

FOCUS ROUTE

- 1 It seems likely that Fascist propaganda had more effect on some groups than others. Try the following exercise to help you clarify your ideas. Take one of the Italians in the list, and try to judge how he or she would be affected by the various forms of propaganda. Make and complete a chart like the one below. Decide what impact (large, limited, none) each propaganda form might have had on that person.

Person

Southern peasant
Teacher
Industrial worker
Urban housewife
Industrialist
15-year-old schoolgirl
Low-ranking civil servant

Propaganda form

Literature
Radio
Cinema
Newspapers
Posters
Art
Architecture
Spectator sport
Rallies

Person:

Form of propaganda	Degree of impact
	Large
	Limited
	None

- 2 You are the newly appointed Spanish ambassador in Rome in 1939. Your new ruler General Franco has asked you to report on Mussolini's propaganda methods. Write an assessment of his approach, making recommendations on the best methods to adopt.
- 3 'The history of Fascist Italy is a history of propaganda.' Mack Smith made this claim referring to Fascist foreign policy, but do you think it could be used more generally of the regime?

Key points from Chapter 6

- 1 Propaganda was a vital part of the Fascist regime; Mussolini took a great personal interest in it.
- 2 The cults of the Duce and of Ancient Rome were central features.
- 3 The PNF had a vital propaganda role.
- 4 The press, though mostly not Fascist-owned, realised it had to conform to the government's wishes.
- 5 Radio and film were used to gain support for Fascist policies, but they remained primarily forms of entertainment.
- 6 Mass activities, such as rallies and sport, were also used for propaganda purposes.
- 7 The organisation of propaganda developed piecemeal; it was only in 1937 that the Ministry of Popular Culture was established.
- 8 The regime tried to use art and architecture for propaganda purposes, but still allowed considerable diversity.
- 9 The attempt to establish a clear Fascist doctrine made little impact.
- 10 Fascist Italy's policy towards the media and the arts was far less totalitarian than that of Nazi Germany or the Soviet Union.

A look ahead

You have studied how Mussolini consolidated his regime, and seen the role of propaganda within this. It is now time to look at what role economic policies played in securing the regime.

How did Mussolini use propaganda to strengthen his regime?

CHART 6A CHAPTER OVERVIEW

6 How did Mussolini use propaganda to strengthen his regime?

- A** What were the aims and methods of Fascist propaganda? (pp. 105–11)
- B** How did Mussolini use culture for propaganda purposes? (pp. 112–22)
- C** Review: How did Mussolini use propaganda to strengthen his regime? (pp. 123–24)

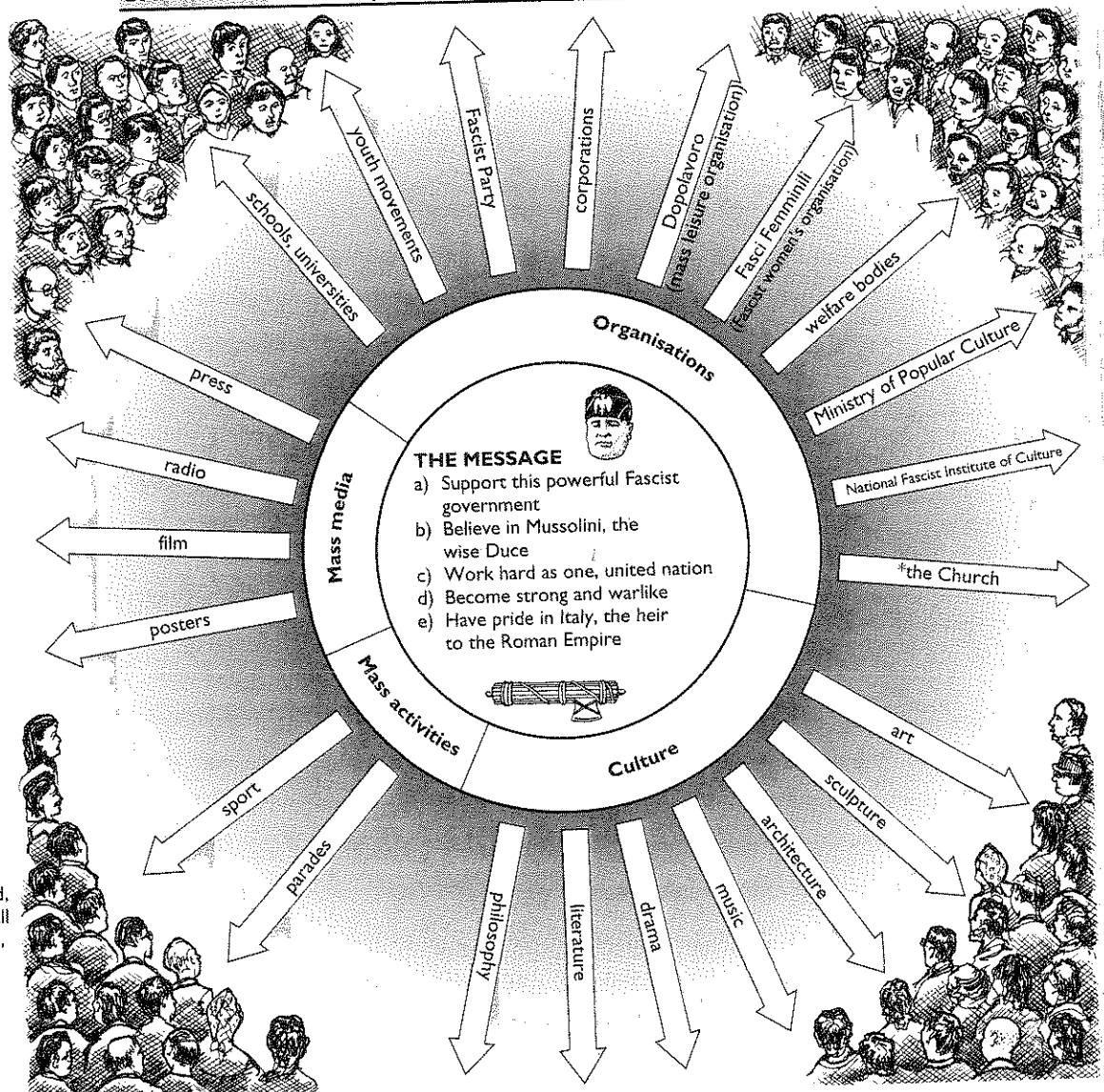
Activity

- List ten methods the Fascist government might have used to spread its ideas and win support.
- Now study Chart 6B and compare this list with your own.

Propaganda and DICTATORS seem to go hand in hand. Both Hitler and Stalin established complete control of the media in their countries, using it to win support and also to ensure that opponents had no means of communicating their views effectively. Did Mussolini succeed in doing the same? He certainly saw the opportunities when he said to an American film crew, 'Your talking newsreel has tremendous possibilities. Let me speak through it in twenty cities in Italy once a week and I need no other power.'

A What were the aims and methods of Fascist propaganda?

CHART 6B Fascist propaganda. Aims and means



*Unlike the other organisations listed, the Church did not try to inculcate all Fascism's ideas in the people, but did, especially after 1929, serve as a powerful body fostering support for the regime (see page 174–76).

Support was also maintained by censorship and suppression of criticism, not itself propaganda.

FOCUS ROUTE

Using pages 106–07, explain how the Fascist regime exploited Italy's Roman past.

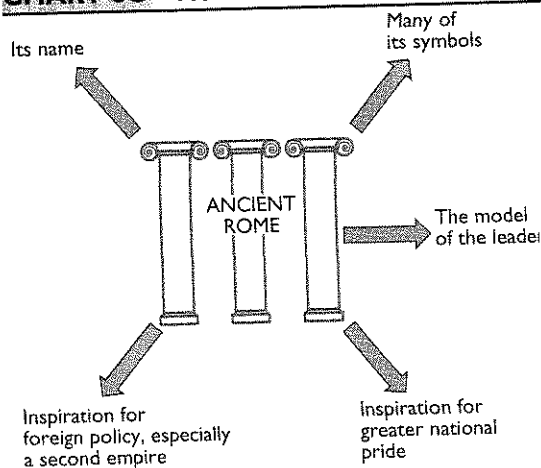
Fascism and Ancient Rome

'Italians, you must ensure that the glories of the past are surpassed by the glories of the future.'

These words of Mussolini were engraved on the imposing entrance to the Mostra Augustea della Romanita exhibition in 1937, which was to celebrate the 2000th anniversary of the birth of Augustus. Over one million people attended the exhibition of 30,000 items, designed to display Rome's IMPERIAL might, and show Mussolini as the heir to Augustus. 'Romanita', or the cult of Ancient Rome, was a major theme in Fascist propaganda.

Italy's Roman past was used both as the inspiration of, and the justification for, Fascist policies. For a country which recently had suffered from disunity and an inferiority complex, the regime's exploitation of this once glorious past was hardly surprising.

In Fascist Italy, symbols of Ancient Rome were everywhere. Hundreds of medieval buildings were demolished in Rome to allow imperial Roman ruins to be better displayed, and new public buildings were largely classical in design. Mussolini was increasingly portrayed, both in appearance and in action, as a new Roman leader who, like Augustus, had established order out of chaos; who was restoring Rome's grain production and improving drainage; who was building up Italy's military might and leading the country to imperial glory.

CHART 6C How Fascism used Ancient Rome**SOURCE 6.1** Mussolini speaking in 1935

Rome is our point of departure and our point of reference. It is our symbol and, if you like, our myth. We dream of a Roman Italy, an Italy that is wise and strong, disciplined and impersonal. Much of the spirit of Ancient Rome is being born again in Fascism; the Lictorian fasces are Roman, our war machine is Roman, our pride and our courage are Roman too. Civis Romanus sum [I am a Roman citizen].

SOURCE 6.2 Extract from a schoolbook for ten-year-olds

If you listen carefully ... you may still hear the terrible tread of the Roman legions ... Caesar has come to life again in the DUCE; he rides at the head of numberless cohorts, treading down all cowardice and all impurities to re-establish the culture and the new might of Rome. Step into the ranks of his army and be the best soldiers.

SOURCE 6.3 From a speech made by Mussolini in May 1936, which was then inscribed in stone for the 1937 exhibition

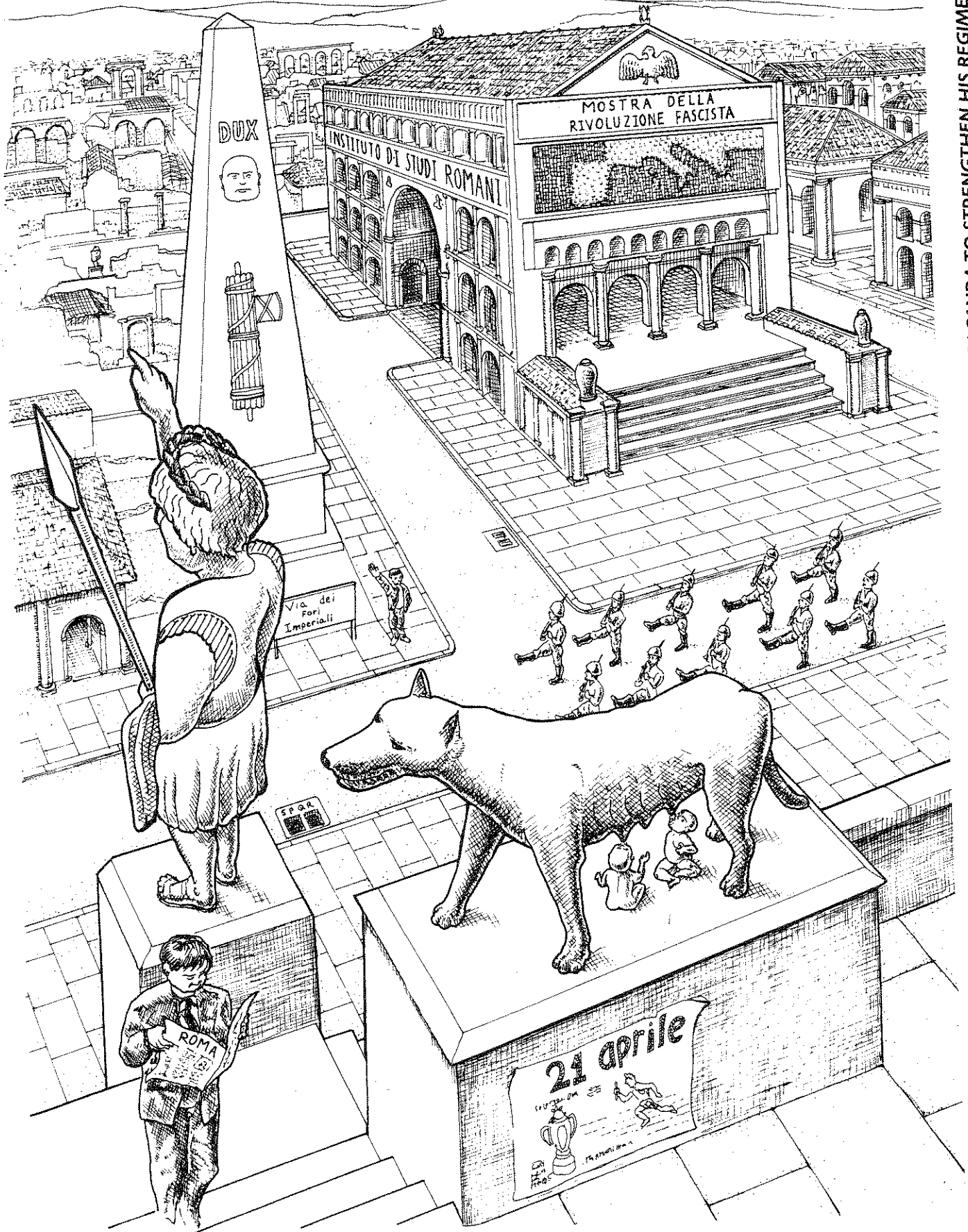
The Italian people have created the Empire with their blood, will make it fertile with their labour and defend it against whomsoever with their arms. In this certain hope, raise high, legionaries, the standards, the steel and your hearts, and salute, after fifteen centuries, the reappearance of the Empire on the fated hills of Rome.

Talking point

Chart 6D is a reconstruction drawing combining various features of Ancient Rome which were adopted by the Fascists. What are the strengths and weaknesses of presenting information through reconstruction drawings?

Activity

- 1 Look at the drawing in Chart 6D. List all the references to Ancient Rome.
- 2 Study Sources 6.1–3. How is the cult of Ancient Rome being used by the regime here?



HOW DID MUSSOLINI USE PROPAGANDA TO STRENGTHEN HIS REGIME?

Dictatorship and technology

The role of technology is often neglected by political historians. One could, however, argue that it would have been very difficult for the totalitarian regimes of the 1930s to have existed without modern technology. This allowed governments and parties to convey their ideas directly to the masses for the first time.

The Fascist regime still made use of generally supportive parish priests and bishops' circulars to influence the rural masses, but radio and, to a lesser extent, film allowed Mussolini to bypass these intermediaries. The microphone and loudspeaker also helped bring Mussolini's voice directly to the masses.

In other ways, technology enhanced the Fascist regime. Fascist architecture, also used to impress the people, benefited from improved technology, such as reinforced concrete, and improved transportation for massive pieces of stone.

Other products of improved technology such as electrification, planes, railways, cars and tanks all in their way gave added power to the regime.

Activity

Read pages 108–11. In a chart like the one below assess each area of the mass media and give it a grade (5–0). Make sure you note down the evidence you would use to back up each judgement.

This is necessarily a simplified assessment; make a note where relevant alongside your chart of any changes over time.

Area of the mass media	How effectively was it used for propaganda purposes?		
	State ownership 5–0 (5 = complete, 3 = considerable, 0 = none)	State control of content 5–0 (5 = complete, 3 = considerable, 0 = none)	Effective propaganda use 5–0 (5 = effective, 3 = some use, 0 = not used)
Newspapers			
Radio			
Cinema			
Posters			

The development of propaganda

Mussolini had begun his rise to power through his talents as a journalist, and throughout his life he paid great attention to the press. The historian Tannenbaum has described the Fascist regime as 'in some ways the reign of journalists'. Newspapers were the most important information and propaganda instrument in Fascist Italy, especially in the 1920s. Mussolini was determined first to suppress criticism, then to ensure the press followed official views. After a slow start, radio became a major propaganda tool of the regime, as did film, especially newsreels. In addition to these formal media, the government fostered enthusiasm by involving the masses in vast parades and sporting activities. Italy's sporting achievements were used to heighten national pride.

The development of a propaganda machine was a gradual process, and the Fascist regime never achieved the impact of Goebbels' efficient machinery. Tannenbaum has described its approach to propaganda as 'amateurish', and this reduced its effectiveness, certainly compared to that of the Nazis. Mussolini's Press Office gradually extended its original role in the 1930s to cover radio, film and eventually all aspects of culture. It was made a ministry (in imitation of Nazi Germany) in 1935. It launched a major propaganda campaign during the Abyssinian War (see pages 214–20) which helped rally support for the war. In 1937 it was renamed the Ministry of Popular Culture, to symbolise its increased effort to bring all Italians into the NATIONAL, Fascist experience. Its sarcastic nickname, 'Minculpop', suggests it had a limited effect, which was not surprising given its bureaucratic inefficiency. This is confirmed by the failure of the Fascist propaganda machine to win popular support for the German alliance and the government's ANTI-SEMITIC policies in the late 1930s. On the other hand, most Italians believed, and some still do despite evidence to the contrary, that Fascism reduced crime, vice and poverty.

The key instruments of propaganda

I. Mass media

Newspapers

SOURCE 6.4 The *Domenica del Corriere* newspaper announcing the beginning of the Abyssinian War



Initially, hostile newspapers were attacked by Fascist squads. In 1923 a law made PREFECTS responsible for censorship. The Fascist Party organised boycotts of some critical papers. By 1926 the last opposition party papers had been suppressed; others conformed, through commitment or fear of the consequences of criticism. Many were bought up by Fascist sympathisers. Hostile journalists and editors could be arrested or replaced, but most popular journalists remained in their posts, helping to reinforce readers' acceptance of what the press said. The government gave grants to favoured journalists and papers.

The state controlled what the papers said, and, more importantly, what they did not say. Most censorship was carried out by editors themselves, with prefects only rarely needing to intervene. Reporting of most crime, disasters, unemployment, and disorders was forbidden. The majority of foreign papers were banned. The only press agency was run by a Fascist. Mussolini's Press Office sent out detailed instructions on the 'correct' version of events. Journalists had to be registered by the state, and join a Fascist association.

Fascist Party newspapers never had more than ten per cent of overall circulation. Mussolini was far more concerned with the content of newspapers than with their ownership. The Vatican's *Osservatore Romano* increased its daily circulation from 20,000 to 250,000 in the late 1930s. The Milan-based *Corriere della Sera* had a circulation (600,000 in 1935) five times that of the Fascist *Il Popolo d'Italia*. The greater variety permitted in newspapers in Italy meant readership grew, unlike in Nazi Germany. Furthermore, some underground anti-Fascist newspapers continued to circulate.

SOURCE 6.5 In July 1923 prefects were charged with ensuring that

[no] articles, comments, notes, titles [might be published which would] impair the nation's interest . . . provoke alarm among the people or disturb public order. [Anything that led to] crime, inspired class hatred, provoked disobedience, or compromised discipline [was to be suppressed].

SOURCE 6.6 Extracts from Minculpop instructions to the press

- Report that the Duce was called back to the balcony ten times.
- Stress that the Duce was not tired after four hours on a threshing machine.

Radio

SOURCE 6.7 An advertisement for 'Radio Balilla' at the National Exhibition of Radio, Milan 1920s



Radio was neglected initially as Mussolini was sceptical of its value. From 1924 onwards the rapidly expanding radio network was state run. The content of programmes was controlled by the state. It consisted mainly of music, both classical and American jazz, and drama. There were two hours a day of official broadcasts. The amount of official broadcasts increased in the 1930s. Their tone, stern and martial, made as much impact as their content. Other commentators whipped up excitement with evocative descriptions of events. Mussolini's major speeches were broadcast live. Large loudspeakers carried them to cheering crowds in piazzas throughout Italy. Private radio listeners, however, also had access to foreign programmes such as Vatican broadcasts, the BBC, and Rosselli broadcasts from Spain.

Few people had radios since they were expensive, though their numbers increased (from 40,000 in 1927, to 1 million in 1938). This number could be multiplied by five to give the approximate number of listeners of private radios. Far more listened in public. In the 1930s, the government provided sets for a new rural radio agency (ERR). It also gave radios to schools. Dopolavoro (OND) ran community listening meetings which helped spread Fascist ideas, especially in rural areas and to the illiterate.

Cinema

SOURCE 6.8 Mussolini laying the foundation stone of the new LUCE building, 1937. The banner proclaims 'Film is the strongest weapon'



As with radio, the government was slow to realise film's potential, but in 1924 a government agency, LUCE (L'Unione Cinematografica Educativa), was created to produce documentaries and newsreels (called cinegiornali). Mussolini frequently previewed them before release. They typically consisted of brief news from abroad, several sports items, a local colour item, such as a festival or an item on the Duce, with a happy story about animals, children or a film star to conclude. Cinemas had to show these before the main film. The state censored Italian and imported films and issued directives on style and content.

In the 1920s Italian cinemas were dominated by Hollywood imports, and the young Italian film industry languished. In 1934 the government decided to intervene, more as part of its AUTARKY policy than for propaganda reasons. A Director

General in the Culture Ministry was appointed; he encouraged film production by restricting Hollywood imports, and providing subsidies and training.

In 1937 the IRI (the Institute for Industrial Reconstruction) helped fund Cinecittà, a series of major film studios, as a 'Hollywood by the Tiber'. This helped the revival of domestically produced films. Italian audiences thus had a mixture of state-produced documentaries, privately produced subsidised Italian films, and American imports. In 1938 three-quarters of ticket sales were for US films, with the most popular being *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. Mussolini's favourite film was *Stanley e Olio* ('Laurel and Hardy').

Initially the government valued the commercial success of films over their propaganda role, and till the late 1930s most films were escapist, or historical drama. Only a few were self-consciously Fascist, dramatising the lives of a Fascist of the first hour struggling against Socialists (*Vecchia guardia*), or that of a pilot in the Abyssinian war (*Luciano Serra, pilota*). Thus there were few explicit propaganda films (apart from newsreels), though most feature films stressed Italy as a modern, technologically advanced country with social harmony.

Increasing numbers of Italians went to the cinema as Dopolavoro showed films, and mobile cinemas toured the countryside. Films offered people escape from their humdrum lives, and a false sense of security and national pride.

SOURCE 6.9 Minister Bottai, 1931

Too openly propagandist films or those too overtly moralising perhaps will not meet with public favour. Even a production which is backing up religious or political ideas must concentrate on its artistic and commercial sides and not lose sight of what leads to success, the real reason for the cinema's existence.

SOURCE 6.11 'Italy has its empire at last'



SOURCE 6.10 Freddi, Director of DGC (General Directorship of Cinematography), 1937

A nation that is able to avoid the harsher realities that involve all the world will be one where all the citizens, even the so-called private citizens, know how to think and act, not merely out of self-interest, but out of regard for the collective group, the nation... The most powerful force, over the last three years, which has hastened the development of this attitude has been our film production. The new national film production is acquiring an international reputation and meaning because it expresses our time in history, which is truly Italian and Fascist.

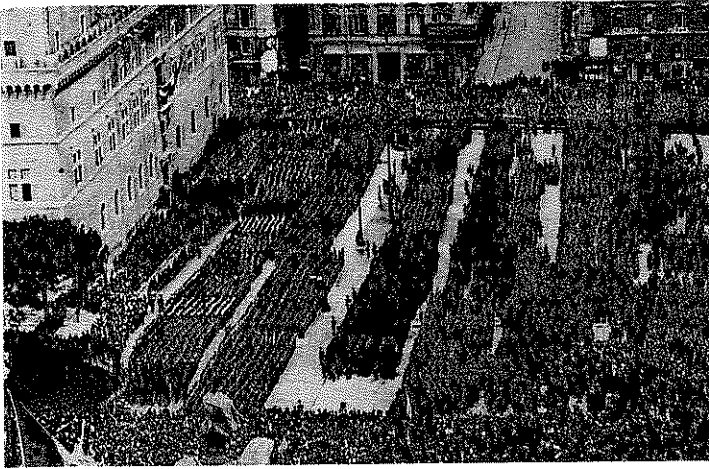
Posters

Posters were the most visual means of propaganda, and many walls were plastered by the party and government agencies with simple slogans and striking images of the Duce. They were important as there was still considerable illiteracy. Occasionally opposition posters were displayed briefly, but generally the government had a MONOPOLY of this important medium (see pages 118–19).

2. Mass activities

Rallies

SOURCE 6.12 A rally to celebrate the seventh anniversary of the Fascist March on Rome



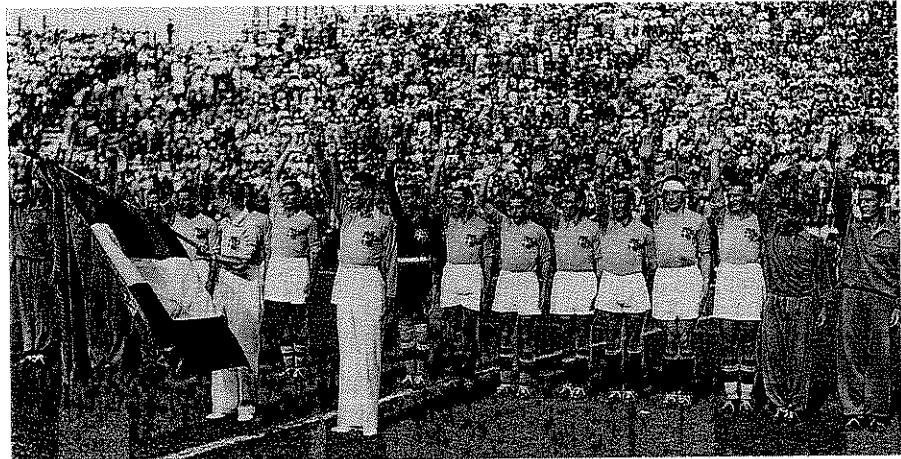
The Fascist Party organised a series of mass parades, both to inculcate discipline and collective identity in participants and to impress observers. Mussolini obtained from Stalin details on Soviet May Day parades which he imitated.

SOURCE 6.13 The art historian F. Whitford has powerfully described the role of such activities in *Art and Power*, 1995

All these events were quasi-religious and ritualistic. All instilled in their participants a sense of belonging to a whole greater than the sum of its parts. Everyone was a member of an organisation, wore its uniform, and knew his or her place in its clearly defined hierarchy. The state itself was seen both as a work of art and a perfectly functioning machine.

Sport

SOURCE 6.14 The Italian team that went on to win the World Cup, 1934. The sign at the back of the stadium reads 'Buy Italian products'



Sport was encouraged, both as a form of active participation and as a spectacle. Like rallies, mass sport was used to help discipline, and socialise the people, and to secure their commitment to the regime.

Many new stadiums were built, and these were also designed to impress the masses (see page 112). Successful national teams were seen as a way to increase national pride. The regime received a great boost from Carnera being world heavyweight boxing champion from 1933 to 1935. The importance placed on sporting success may be indicated by the rumours that the national football team received a telegram saying 'Win or Die' before the 1938 World Cup final! They won, as they had in 1934.

Activity

What were the strengths and weaknesses of the major means of propaganda in spreading the Fascist message?

Talking points

- 1 In what ways do modern governments try to use sport for political purposes?
- 2 Have you ever attended a public event where you were emotionally swept away by the power of the occasion? What long-term effects did it have on you, if any?

SOURCE 6.15 Fascist Deputy and newspaper editor Lando Ferretti in 1928

Sport is, for us, above all a school for the will which will prepare citizens in peace time to be heroic soldiers for Fascism in war time . . . To be prepared, to confront the struggle, to behave with honour, to die for victory if necessary, this is the trajectory [direction] of sporting education and its supreme purpose.

SOURCE 6.16 D. Thompson, *State Control in Fascist Italy*, 1991, p. 84

The channelling of emotions into nationalistic competitiveness associated particularly with football, cycle racing and boxing, probably bound far more individuals to Mussolini and the regime than did any IDEOLOGY or the overt militarism of so much Fascist activity.

FOCUS ROUTE

- 1 Using pages 112–22, make notes on the way Mussolini used the arts for propaganda purposes.
- 2 Why was there considerable cultural diversity in Fascist Italy?

B How did Mussolini use culture for propaganda purposes?

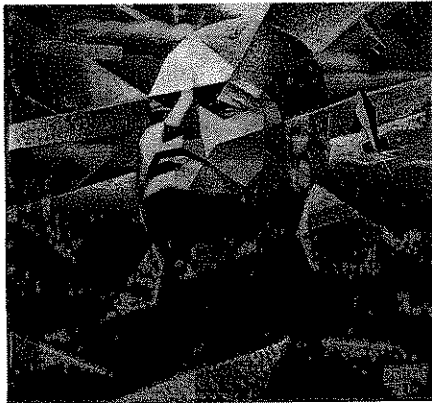
SOURCE 6.17 F. Whitford, *Art and Power*, 1995

Culture mattered a great deal to totalitarian governments. They paid it obsessive attention because they believed in its power. They knew that it could, if directed, immensely enhance their authority. They also knew that, if uncontrolled, it could undermine and destroy their omnipotence [total power]. Culture could only serve their purposes if it were regulated as ruthlessly as every other aspect of life.

Whitford makes this comment in the book *Art and Power* about the use of culture by the dictatorial governments in the 1930s. Let us examine how justified this view is of Fascist Italy.

First, however, we need to consider what we mean by culture. Culture can be taken to mean both elitist works of art and intellectual discussion (high culture), and popular customs and behaviour (mass culture). Mussolini was concerned with both, though particularly the latter. As we have seen, the development of modern means of communication had given the regime the opportunity to reach and influence the masses far more effectively than previous governments. However, the regime also concerned itself with high culture, both as a means of propaganda, but also to increase the external prestige of the Fascist state.

SOURCE 6.18 Portrait of Mussolini by Dottori, 1933



Was there an official view of Fascist art?

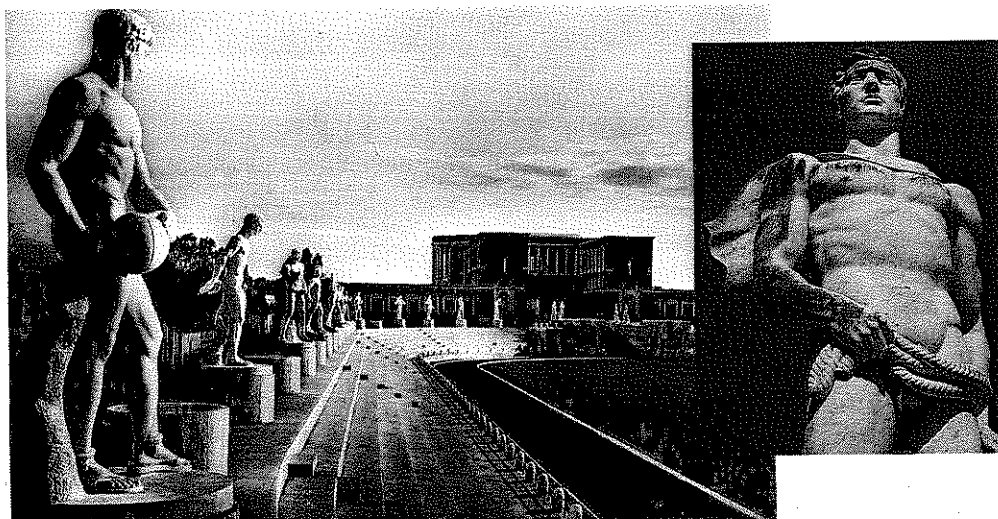
If you have studied art in Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, you will have an image of totalitarian governments seeking to impose an official style, 'Aryan' or Socialist Realist, and ban 'degenerate' (perverted) art in an attempt to control all aspects of life. You might expect to see the same in Fascist Italy.

SOURCE 6.19 The artist Mario Sironi, *Manifesto of Mural Painting*, 1933

In the Fascist state art acquires a social function; an educative function. It must translate the ethics [principles] of our times. It must give a unity of style and grandeur of contour to common life. Thus art will once again become what it was in the greatest of times and at the heart of the greatest civilisation; a perfect instrument of spiritual direction.

SOURCE 6.20 Alfieri, Minister of Culture, 1939

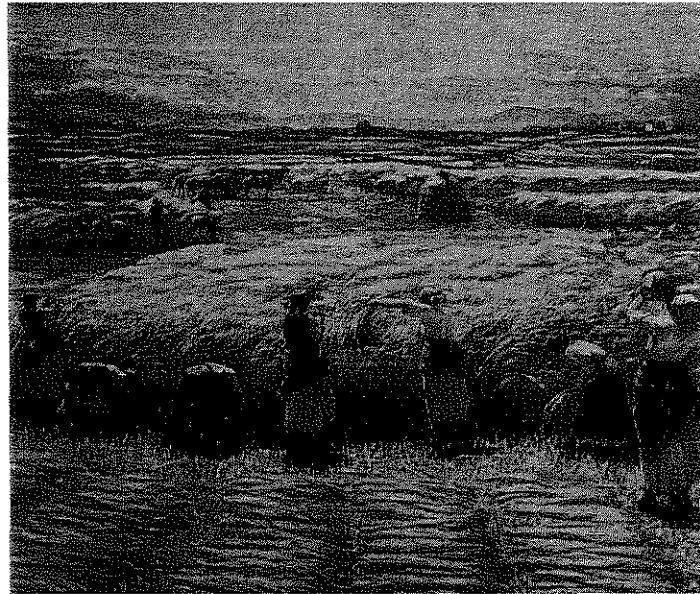
Art must be, in these times of noticeable social improvement, art for the people and by the people; such art as shall exalt the people and which the people, advancing towards higher aims, will understand.



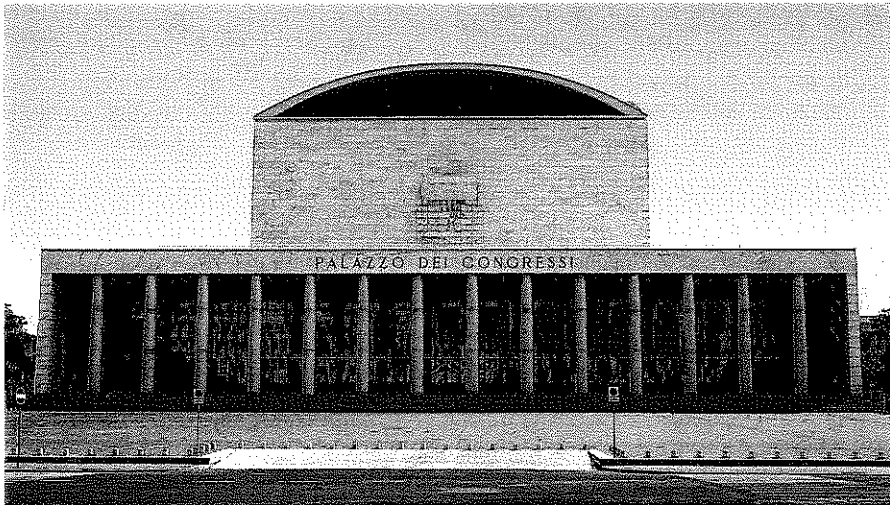
SOURCE 6.21 The Stadium of the Marbles, Mussolini Forum

Activity

- 1 What do Sources 6.19 and 6.20 tell us about the Fascist regime's view of art?
- 2 Look at the examples here of paintings and buildings from Fascist Italy.
 - a) Describe each source.
 - b) What message might each one be trying to convey?
- 3 Do you think they would make an impact on ordinary people, as Alfieri wished?



SOURCE 6.22
Langoni,
Battle for Corn,
1940. Submitted
for the Cremona
Prize

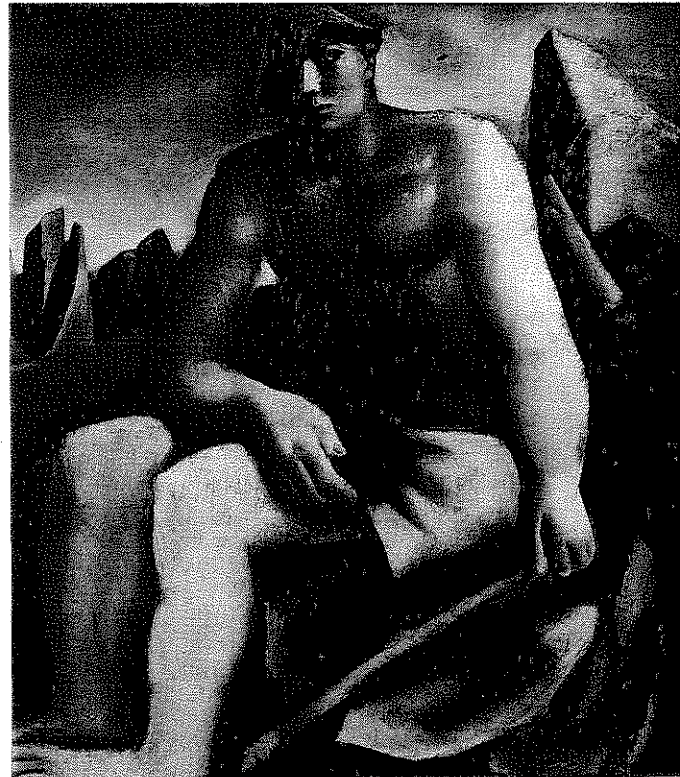


SOURCE 6.23 A modern photograph
of the Palace of Congresses, EUR, 1938–42
(see page 116)

SOURCE 6.24 *Portrait of the Duce* by Amrosi, 1930. A
FUTURIST aero-portrait of Mussolini, with a view of Rome
and the via dei Fori Imperiali behind him



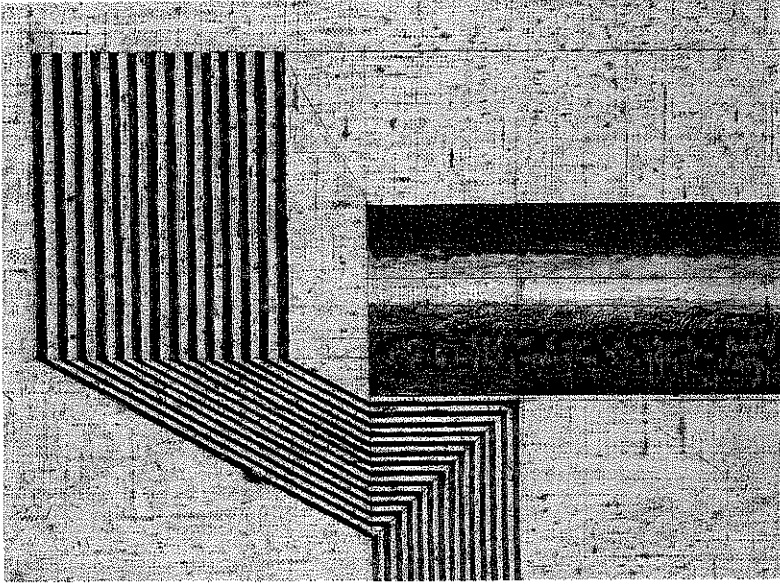
SOURCE 6.25 Sironi, *Shepherd*. Sironi
was a strong Fascist supporter



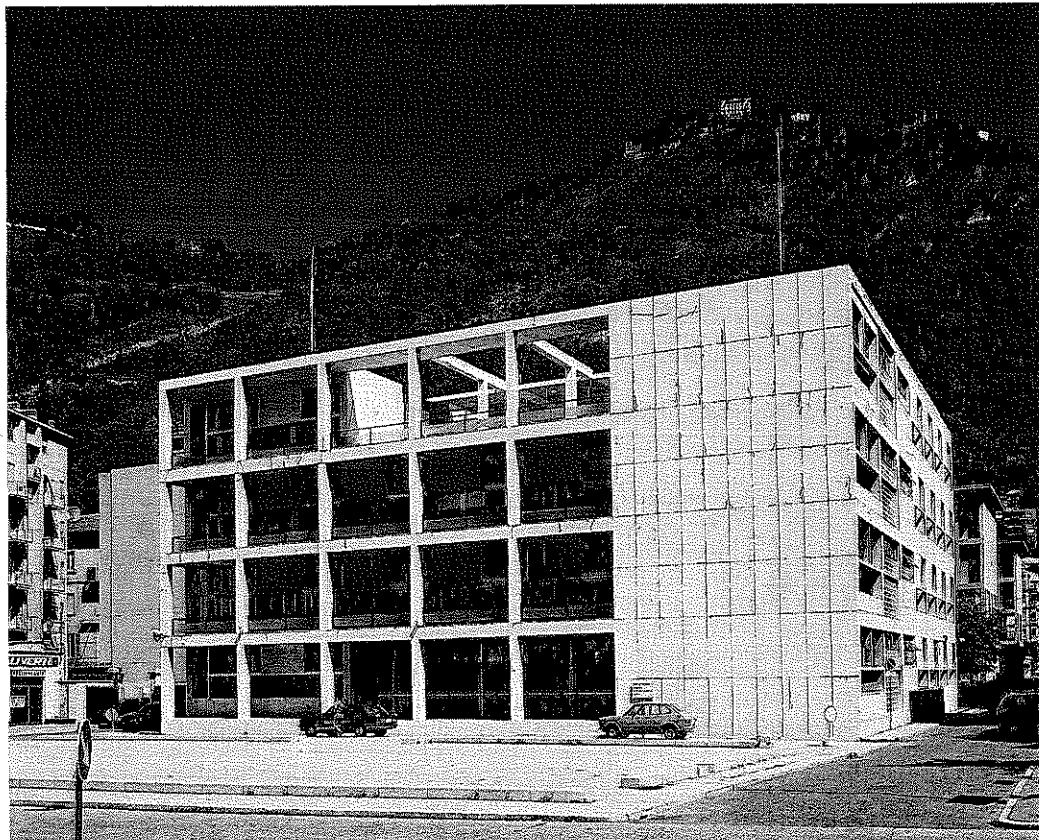
Were other kinds of art allowed?

Alongside official Fascist art, painting which was more abstract, and sometimes potentially subversive art, was still created (see Sources 6.26 and 6.27). This was not just in private commissions, but even within state and party-sponsored works. Many artists officially conformed to enhance their career opportunities, but exploited the system to express their own artistic vision (see Source 6.28).

SOURCE 6.26 *Rhythm* by Licini, 1933, an example of abstract painting



SOURCE 6.27 *Crucifixion* by Manzù. This painting won the Bergamo Prize in 1939, and can be seen as an attack on Nazi brutality in Germany



SOURCE 6.28 Casa del Fascio, Como, by Terragni, 1936–40

Activity

What do the arts show us about Fascist Italy?

Study the paintings, sculpture, architecture and other arts, and the documentary sources on pages 112–22.

Find evidence about:

- the cult of the Duce
- the cult of Rome
- grand ambitions not fulfilled
- cultural diversity
- the nature of totalitarianism in Fascist Italy.

SOURCE 6.29 Fascist Grand Council Member Farinacci, 1940

We cannot allow the consciousness of people to be expressed in art by disgusting nudes, Jewish hats, gaunt and emaciated [abnormally thin] faces, bodies suffering from elephantiasis [a disfiguring disease], by drunken and deformed expressions; in short by the rhetoric [exaggerated language] of monstrosity and deceit, the mania of novelty for the sake of it, and even of technical virtuosity which conceals, without success, the total absence of sentiment, thought and understanding of life.

Activity

How far do Farinacci and Bottai agree on what is desirable art?

How could you have this variety?

'Fascist art is the art of the masses.' This proud boast, reiterated by numerous Fascist officials, stemmed less from a desire to develop the cultural sophistication of Italians than the government's aim to use art as a means of propaganda. Thus 'Fascist art' had to have a clear message and be impressive. However, it was not that simple. There were, typically, divisions and debates amongst the Fascists as to what should be the 'Fascist style', or even if there should be one. Thus far more than in the fellow totalitarian regimes of Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, there was considerable cultural diversity under Fascism. This also reflected the general variety of influence centres and greater toleration of diversity in Fascist Italy, provided this did not lead to direct opposition to the regime. Whether this greater diversity actually harmed the government's propaganda aims is open to debate.

SOURCE 6.30 Fascist Grand Council Member Bottai

Fascism does not want a state art... For the state, it is important that both Bergamo and Cremona [two alternative art exhibitions] exist, as consenting and dissenting voices, that is, as expressions of a reality that is both vital and dialectic [progressive clash of opposites].

SOURCE 6.31 Bottai, speaking at the opening of the Venice Biennale Art Exhibition in 1940

Art which is directly controlled by the state, as an instrument of propaganda, not only results in illustration or documentation, but owing to the lack of expression loses all its effectiveness as propaganda.

There were broadly two main artistic tendencies. Neo-classicists looked to ancient Rome for inspiration, favouring realism and monumentalism (Sources 6.21, 6.22 and 6.23), whereas modernists experimented in more diverse, abstract styles (Source 6.26). Mussolini was himself torn; on the one hand he claimed to be modernising Italy, yet he, and most people, were not attracted to more abstract modernist architecture and art.

Given its claim to be a state that incarnated (embodied) the nation, and the government's desire to use art as a means of propaganda, it is not surprising that ultimately most Fascists (like the Nazis and COMMUNISTS) favoured the more classical, realist approach, especially as this could be seen as traditional Italian art as opposed to more cosmopolitan (international) modernism.

In common with other totalitarian regimes, the most favoured forms of art showed human beings as social stereotypes, not individuals. Thus sturdy rural or industrial workers, productive women, and virile youths striving to make Italy great were frequently portrayed (see Source 6.25). Even more dominant was, of course, Mussolini, in numerous paintings, posters and sculptures, shown as a firm, wise leader (see Sources 6.18 and 6.24).

In the late 1930s, a radicalisation evident elsewhere also affected art. Farinacci led the attack on Jewish influences in culture, which was used to attack abstract art which previously had been tolerated. As in other areas, this radicalisation aroused dissent (see Chapter 11). The tension between different Fascist views of painting is well illustrated by the establishment of two rival prizes in 1939, by two leading Fascists. In 1939 Farinacci, an admirer of Nazi Germany, set up the Cremona Prize to promote simple, propagandist art. Mussolini himself chose the themes, such as 'Listening to a speech by the Duce on the radio', 'The Battle for Grain' (1940), and 'Italian Youth of the Fascist Movement' (1941). Bottai, in opposition, set up the Bergamo Prize to encourage more creative freedom. The themes were more open, for example landscape in 1939, two figures in 1940, and there was no set theme in 1941–42.

The government tried to control art through promoting competitions, at regional, national and international level. Winners received government funds and commissions. Alongside this, however, private commissioning continued largely unaffected, until the late 1930s. Artists were expected to join the Syndicate of Professionals and Artists. They had to profess loyalty to the regime, but were not required to subscribe to an official view of art. This meant that unlike Nazi Germany Fascist Italy experienced no loss of major artists.

Talking point

Is realistic art inherently more effective than abstract art as a form of propaganda? Why/not?

How was art used?

So far you have been looking at the nature of art in Fascist Italy; we now need to examine how it was used as a form of propaganda. When you have studied this next section, you can complete the chart on page 122, which you might like to look at now.

If art was to serve as an effective form of propaganda, it had not just to be easily understandable, it also had to reach the people. This was easier to achieve with architecture, certainly for urban Italians, than with painting. However, the government organised about 50 art exhibitions a year, with major ones every two to four years at Rome, Milan and Venice for which there were reduced train fares. These exhibitions helped increase familiarity with art. Other exhibitions more directly celebrated the achievements of the regime. Like the major 1932 Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution, these were often housed in newly constructed buildings, which themselves sent a message, as did the new stadiums, such as Rome's Stadium of Marbles (see Source 6.21).

Like other dictators, Mussolini wanted to demonstrate the stability and power of his regime, and the construction of monumental official buildings was one of the best ways of doing this. Public buildings were designed to impress. Most were decorated with sculpture or murals (see Source 7.16 on page 139), which the artist Sironi considered 'social painting par excellence'. A practice developed, formalised in 1942, that all public buildings had to have at least two per cent of their outside walls used to display some form of art. Probably one of the most effective ways in which art was used to gain support for the regime was in a series of striking posters (see pages 118–19).

All dictators plan grandiose restructuring of their capitals, or even have new cities designed to show, through their sheer scale, the power and permanence of the state. New motorways (even if there were not many cars) served the same purpose. Mussolini's new exhibition city EUR (Universal Exhibition of Rome) planned for 1942 was not completed, but the centre of Rome felt the impact of his new vision, with many old buildings being demolished for his new via dei Fori Imperiali (see Source 6.37).

Talking points

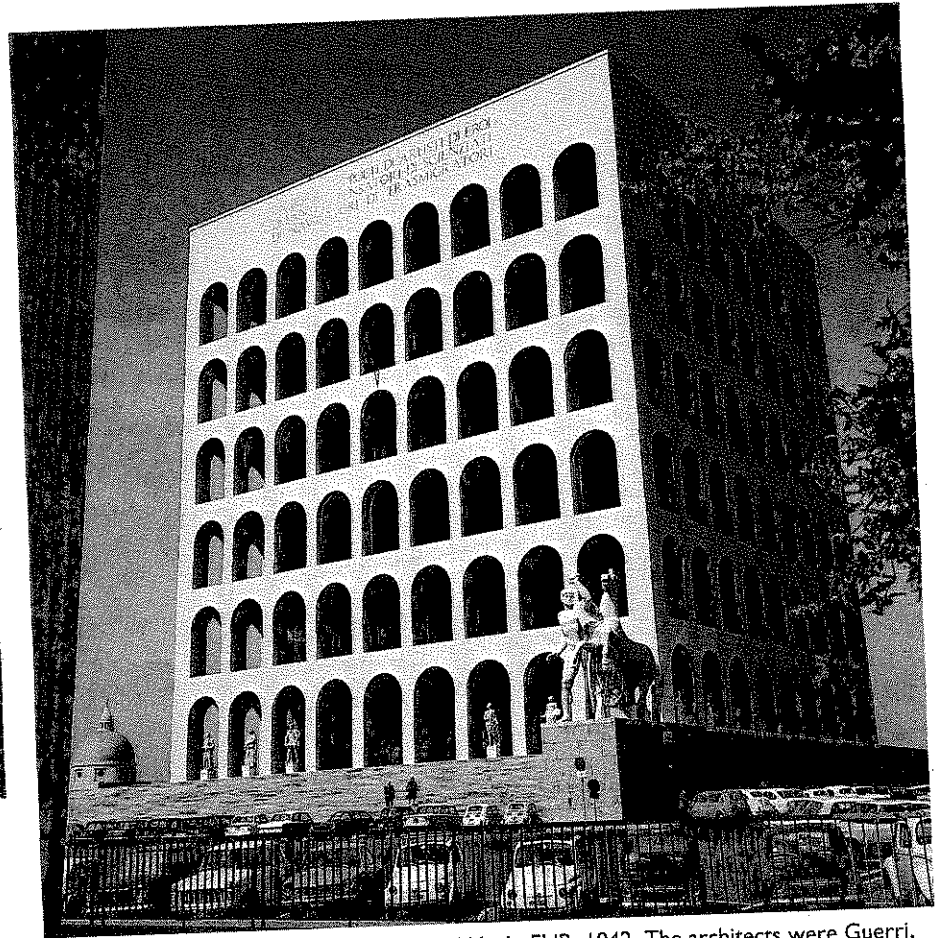
- 1 Benton entitled a chapter on totalitarian architecture (in *Art and Power*, 1995) 'Speaking without adjectives'. What do you think he meant?
- 2 Mussolini was far more interested in Italy's Roman architectural and military past, than he was in Italian Renaissance art. Why do you think this was?

SOURCE 6.32 The Gori sculpture on top of the Italian Pavilion, Paris 1937. Italy's pavilion faces that of Germany, with the Soviet Union's on the left. This major international exhibition, celebrating peace and technology, evoked great rivalry between the major states, especially between the Fascist regimes and the USSR



SOURCE 6.33 A sculpture of Mussolini standing on his own head, 1930

SOURCE 6.34 Mussolini monument, Abyssinia 1936. This was built by soldiers in 1936, near the battleground of Amba Aradam. All it needs is an adoring crowd!



SOURCE 6.35 The Palace of State and Work, EUR, 1942. The architects were Guerri, Lapadula and Romano. One of the few parts of EUR actually built, it echoes the grandeur of Roman monuments and combines it with the boldness of a modernist vision

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SOURCE 6.36 The entrance to the Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution, 1932, a strikingly modernist design



SOURCE 6.37 Mussolini starts demolition work for the via dei Fori Imperiali, built 1928–32



CHART 6E The state and the arts in Fascist Italy



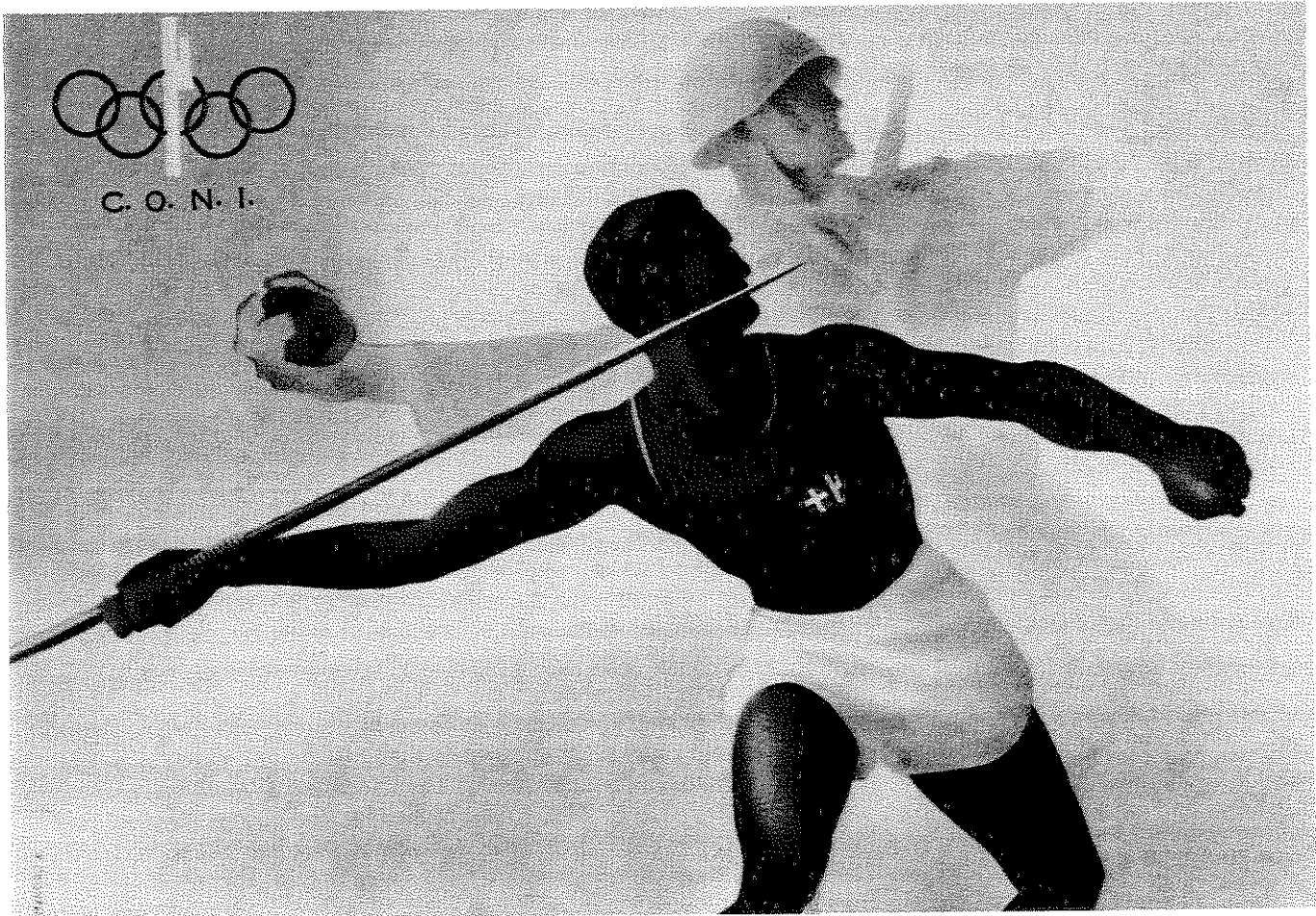
HOW DID MUSSOLINI USE PROPAGANDA TO STRENGTHEN HIS REGIME?



SOURCE 6.39 'Buy Italian': a poster encouraging people to fight against the sanctions imposed during the Abyssinian War



SOURCE 6.40 A poster for the Olympic Games linking Italian prowess in sport with that in war



SOURCE 6.41 Portrait of the Duce with a dedicatory poem by Oswaldo Bot



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Activity

- 1 Comment on the style of Bot's poem.
- 2 What do you think is Bot's attitude to Mussolini?

Talking point

Why do you think there was no Italian equivalent to *Das Kapital* or *Mein Kampf*?

Literature and drama

Much less attention was paid to literature and drama, which did not reach the masses. Mussolini spoke of 'a theatre for twenty thousand', hoping to extend this art form to the masses, but drama remained a minority pursuit, despite the efforts of the OND and National Fascist Culture Institute. The latter had been established in 1926 to spread 'Fascist' culture to the masses. It had 94 provincial sections and organised conferences, free concerts and publications. It claimed 200,000 members by 1941, though these were overwhelmingly middle class. Music (apart from opera) had less potential for direct propaganda. Musicians were required to join the Fascist Union of Musicians, and were encouraged to reject foreign influences, and develop 'cultural AUTARKY'. However, considerable diversity was still maintained.

In theory the Ministry of Popular Culture was supposed to control music, but in practice music escaped major regimentation. The same can be said for literature. Initially some major writers, such as the dramatist Pirandello and the poet d'Annunzio, had been attracted by the bright future promised by Fascism, but as the regime degenerated into corruption and careerism (where people were motivated only by the desire to further their own careers), many writers tried to isolate themselves from the cynicism and hypocrisy of day-to-day life. No great Fascist literature was written, as is perhaps illustrated by Source 6.41! Provided writers included nothing directly hostile to the regime, they were left free, apart from being required to join the relevant Fascist syndicate. The poet Eugenio Montale probably spoke for many when he explained, 'I never was Fascist, nor did I sing to Fascism. Nor however did I write poems that might appear to oppose that pseudo-revolution.'

Philosophy and intellectual ideas

Mussolini was concerned about other aspects of culture, and was particularly concerned to develop a philosophy of Fascism. He considered this could boost the regime's international reputation, and help establish a new Fascist ELITE. Unlike COMMUNISM, which had the writings of MARX and Lenin, and even Nazism, which had *Mein Kampf*, Fascism had no corpus (body) of writing explaining its nature.

Mussolini had been a critic of dogmas (sets of beliefs or principles). However, now that he was the leader of a regime, not just a protest movement, he was keen to formulate a clearer doctrine of Fascism.

In 1925 over 200 intellectuals, presided over by the philosopher Gentile, met at Bologna to produce the MANIFESTO of Fascist Intellectuals. They grandly proclaimed that without Fascism there could be no true culture. Other intellectuals, led by Croce, responded with a Counter Manifesto declaring Fascism and culture incompatible.

Gentile in fact had a far more refined view of Fascist culture than many in the party. He wisely believed that higher culture could not be coerced, but only gradually absorbed into the new Fascist consciousness. The most famous product of this approach was the *Enciclopedia Italiana* which was published between 1929 and 1938 as a sort of rival to the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. It was a compendium (collection) of human knowledge, with particular stress on Italy's role. As editor, Gentile gained the collaboration of 2500 experts, whom he chose on the basis of their expertise rather than political views. This led to some criticism from more RADICAL Fascists, but interestingly Mussolini supported Gentile's approach as his main concern was to increase the prestige of Italy in the eyes of the world. (This concern for intellectual rigour did not, however, prevent Mussolini from co-authoring the long article on Fascism!) The diversity of perspectives in this official publication neatly illustrates the lack of rigid cultural controls under Mussolini's regime.

Indeed, the attempt to intellectualise the diverse and contradictory ideas in the Fascist movement had little impact. Amongst the educated, Fascism was seen primarily as a vehicle for career advancement rather than intellectual inspiration. Though the 60 eminent intellectuals who became members of the new Royal Academy of Italy in 1929 boosted the regime's prestige, most were

not committed Fascists. The famous philosopher Croce retained his influence. He had initially sympathised with Fascism as a positive force that might reinvigorate Italy, but became increasingly critical. His renown was so great (and his mass influence so little) that the government took no action against him. In 1926 he was the victim of unofficial squad violence (Mussolini was suitably horrified), but his books were still published. Indeed, in the 1930s the circulation of his philosophical journal, *La Critica*, doubled.

The Liberal economist Einaudi also remained influential in academic circles, as, of course, did the Catholic Church, with its own students' federation, and Catholic University in Milan. The Italian intelligentsia, though politically conformist, did not become intellectually engaged with the regime. The historian Zaggario has argued that 'Italian academic culture was largely impervious [resistant] to Fascistisation'.

SOURCE 6.42 Extract from the *Enciclopedia Italiana* entry on Fascism, 1932, written by Gentile and Mussolini

Against individualism, the Fascist conception is for the state; and it is for the individual in so far as he coincides with the state, which is the conscience and universal will of man in his historical existence. It is opposed to classical LIBERALISM, which arose from the necessity of reacting against absolutism, and which brought its historical purpose to an end when the state was transformed into the conscience and will of the people. Liberalism denied the state in the interests of the individual; Fascism reaffirms the state as the true reality of the individual. And if liberty is to be the attribute [quality] of the real man, and not of that abstract puppet envisaged by individualistic Liberalism, Fascism is for liberty. And for the only liberty which can be a real thing, the liberty of the state and of the individual within the state. Therefore, for the Fascist, everything is in the state, and nothing human or spiritual exists, much less has value, outside the state. In this sense Fascism is totalitarian, and the Fascist state, the synthesis and unity of all values, interprets, develops and gives strength to the whole life of the people . . .

Therefore Fascism is opposed to SOCIALISM, which confines the movement of history within the class struggle and ignores the unity of classes established in one economic and moral reality in the state; and analogously [similarly] it is opposed to class SYNDICALISM . . .

Fascism is opposed to DEMOCRACY, which equates the nation to the majority, lowering it to the level of that majority; nevertheless it is the purest form of democracy if the nation is conceived, as it should be, qualitatively and not quantitatively . . .

It is not the nation that generates the state, as according to the old naturalistic concept which served as the basis of the political theories of the national states of the nineteenth century. Rather the nation is created by the state . . .

Above all, Fascism . . . believes neither in the possibility nor in the utility of perpetual peace. It thus repudiates [rejects] the doctrine of PACIFISM – born of a renunciation of the struggle and an act of cowardice in the face of sacrifice. War alone brings up to their highest tension all human energies and puts the stamp of nobility upon the peoples who have the courage to meet it . . .

Fascism carries over this anti-pacifist spirit even into the lives of individuals. The proud motto of the Squadrista, 'Me ne frego' [I don't give a damn], written on the bandages of a wound, is an act of philosophy which is not only stoical [self-sacrificing], it is the epitome [essence] of a doctrine that is not only political: it is education for combat, the acceptance of the risks which it brings; it is a new way of life for Italy . . .

If it is admitted that the nineteenth century has been the century of Socialism, Liberalism and Democracy, it does not follow that the twentieth must also be the century of Liberalism, Socialism and Democracy. Political doctrines pass; peoples remain. It is to be expected that this century may be that of authority, a century of the 'Right', a Fascist century . . .

In the Fascist state religion is looked upon as one of the deepest manifestations [products] of the spirit; it is, therefore, not only respected, but defended and protected . . .

Activity

- 1 What does the background information about the *Enciclopedia Italiana* indicate about Fascist Italy?
- 2 Read the extract from the *Enciclopedia* (Source 6.42). What is Fascism
 - a) opposed to
 - b) in favour of?
- 3 How influential do you think this definition of Fascism was in strengthening Mussolini's regime?
- 4 As a member of the Ministry of Propaganda, draw up a simple propaganda leaflet, conveying to the masses the key ideas from this encyclopedia entry.

To conclude, let us look at some historians' comments on culture and dictatorship.

SOURCE 6.43 Whitford, p. 5

The central message of totalitarian art and architecture was that individual identity had meaning only in terms of the larger identity of the state, embodied in the CHARISMATIC person of the supreme leader.

SOURCE 6.44 I. Golomstock, *Totalitarian Art*, 1990, p. 120

Totalitarianism as a whole effected its control of art through the use of both the carrot and the whip. Italian Fascism, however, used only the carrot: its cultural policy was executed through encouraging supporters rather than through destroying opponents.

SOURCE 6.45 V. Zaggario in *Historical Dictionary of Fascist Italy*, ed. P. Cannistraro, 1982, p. 149

It cannot be said that the Fascist regime forcefully channelled culture in a precise, well-defined direction... In reality it is more accurate to consider the existence only of a general plan for organising an intellectual consensus through cultural agencies. The most important goal of this plan was to obtain subservience to the regime in exchange for relative autonomy of artistic and cultural forms, but not of content.

SOURCE 6.46 De Grand, p. 70

Control over culture was subject to the same fragmentation of power [as]... in other areas of Fascist administration. The impact of the Ministry of Popular Culture was limited by rival power centres, e.g. Bottai in the Education Ministry from 1937... Outside of government, the Catholic Church developed its own cultural network. The old liberal culture survived under the protection of Croce... and Einaudi... The Fascist hardliner Roberto Farinacci used his provincial power base to foster the style of art favoured by the Nazis.

SOURCE 6.47 S. Fraquelli in *Art and Power*, 1995, p. 136

Its pluralistic cultural policy created a form of consensus, though ultimately it underscored the disunity and diverging factions that existed within the Fascist regime.

Activity

- Read the historians' assessments (Sources 6.43–47), and note down points under these headings:
 - Aims
 - Methods
 - Degree of control/uniformity.
- Draw a chart like the one below. Then assess each area of Italian culture and give it a grade to indicate the extent of the government's control. You will probably find this a challenging exercise. Discussion with others may be useful.

Area of the arts	How effectively was it exploited for propaganda purposes?		
	Degree of state intervention 5–0 (5 = major, 3 = some, 0 = none)	Degree of individual artistic freedom 5–0 (5 = virtually none, 3 = within certain bounds, 0 = virtually total)	Effectiveness as propaganda 5–0 (5 = effective, 3 = some exploitation, 0 = not used)
Art			
Architecture			
Literature			
Theatre			
Music			
Philosophy			

■ Talking point

Why do you think this chapter on propaganda has come before an examination of Mussolini's main policies?



Review: How did Mussolini use propaganda to strengthen his regime?

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HOW DID MUSSOLINI USE PROPAGANDA TO STRENGTHEN HIS REGIME?

This chapter has looked at the aims and methods of Fascist propaganda. Mussolini used it to try to strengthen his regime, but how far did he succeed?

This is a difficult question to answer. Propaganda is designed to affect people's attitudes, and this is hard to assess. (This issue is addressed in Chapter 8.) One must also be aware that different groups of Italians might react in different ways.

Secondly, propaganda was only one factor helping to sustain the regime. It seems probable that Mussolini was particularly popular in 1936, and became increasingly unpopular from 1940. But how far was the former due to the success of propaganda, and the latter to its failure? To what extent were propaganda successes due to the methods used, or to the message being conveyed?

It does, however, seem likely that propaganda played a major role in sustaining Mussolini's regime, and making him Italy's most popular leader ever. On the other hand, it is likely that propaganda helped reinforce support gained for other reasons, and that it was unable to prevent growing discontent caused for other reasons. It is also possible that the novelty value of having a supposedly all-wise leader wore off, and that the excesses of the cult of the Duce led to a decline in Mussolini's popularity.

It can also be argued that propaganda ultimately contributed to the downfall of the regime. This is based on the view that Mussolini, the great propagandist, himself came to believe his own propaganda, and lost his earlier grasp of reality. This led him in the late 1930s to adopt domestic and especially foreign policies that alienated powerful groups in Italy, culminating in his overthrow in July 1943.

Let us end by considering the tentative judgements of the historian Tannenbaum in his chapter 'Popular Culture and Propaganda'.

SOURCE 6.48 Tannenbaum 1973, pp. 246, 280, 282

Most modern dictatorships use various forms of mass culture to create the impression that life in their country is wholesome and that their citizens are all honest and patriotic . . . the fact that the Fascists were more amateurish in their propaganda than the Nazis and the Communists did not limit their control over the mass media, though it did reduce their effectiveness in inculcating the public with a coherent new set of values. This ineffectiveness was also due in part to the lack of coherence or newness in the values the Fascists thought they had. The Italians tried to be sceptical towards overt propaganda and to trust their own personal experience. But most of them had no way of resisting the covert propaganda in the mass media, which pretended that crime, vice and poverty did not exist . . .

The older generations of rural people, particularly in the South, were virtually untouched by the mass media, and their children, who were more exposed to them in the youth organisations and the schools, still preserved many of their traditional values beneath a veneer [thin coating] of Fascist gestures and slogans. Even most urban workers seem to have learnt little about the regime from the mass media, although they were presumably 'integrated' into it through their labour unions and the DOPOLAVORO. On the other hand, the educated classes tried to resist the media as a sign of their own superiority. It was the younger members of the urban middle and lower-middle classes who were most receptive to both the media and their messages, particularly their entertainment aspects.

The ineffectiveness of Fascist propaganda in changing people's attitudes was especially evident regarding the regime's two most important changes in policy in the late 1930s: racism and the alliance with Nazi Germany.