

## Impact case study (REF3b)

<b>Institution: University of Warwick</b>
<b>Unit of Assessment: 35 Music, Drama, Dance and Performing Arts</b>
<b>Title of case study: The Cult of the Duce: visual imagery and the built heritage of Italian Fascism</b>
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b> (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>The AHRC-funded project, 'The Cult of the Duce' conducted the first multi-faceted analysis of the genesis, functioning and decline of the personality cult of the Italian dictator Benito Mussolini, with an emphasis on the role of visual imagery in sustaining his authority. By staging an art exhibition in London, the research introduced little-known twentieth-century Italian anti-Fascist artwork to British audiences which illustrated the importance of manipulating visual imagery for political authority. 3 documentary films were made about the research which were shown publicly but have been primarily used as a teaching aid to enhance learning of Fascism and Italian culture and history in HEIs and FE colleges around the world. Lastly, the research has provided the historical context underpinning the conservation of built heritage and tourism in the province of Forli, Italy, where Mussolini was born.</p>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b> (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>Research for <i>The Cult of the Duce</i> was undertaken between 2006 and 2011 by PI Stephen Gundle, (Professor of Film and Television Studies, Warwick; who moved from Royal Holloway, University of London in 2007), Co-I Christopher Duggan (Professor of Italian History, Reading) and Co-I Giuliana Pieri (Senior Lecturer in Italian and Visual Arts, RHUL), plus research assistants: Simona Storchi, Sofia Serenelli, Vanessa Roghi and Paola Bernasconi, and PhD students Alessandra Antola and Eugene Pooley.</p> <p>The research has shown that the personality cult was related to the peculiarities of nation- and state-building in Italy since 1860 and the difficulties of bridging the gap between the masses and the political institutions. Various factors contributed to its emergence, including the ideological eclecticism of Fascism, centrifugal impulses within the Fascist Party, the idea of Fascism as a form of 'religion', contemporary celebrity templates, and state control of the media. As the main common denominator within the Fascist regime, the cult served several purposes. It offered a solution to the limitations of parliament and the monarchy as national symbols; it mapped closely on to existing patterns of religious and nationalist political belief; it served to establish the sense of an intimate bond between masses and leader, and, especially in the early 1940s, helped short-circuit disaffection generated by economic hardship and anger at the corruption and inefficiency of the party and the state.</p> <p>Evidence from unpublished diaries and letters in various Italian archives examined by Duggan has indicated that the cult was internalised by both the well-educated and the less educated. Belief in the genius and beneficence of the <i>Duce</i> was often underpinned by religious or sexual feelings and was frequently intensified in times of hardship or crisis. Distance and class were important: the study of secret police and other reports that monitored opinion has shown high levels of adhesion to the cult among the peasantry and rather more critical perspectives in the towns and cities (among the middle classes especially, but also among workers). Mussolini travelled more than any previous Italian prime minister and Gundle's research demonstrated that his appearances were meticulously prepared and were promoted as magical moments of communion between the national leader and the local inhabitants.</p> <p>The research underlined a complex interplay between, on the one hand, the propaganda machinery of the Fascist party and the state and, on the other, spontaneous adhesion to the cult. An important focus of our research was on the cult as visual culture (portraits, sculptures, posters, photographs and posters) and theatre – Gundle analysed Mussolini's repertoire of theatrical poses and attitudes which were captured and amplified in domestic and international press. A wealth of material in private collections and archives provided evidence of the peculiar visual strategy of the cult which was based on a principle of unity within difference: a number of seemingly contrasting iconographic references encompassing Classical, Renaissance, Modernist and avant-garde</p>

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models were shown to coexist and to be used to highlight different facets of Mussolini's public persona. Images of Mussolini, whether in propaganda or works by the most prominent artists, embraced the principle of organised confusion - an approach which gave a misleading sense of stylistic freedom in the aesthetic expressions of Fascist Italy.

Gundle examined the aftermath of the cult and found that it persisted among loyalists in the decades after the war which was manifested for example through ritual visits to the Mussolini's birthplace, Predappio in the province of Forli where he was finally buried in 1957. Memoirs of family members and lieutenants published in the press contributed to a counter-campaign against the demonisation of Mussolini in the form of humanising the late dictator as the embodiment of the flaws of the Italian people. Postwar Italian cinema avoided representations of Mussolini at the height of his power, while television screened documentaries and then depicted him in drama from the 1960s.

**3. References to the research** (indicative maximum of six references)

- Gundle, S., C. Duggan and G. Pieri, *The Cult of the Duce: Mussolini and the Italians* (Manchester University Press, 2013), (edited essay collection; peer reviewed) [REF 2]
- Gundle, 'The Cult of Mussolini in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Italy', special issue of *Modern Italy* (18:2, 2013), co-edited with Duggan and Pieri (journal special edition; peer reviewed) [REF 2]
- Gundle, *Mussolini's Dream Factory: Film Stardom in Fascist Italy* (Berghahn Books, 2013) (monograph; peer reviewed) [REF 2].
- Gundle and D. Forgacs, *Mass Culture and Italian Society from Fascism to the Cold War* (Indiana University Press, 2007); Italian edition: *Cultura di massa e società italiana, 1936-54* (Il Mulino, 2007). (50% authored by Gundle) (monograph; peer reviewed)
- Gundle, 'Un Martini per il Duce: l'immaginario del consumismo in Italia negli anni Venti e Trenta' in Anna Villari (ed.), *L'arte della pubblicità: il manifesto italiano e le avanguardie 1920-1940* (Silvana editoriale, 2008, pp.46-69. (exhibition catalogue chapter; exhibition staged under auspices of municipalities of Rome and Forli, 2008)
- Cremoncini, R. and others (eds), *Against Mussolini: Art and the Fall of a Dictator* (Estorick Collection of Modern Italian Art, 2010). (exhibition catalogue with essays by Gundle, Duggan, Pieri and Storchi)

Research Grants:

AHRC grant for 'The Cult of the Duce: Mussolini and the Italians, 1918-2005', PI Gundle, Co-Is Duggan and Pieri (£482,000), Oct 2006-Feb 2011.

**4. Details of the impact** (indicative maximum 750 words)

The research has increased public awareness about the political importance of visual imagery in Fascist countries through an exhibition in London displaying artwork designed to ridicule and condemn Mussolini's Fascist regime on the eve and in the immediate aftermath of his downfall. The research has led to the creation of teaching resources (3 documentary films) which have enhanced learning in HE and FE-level education around the world for students studying European History and Fascism. As a result of the research and the documentary films, Gundle was invited to join the Scientific Committee for an EU-funded project exploring the future uses of the built heritage of fascism and communism in South Eastern Europe. It has successfully established a European cultural route to promote tourism in the region and preserve the physical symbols of this turbulent period in European history. The final meeting of this project was held in Forli in June 2013 and consisted of a symposium chaired by Gundle.

The project team created materials to support teaching and learning in HE, FE and secondary schools around the world. The 3 documentary films (made in English and Italian versions) combine archival footage with original material, including interviews, oral history and location filming, each covering a different subject: 1. Mussolini and Fascism; 2. The Town of Predappio, Mussolini's birthplace; 3. Mussolini in Postwar Italy. These films were distributed to 250 academics and teachers (by request) in over 15 countries around the world, including the UK, USA, Canada, Italy, Australia, Ireland, New Zealand, Germany, Poland and South Africa. While primarily used to support the teaching of Fascism, the films have also been used in courses on Italian History and Culture, Film, Religion, Modern Art, Architecture and Gender Studies. In a survey of those who used the DVDs in their teaching, 60% did so to encourage a greater understanding of the social and cultural trends underpinning fascism and to teach historical facts about the ideology and practices of fascism. 94% of users reported that the films encouraged an increased engagement with the topic among their students. Teachers reported that students 'now demonstrate a far greater interest in exploring aspects of fascism in their research papers than they did prior to utilising the DVD.' 82% routinely use the films in their teaching, several respondents replying that 'the 3 DVDs put together constitute an unprecedented tool for teaching and research in any language' and that they are 'certainly the best AV teaching materials on Fascism available in English.'

The documentary films were first screened at a public event at UCL in London, February 2011, which attracted an audience of approximately 200 people, including members of the general public, artists, filmmakers and historians. The second film about Predappio has had particular impact for the region. It was screened in a local cinema owned by the municipality on 25 February 2011 to an audience of 250 residents, which was followed by a round table discussion involving the city's mayor and 3 historians about the appropriate contemporary uses of the Fascist past. As a result of his research, Gundle was proposed by the municipality of Forli to sit on the Scientific Committee of the ATRIUM Project (Architecture of Totalitarian Regimes of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century in Urban Management), an EU-funded initiative involving 18 partners from 11 countries in South Eastern Europe. Running from 2011 until June 2013, the ATRIUM project has generated a survey of surviving Fascist built heritage (monuments, buildings, town planning) in the region to support the formation of an EU-accredited European cultural route which will both preserve the region's built heritage and promote cultural tourism. As the committee's only historian, Gundle attended 4 transnational meetings of the project partners and provided the historical context for the project which has been published in its survey and brochures. By the end of July 2013, the partner countries established an association to manage the cultural route and published a report on how partner countries can develop visions and structures for managing the sites identified for their historical and cultural significance.

To increase public awareness about the important role of visual imagery in the cults of twentieth century dictators, the research was used to curate an exhibition of artwork produced in Fascist Italy at the Estorick Collection of Modern Italian Art in London. The exhibition 'Against Mussolini: Art and the Fall of a Dictator' ran from 22 September to 19 December 2010, attracting 4,850 visitors. It was co-curated with the Director and staff at the Estorick and Gundle, Pieri and Storchi, who provided contacts for collectors who lent works for the exhibition, wrote the accompanying labels, wrote the exhibition catalogue (260 sold), and gave gallery talks. The exhibition brought to London art works produced in Italy and abroad during the Fascist era with a particular emphasis on the decline of the cult and the years immediately following Mussolini's initial fall from power (1943), during which time there was widespread destruction of Fascist symbols and images of Mussolini. On display were paintings and drawings of some of the most important Italian artists of the twentieth century, such as Renato Guttuso, Mario Mafai and Mino Maccari, who created artwork ridiculing Mussolini and condemning the violence and brutality of the regime. Gundle, Pieri, Duggan and Storchi each gave a public talk on 4 Saturday afternoons during the exhibition on the historical and political context of the art work and its aesthetic qualities to audiences of 20-30 people. The talks were recorded and feature on the project website (see below). Visitors expressed their admiration for the way in which the exhibition tackled a sensitive topic, 'Really impressive special exhibition. Hard subject matter, fascinating images.' The exhibition attracted media interest in the UK, Europe and abroad appearing in newspapers in Italy, the Wall Street Journal Europe, the Czech Republic and

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Panama. It was featured in the *Sunday Times* culture critical list 3 weeks running (Oct 3, 10, 17, 2010).

**5. Sources to corroborate the impact** (indicative maximum of 10 references)

AHRC Final project report (2011) confirms the project's non-academic outputs including the production of the documentary films; the exhibition, website, gallery talks, visitor figures, media interest; and public screenings of the films.

Project website [www.mussolinicult.com](http://www.mussolinicult.com), 1,935 page views from 67 countries; 80% are new visitors (until July 2013; Google Analytics report).

Exhibition:

Statement from the Director, Estorick Collection of Modern Italian Art, London

'Against Mussolini: Art and the Fall of a Dictator' (exhibition website and catalogue, Estorick Collection, London, 2010)

Visitors' Book

Media references (exhibition):

'The critical list; The best of what's on this week', *Sunday Times* (3, 10 and 17 Oct 2010), 'A fascinating examination of antifascist art in Italy and elsewhere, including Britain'

'Going out...staying in', *The Times* (22 Sep 2010)

'Cultural Calendar', *Wall Street Journal* and *WSJ Europe* (24 Sep 2010)

*Corriere della Sera* (Italian daily newspaper) (3 Oct and 12 Dec 2010)

*La Nazione* (Italian regional daily newspaper) (14 Oct 2010)

*Il Resto del Carlino* (Italian regional daily newspaper) (25 and 27 Feb 2011)

*La Estrella de Panama* (Spanish language daily newspaper) (22 Sep 2010)

'Saturday Review', BBC Radio 4, 25 Sep 2010 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00twzp8> (289,000 listeners, RAJAR figures approximate)

Teaching support material

3 x 45min documentary films, *Mussolini: The Story of a Personality Cult*

Survey of DVD users (conducted March-May 2013)

Consultancy

ATRIUM Project (Architecture of Totalitarian Regimes of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century in Urban Management)

<http://www.atrium-see.eu/> and membership of Scientific Committee [http://www.atrium-see.eu/index.php?option=com\\_k2&view=item&layout=item&id=112&Itemid=160](http://www.atrium-see.eu/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&layout=item&id=112&Itemid=160)