation* (Montreal and New Haven: CCA and Yale Center for British Art, 2003), which was awarded the book prize “Historians of British Art” in 2004. She has published essays in scholarly journals such as *History of Photography*, *Visual Resources*, *Afterimage*, *Casabella*, *Fotologia*, *Photography and Culture*, *Perspectives*. She has completed a book on *Photography and Italy* (Reaktion Books, 2010), the first historical study on this subject in English literature, which will be also published by Contrasto, Milan. She is preparing an edited volume of essays on the interdisciplinary dialogue between photography and architecture, and has started to work a new project on photomontage in Italy in the 1920s and 1930s.