On the Fringe of Italian Fascism: An Examination of the Relationship between Vinicio Paladini and the Soviet Avant-Garde

Christina Brungardt
Graduate Center, City University of New York

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On the Fringe of Italian Fascism: An Examination of the Relationship between Vinicio Paladini and the Soviet Avant-Garde

by

Christina Brungardt

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Art History in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Art History in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Emily Braun

__________________
Date

Chair of Examining Committee

Claire Bishop

__________________
Date

Executive Officer

Maria Antonella Pelizzari
Rose-Carol Washton Long
Ernest Ialongo

Supervisory Committee

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
Abstract

On the Fringe of Italian Fascism: An Examination of the Relationship between
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Christina Brungardt

Adviser: Professor Emily Braun

Vinicio Paladini’s career as an artist, architect, and cultural critic illuminates the paradoxes of the Italian avant-garde between the World Wars. He emerged as an early proponent of communist-Futurism in 1922 and attempted to integrate futurist techniques with the Marxist theories of Antonio Gramsci. In addition, Paladini provided a direct point of contact between the Russian and Italian avant-garde, traveling to Moscow and reporting to the Italian public on Soviet artists’ developments in film, photomontage, and architecture. Yet he struggled to merge his leftist ideology with his artistic practice as Fascism spread throughout Italy. Although he has been largely neglected in studies of Italian modernism, Paladini was well known to fellow artists and architects in the 1920s and 1930s, but he quickly became a pariah due to his unwillingness to compromise his ideals for regime recognition. Mussolini’s pluralistic patronage, however, provided Paladini and leftist intellectuals with opportunities to continue contributing to the state-sponsored artistic milieu. A study of Paladini’s career imparts valuable insights into why and how leftist intellectuals worked under the auspices of the fascist government. His participation in fascist-affiliated groups, such as Futurism and Rationalism, and contributions to government approved journals implicated his work in regime propaganda, yet also allowed him a public platform for the expression of his revolutionary ideas. Despite the origins of his art in Soviet Constructivism and communist agit-prop, he influenced the style, iconography, and propaganda
efficacy of the futurist machine aesthetic, the state-sponsored film industry, and regime exhibition design in Italy. Clear divisions between left and right-wing factions within post-war art movements, such as Italian Futurism and Rationalism, are difficult to draw. Rather, it is vital to consider how Paladini consciously blurred the lines between the two in the wake of World War I and in response to Fascism. By examining the shifts within his leftist agenda and how it became commandeered by fascist propaganda, or unwittingly served it, my research documents commonalities in the politicized aesthetics by both left and right.
Acknowledgements

This dissertation began as note I scribbled during the spring of 2009 during a course on Futurism by Emily Braun at the Graduate Center. As a matter of habit, I maintained a running list of subjects, ideas, and artists mentioned during lectures that piqued my interest with the intention of looking them up at a later date. Yet when I went to research Vinicio Paladini, I found very little on his career outside of a few sources. Professor Braun was incredibly kind and helpful in answering my questions and in providing me with direction for what was then only a curiosity. As my interest in the topic grew, I learned Italian and began to alter the path of my studies at the Graduate Center. I will be eternally grateful for Professor Braun’s initial encouragement to pursue this course of research. Her support, guidance, and mentorship have continued throughout the process of researching and writing my dissertation.

The members of my committee, Maria Antonella Pelizzari, Rose-Carol Washton Long, and Ernest Ialongo, have generously dedicated their time and efforts to providing me with recommendations that have not only improved my dissertation, but also my work as a scholar. Professor Pelizzari’s enthusiasm for the project has motivated me to continually dig deeper into the archive, journal, or image at hand. Professor Long’s knowledge of the Russian avant-garde and of international cultural interactions has been central to developing my understanding of the Italian perspective on Soviet exchanges in the 1920s and 1930s. Professor Ialongo’s suggestions encouraged me to tease out the incredibly nuanced political and cultural milieu of fascist Italy.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Filippo Tommaso Marinetti’s “The Founding and First Manifesto of Futurism” was discussed and partially reprinted in the Russian press within one month of its February 1909 publication in the French journal, Le Figaro. By 1910, correspondence had been established between members of the Italian and Russian avant-garde regarding the exact nature of Futurism. Multiple groups within Russia came to identify themselves with Cubo-Futurism in the years before World War I, including Hylea, the Ego-Futurists, and Centrifuge, but some traced their origins to anti-Symbolism and the Russian avant-garde at the turn of the century rather than to the Italian movement. Although Russian and Italian Futurism had much in common – including an anti-passéist stance, the desire to restructure language, and the technique of provocation – there was a trenchant disavowal of any Italian influence on contemporary Russian groups by the time Marinetti visited Moscow and St. Petersburg in early 1914. Mikhail Larionov and Natalia Goncharova were dismissive of Marinetti’s contributions and considered his work irrelevant to the growth of Russian Cubo-Futurism whereas Velimir Khlebnikov and Benedict Livshits

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For consistency throughout the text, all “-isms” will be capitalized. The adjectival form (such as futurist and communist) will remain lower case unless used in a formal title. Marla Stone and Anja Klöck provide the precedent for this stylistic decision.

2 Markov’s Russian Futurism provides a detailed history of the various Russian futurist groups and their interactions/overlaps with each other.

distributed flyers protesting his arrival, declaring it an attempt to colonize Russian art.\(^4\) Despite the lukewarm reception, Marinetti did manage to convince a few Russians, including Olga Rozanova, Alexander Archipenko, Aleksandra Exter, and Nikolai Kulbin, to submit work for the *Esposizione Libera Futurista Internazionale (Free International Futurist Exhibition)* held in Rome in the spring of 1914.\(^5\) The tenuous relationship between the two movements halted with the advent of World War I and the post-war political shifts within each country ultimately severed any remaining contact: many of the Russian futurists aligned with Communism in the wake of the October Revolution whereas the majority of Italian futurists eventually supported Fascism.

World War I had drastically altered the political, financial, and cultural terrain of Italy. Soldiers disaffected by their treatment upon returning from the frontlines began to coalesce into the nationalistic *combattentismo* movement while the *arditi* (stormtroopers) formed a political network that became foundational for the rise of Fascism.\(^6\) Benito Mussolini’s Fasci di Combattimento, which eventually became the Partito Nazionale Fascista (National Fascist Party, or PNF), drew its membership from both groups. In addition, the country was experiencing a financial recession that triggered a rise in workers’ unions as well as increased interest in Socialism and Communism. The cultural sphere also suffered from the post-war turmoil. Art movements, like Futurism, were recovering from the loss of members and relevance due to the war. While some futurists, such as Carlo Carrà and Gino Severini, had shifted their allegiance to

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\(^4\) Milner, *A Slap*, 30. Milner reprints the content of the flyer: “Some natives and the Italian colony on the Neva are, for personal reasons, bowing today to Marinetti’s feet, thus retracting the first step of Russian art on the road to freedom and honor, and bending the noble neck of Asia under Europe’s yoke.”


rival art groups intent on a classicizing return to order, others had perished in the war, including Antonio Sant’Elia and Umberto Boccioni. Yet zealous interest in Futurism persisted and younger artists, notably Fortunato Depero and Enrico Prampolini, were elevated within the movement’s ranks.

In response to the political uncertainty of the period, Marinetti organized the Fasci Politici Futuristi (Futurist Political Party) and published a political program in February 1918. Although the group initially had a left-wing orientation, it was staunchly opposed to the goals of Communism. The Fasci Politici Futuristi did not call for a proletarian revolution but rather a “modernization of the economic and social structures and a radical reform of the political culture of the country.” From mid-1918 until 1920, an alliance existed between Marinetti’s ranks and Mussolini’s Fasci di Combattimento, which culminated in several joint actions. The most infamous of these stemmed from rising anti-Bolshevik sentiments and resulted in the destruction of the Milan offices of the socialist newspaper, Avanti!, in April 1919.

In Russia, the multitude of experimental art groups from before the war proliferated in the wake of the October Revolution. Among them Komfut (Kommunisty-futuristy), a communist-futurist group led by Vladimir Majakovsky, soon became inspirational to Italian left-wing avant-gardists seeking to establish a communist and revolutionary art form within their own nation. Several factors contributed to Italian interest in the Russian movement, including shared ideology and artistic strategies. The artists and writers of Russia’s Komfut firmly supported the Revolution, advocated for a proletarian government, and identified with

8 Berghaus, *Futurism and Politics*, 97.
Bolshevism. Komfut consciously based its agitational propaganda program for the new Soviet government on pre-war Russian and Italian futurist strategies of provocation and on the destruction of past, bourgeois art forms, but the movement also became directly engaged in the promotion of Communism and the cultural development of the proletariat. For Italian left-wing artists, it seemed plausible that Marinetti’s Futurism could be modified following the Russian Komfut model to provide an effective agitational and educational tool to spread Communism within their own nation. The loose affiliation that had existed prior to the war between Italian and Russian Futurism, presented a potential, albeit tenuous, point of interaction.

Reinforcing the belief in the viability of an Italian variant of Komfut, the new Soviet administration appointed Anatoly Lunacharsky to the Narkompros (Народный комиссariat просвещения or People’s Commissariat for Education) on October 26, 1917. Between 1908 and 1911, Lunachrsky had sustained contact with the rising socialist and communist faction within Italy; he had lived primarily in Capri, Naples, and Bologna, where he served as a lecturer at an experimental communist school. During this period he developed his ideas that would later be foundational for the establishment of Proletkult, centers for the development of proletarian education and culture. His courses not only focused on political theory, but they also introduced worker students to literature and propaganda as well as art via tours of museums.

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Lunacharsky’s connections with the nascent Italian Communist Party became an additional source of contact between the two nations and left-wing artists.

Within his role as the newly appointed Minister of Education, Lunacharsky was also responsible for the arts, which became a particularly difficult task due to the varied nature of Soviet artists’ groups and unions after the Revolution. Despite frequently contentious relations, Narkompros supported a variety of cultural organizations and programs, including those affiliated with Russian Komfut. Artists and writers who identified themselves with the movement served on advisory and administrative boards for Narkompros, while others created agitational propaganda and worked within Proletkult centers for proletarian education. Left-wing Italian futurists latched on to the possibility of establishing similar programs within Italy and viewed Komfut as their most analogous model, often misinterpreting or collapsing the distinctions between the various Russian avant-garde groups and imposing their own interpretations on the immediate post-Revolution period.

Vladimir Lenin and Lunacharsky were also interested in the potential of using Futurism and the avant-garde as a conduit for spreading communist ideology into Europe, which spurred Soviet political and cultural outreach shortly after the October Revolution. The International Section of Narkompros was established in 1918 and was directed to develop contacts with artists

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17 Lodder, Russian Constructivism, 48-54.
18 Cesare G. de Michelis, “I contatti politico-culturali tra futuristi italiani e Russia,” in Futurismo, cultura e politica, ed. Renzo De Felice and George L. Mosse (Torino: Fondazione Giovanni Agnelli, 1988), 369-382. It should be noted that Lenin was not particularly fond of Russian Futurism.
sympathetic to Communism in Western Europe.\textsuperscript{19} The International Section eventually served on the frontline of a programmatic plan to spread Communism that was instituted and overseen by the Comintern, or Third International, which was established the following year in 1919.\textsuperscript{20} Russian artists, like El Lissitzky, were sent systematically to Europe to cultivate relationships with avant-garde artists’ groups beginning in 1921-1922.\textsuperscript{21} Likely as an extension of this program, Leon Trotsky and the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci conferred about the possible role of Futurism in promoting an Italian communist revolution, specifically when Marinetti began to distance himself from Mussolini in 1920.\textsuperscript{22} Moreover, after World War I and before Benito Mussolini’s March on Rome in 1922, the prospect for an Italian variant of Komfut began to circulate in left-wing political and cultural journals, such as \textit{L’Ordine Nuovo} and \textit{Avanguardia}. Italian leftist intellectuals, including Duilio Remondino, Frida Rubner, and Rezio Buscaroli, debated the merits of whether Futurism, which had retreated from an active political engagement at the end of 1920, could be similarly adapted to serve a communist agenda in Italy and whether it could be effectively instituted as a cultural education program for the workers in accordance with Marxist principles of production.\textsuperscript{23}

\textsuperscript{20} Golomstock, \textit{Totalitarian Art}, 61.
\textsuperscript{21} Christina Lodder, “El Lissitzky and the Export of Constructivism,” in \textit{Situating El Lissitzky: Vitebsk, Berlin Moscow}, ed. Nancy Perloff and Brian Reed (Los Angeles, CA: Getty Research Institute, 2003), 33. Lodder has also noted that Lissitzky was potentially part of the Cheka.
\textsuperscript{23} Berghaus, \textit{Futurism and Politics}, 150-155.
Foundational for the Komfut debates was the lost opportunity for an Italian communist
revolution during the Turin factory occupations in 1920. The organization of factory councils in
1919 by Gramsci and members of *L’Ordine Nuovo* (who were then affiliated with the Partito
Socialista Italiano, or PSI) precipitated the occupations and would later become the basis for
local branches of the Communist Party.\(^{24}\) Tensions mounted between the factory workers and
owners leading to waves of general strikes in Turin in April 1920. By September the situation
had escalated with over 500,000 laborers occupying sites of industrial production in northern
Italy. Gramsci, who agitated for the strike to evolve into a full revolution, applauded the
workers’ actions; however, the PSI failed to support the strike.\(^{25}\) The PSI began to fracture over
the party’s involvement in the occupations, which resulted in a splinter group forming the Partito
Comunista Italiano (hereafter PCI) in 1921. The internal divide between the two factions, as
well as the workers’ lost faith in the PSI, weakened the political left in Italy against the rise of
Fascism. Gramsci continued to work with the factory councils in northern Italy and established
the Institute for Proletarian Culture in Turin in 1921, which was a branch of the Soviet
Proletkult.\(^{26}\) A faction of leftist futurists began working with the Turin Proletkult and together
they held the *Esposizione Futurista Internazionale* (Futurist Exhibition International) in May
1922, causing a flurry of interest in a potential alliance between Futurism and Communism.\(^{27}\)

\(^{24}\) David Forgacs and G. Nowell-Smith, ed., *Antonio Gramsci: Selections from Cultural Writings*
(London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1985), 18-19. Forgacs has provided a detailed timeline of the
events of 1919-1921 in Italy as they relate to Gramsci, the factory occupations, and the
development of the PCI.

\(^{25}\) Walter Adamson, “Towards the Prison Notebooks: The Evolution of Gramsci’s Thinking on
Political Organization 1918-1926,” *Polity* 12, no. 1 (Autumn 1979): 38-64. Adamson details the
nuances of Gramsci’s changing political theories with an emphasis on the factory occupations
and how it led to a split between the PCI and PSI as well as how Fascism made major gains as a
direct result of the failed factory occupations.

\(^{26}\) Berghaus, *Futurism and Politics*, 184.

\(^{27}\) Berghaus, *Futurism and Politics*, 185-186.
The possibility of art in the service of a communist revolution based on Russian models began to circulate in Italian artistic and literary journals, such as *Comunismo*, as early as 1919. The potential for Italian variant of Komfut, however, was not widely discussed until the 1922 debates in *Avanguardia*. The concept was popular among the Independent futurists who gathered at Anton Giulio Bragaglia’s Casa d’arte Bragaglia in Rome and those in Turin who were attempting to form centers for proletarian culture. Garnering interest from both Gramsci and Lunacharsky, the anti-bourgeois stance of Futurism seemed perfectly situated to provide the stimulus for an Italian communist revolution. During the spring and the summer of 1922, the debate intensified among communist artists and writers about whether Futurism could serve as a model for proletarian culture, but the March on Rome in October quelled the discussion as the political terrain dramatically shifted.

Although the content of the debates has been well documented, most art historical studies fail to analyze the implications of the fractured leftist futurist groups on the evolution of Futurism. In addition, the correlations between the Italian and Russian debates on proletarian culture are either overlooked or generalized, as are the influences of Russian Komfut on the rise of a machine aesthetic in Italy. 1922 signaled an end to the political goal of proletarian revolution in Italy, but artists continued to subversively extend the style and iconography of the Russian avant-garde well into the 1930s, most notably in the perpetuation of the machine aesthetic and its later incarnation as futurist *aeropittura*.

Central to the growing interest in an Italian variant of Komfut were Vinicio Paladini (1902 Moscow, Russia – 1971 Rome, Italy) and Ivo Pannaggi (1901 Macerata, Italy – 1981.

28 Giovanni Lista, *Arte e politica: il Futurismo di sinistra in Italia* (Milan: Multhipla, 1980), 54-81. The details of this debate will be covered in the next chapter.
Macerata, Italy). Both were part of the Independent futurist group in Rome and they participated in the Turin Proletkult exhibition. In 1922, they also published the influential “L’arte meccanica. Manifesto futurista” (the “Manifesto of Futurist Mechanical Art”) in *La Nuova Lacerba*, which articulated their ideas about the revolutionary potential of the machine aesthetic for a new, mass society. The possibility of an Italian Komfut was seemingly destroyed in 1924 when Marinetti allied Italian Futurism with Fascism. Shortly thereafter, Pannaggi relocated to Germany, removing himself from the grasp of Mussolini’s regime yet retaining his affiliation with Marinetti’s movement. In contrast, Paladini stayed in Italy, divorced himself from Marinetti’s Futurism, and continued to look to the Russian avant-garde for inspiration. In his exhibition reviews and writings on photomontage, film, and architecture from the second half of the 1920s until the mid-1930s, Paladini propagated leftist aesthetics overtly and covertly under Fascism.

Paladini is the main figure of this study because he provided a direct point of contact between the Russian and Italian avant-garde. He had strong ties to Russia, as it was his birthplace, his mother’s homeland, and he made frequent visits to Moscow throughout his lifetime. His mother, Paolina Amosova, and father, Ugo Paladini, provided him with an upper middle class upbringing in Rome, where they relocated shortly after he was born in order to pursue the family business of hotel management. Paladini took up painting as a young man.

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30 *Esposizione futurista internazionale*, Exhibition pamphlet, inaugurated by F.T. Marinetti (March 27, 1922).
32 Giovanni Lista, *Dal Futurismo all'immaginismo: Vinicio Paladini* (Salerno: Il cavaliere azzurro, 1988), 9. His father ran and eventually owned hotels, which caused the family to relocate to Rome in 1903. Lista documents his mother’s name as Paolina Amosoff, but I have adjusted the spelling to reflect contemporary standards for translating Russian last names.
and became a follower of Giacomo Balla and the futurist movement around 1920. It was through Balla and Anton Giulio Bragaglia that he befriended Pannaggi in 1921 and their brief artistic collaboration began. Paladini’s knowledge of the Russian avant-garde garnered him favor among the eclectic mix of Independent futurists that congregated at the Casa d’arte Bragaglia and Teatro degli Indipendenti. Paladini, who considered himself a Bolshevik futurist, had joined the PCI upon its formation in 1921 and injected leftist aesthetic ideology inspired by Gramscian Marxism into the form and content of post-war Italian Futurism.

In 1922 Paladini established himself as cultural writer, contributing four articles to the communist journal, *Avanguardia*. Within each text he promoted the potential use of the mechanical aesthetic as a revolutionary force and the viability of an Italian Komfut. In addition, his interest in Constructivism and Futurism resulted in Paladini’s initial foray into architecture. He worked as an assistant to Virgilio Marchi on the design of the bar at the Casa d’arte Bragaglia in 1922 (Fig. 1.1) and began creating set designs for Bragaglia’s Teatro degli Indipendenti. By the end of 1924, the intervening political turmoil and Marinetti’s rapprochement to Fascism caused Paladini to change his artistic production and to relinquish his push for an Italian Komfut. Instead, he began to develop a new art movement called Imagism, which was inspired by a similarly titled left-wing Russian avant-garde group. Paladini also began studying architecture at the Scuola superiore di architettura in Rome in 1925, earned his degree in 1930, and was certified for practice in 1932. As an early adherent to Italian Rationalism, he advanced the

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33 Basic biographical details for Paladini are included in Carpi and Lista’s texts.
theories of modern architecture in cultural journals beginning in 1928, including *L’Interplanetario, Quadrante,* and *Rassegna di architettura.*

Throughout his career, Paladini consistently presented himself as a Russian-Italian artist and he encouraged the perception of his Bolshevik status by dressing in a *kosovorotka* (a traditional Russian peasant shirt, also called a *tolstovka* for Leo Tolstoy who was also fond of the style; Fig. 1.2 and Fig. 1.3). Unfortunately, he only had a partial mastery of the Russian language, which occasionally hindered his communications with Soviet artists and architects. Due to his connections with and knowledge of the Russian avant-garde, he became a desirable voice in cultural journals that wanted to assert the international relevance of Italian art and architecture. His writings proved foundational for the continued viability of Italian modernism under Mussolini’s regime and informed, through a politically and intellectually leftist stance, the developments of Futurism, Imagism, and Rationalism well into the 1930s.

Paladini’s travels throughout Eastern and Western Europe introduced him to various contemporary avant-garde movements, but two trips to Moscow were particularly important for his artistic development. The first was at the end of 1927 (which extended into 1928) and it informed a spate of articles on Soviet architecture, film, and photomontage. A second trip at the end of 1934 provided fodder for four more texts that focused on the Soviet Union and its cultural and social developments in the midst of Stalin’s Second Five-Year Plan. The main impetus for the later trip was likely Paladini’s disillusionment with the political climate in Italy. Beginning in 1934 he traveled to and lived in the United States, Russia, Italy, and France. Ultimately, he

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settled in New York in 1939 only to return to Italy in the early 1950s due to the anti-communist campaigns of the McCarthy era.\textsuperscript{38} While in the United States, Paladini continued to work with modern and progressive artists and architects, such as Gilbert Rohde, Leon Barmache, and Herbert Bayer, and his innovative designs were featured in architectural journals like \textit{New Pencil Points} alongside those by Marcel Breuer and Walter Gropius.\textsuperscript{39}

Paladini’s desire to integrate futurist techniques with theories promoted in Gramsci’s \textit{L’Ordine Nuovo}, which was created to serve as a source for the political education of the proletariat, is the point of departure for this study.\textsuperscript{40} Gramsci, one of the founding members of the PCI, considered Futurism an important revolutionary aesthetic for its anti-bourgeois stance and role in destroying past artistic forms.\textsuperscript{41} The extremity of futurist antics, Gramsci believed, could be utilized to unfetter the proletariat from dominant social and aesthetic forms. He embraced the Soviet incorporation of the peasantry into his theories as Italy had a small industrial worker base.\textsuperscript{42} He advocated for intellectuals to aid the proletariat and the peasants until they were fully ready to take control of the means of both industrial and artistic production. Paladini would reiterate Gramsci’s concepts of cultural education throughout his writings from 1922 until the mid-1930s.

In both Russia and Italy, communist and Marxist theorists argued that a true social, cultural, and political proletarian revolution needed to arise from the workers and not be dictated

\textsuperscript{38} Lista, \textit{Dal Futurismo}, 60.
\textsuperscript{39} Cennamo, \textit{La Prima esposizione}, 259-260. See also “Selected Details,” \textit{New Pencil Points}, no. 3 (March 1943): 76-79.
\textsuperscript{40} Adamson, “Towards,” 47.
\textsuperscript{42} Forgacs, \textit{The Antonio Gramsci Reader}, 137. According to Forgacs the Soviet Union began focusing on incorporating the peasantry into the communist party in 1923 and Gramsci adapted these ideas to the Italian situation in his writings, the Lyons Theses (1926) and “Some Aspects of the Southern Question” in 1926.
by the bourgeoisie. Although Futurism called for the destruction of bourgeois art, its own middle class foundations damned the movement among Marxist purists. Futurism, due to its early affiliations with Fascism, was suspect, especially after Mussolini’s triumphant March on Rome in 1922. The perception of Futurism as radical and politically leftist was in jeopardy and became a point of discussion between Trotsky and Gramsci. Trotsky panned both Russian and Italian futurists who wanted to aid the communist revolution due to their bourgeois art forms, which did not serve the proletariat. He also perceived the “natural” transition from Italian Futurism to Fascism as early as 1923 in Literature and Revolution when he observed that “It is not an accident, it is not a misunderstanding, that Italian Futurism has merged into the torrent of Fascism; it is entirely in accord with the law of cause and effect.”

Trotsky asserted that Italian revolutionary methods naturally led to Fascism rather than a proletarian revolution, citing Italian Futurism’s affiliation with the World War I interventionists and contrasting it with Russian Futurism, which supported the October Revolution.

In his Prison Notebooks, Gramsci also argued that the Italian means for cultural and societal regeneration and political revolution were distinctly different from those of the Russians. The major difference resided in the strong capitalist and industrialist interests that accommodated the “passive” revolution of Fascism, and the weaknesses of the intellectual class. Similarly, communist writers and artists opposed to Futurism continually pointed out its bourgeois intellectualism, focus on individualism, and its capitalist glorification of industry as evidence of why it could not be the art of the proletariat. The potential for a communist-futurist collaboration was foreclosed as soon as Marinetti began to ally the movement with Fascism at

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the First Futurist Congress in 1924 and when he announced his commitment to the regime by signing the “Manifesto of Fascist Intellectuals” in early 1925.\footnote{Walter Adamson, “Modernism and Fascism: The Politics of Culture in Italy, 1903-1922,” \textit{The American Historical Review} 95, no. 2 (April 1990): 361.}

Once Communism was officially banned by Mussolini’s Exceptional Decrees in 1926, the left was driven underground and sought ways to effect political resistance within Italy. One proposed solution was the concept of \textit{entrismo} (entrism), which is a tactic of infiltrating the dominant political party by working within the system. This strategy had foundations in the 1920s and was promoted by Trotsky, Gramsci, and Palmiro Togliatti in the 1930s to counter rising Fascism throughout Europe.\footnote{Robert Jackson Alexander, \textit{International Trotskyism 1929-1985: A Documented Analysis of the Movement} (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), 348-355. The most famous employment of entrism during this period is also known as the French Turn. It occurred in 1934 when Trotsky advocated for Trotskyists to join the French Socialist Party, as the French Communist Party was unstable.} Togliatti had worked with Gramsci, been a contributor to \textit{L’Ordine Nuovo}, and was instrumental to the development of the PCI. He was delegated to represent the PCI at the Executive Committee of the Communist International in 1926, appointed leadership of the party after Gramsci was imprisoned, and lived in exile due to Mussolini’s ban on Communism.\footnote{Aldo Agosti, \textit{Palmiro Togliatti: A Biography} (London: I.B. Tauris, 2008), 39-42.} Although Trotsky’s concept of entrism was anathema to Stalin due to the former’s dismissal from the Communist Party, Italian communists like Togliatti and Gramsci argued for the efficacy of fighting covertly “inside enemy lines” to instigate mass organization of revolutionary interests and of working with middle class intellectuals with anti-fascist sentiments.\footnote{Agosti, \textit{Palmiro Togliatti}, 70-78.} According to Togliatti and also Gramsci (in his prison writings), the revolution needed to begin by infiltrating workers’ organizations and systematically disabling the power
structures of Fascism. Togliatti’s writings and later lectures on Fascism recommended that communist adherents should work within the fascist system in Italy for both practical, as well as agitational, reasons. I use entrism, as the framework with which to understand Paladini’s relationship to the regime and its cultural policies: fundamentally opposed to Fascism, he nonetheless chose to work and critique it from within. Deliberately antagonistic, he consistently held up Bolshevik aesthetics as the most effective and emancipatory for a modern mass society of workers.

Paladini’s career provides an ideal case study for understanding the political and artistic pluralism of the avant-garde and its relationship to fascist cultural policy. Clear divisions between left and right-wing factions within post-war art movements, such as Italian Futurism, are difficult to draw. Rather, it is vital to consider how Paladini consciously blurred the lines between the two in the wake of World War I and in antagonistic response to Fascism. Further, as my dissertation demonstrates, Paladini’s interest in and dissemination of Russian avant-garde practices was key to the longue durée of modernism under the regime. This neglected artist was well known to fellow futurists (Prampolini and Marinetti expropriated his “L’arte meccanica. Manifesto futurista”) and influenced several artists and architects, including Giuseppe Terragni. Despite its origins in communist ideology, Paladini’s machine aesthetic influenced fascist

49 Agosti, Palmiro Togliatti, 97-99 and Forgacs, Antonio Gramsci Reader, 222-225. Forgacs has noted that Gramsci changed his perspective from a “war of manoeuvre to a long war of position,” meaning that the working class and its intellectual supporters could no longer engage in a direct attack or singular mass movement, but would need to slowly build momentum from within the ranks of workers despite the overarching political system. Agosti has identified how Gramsci’s concept was closely related to Togliatti’s entrism (although unknown to him at the time).

futurist aeropittura (airplane painting), the constructivist designs of the famous Mostra della Rivoluzione Fascista (Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution), and the content of pro-International Style journals, such as Quadrante, which were openly tolerated by the regime. I explore the nexus between communist and fascist aesthetics and how such opposing political positions produced similar artistic products. By examining the shifts within Paladini’s leftist agenda and how it became commandeered by fascist propaganda, or unwittingly served it, my research documents commonalities in the politicizing of aesthetics by both left and right.51

A resurrection of Futurism has transpired in the last decade. Walter Adamson has provided a succinct historiographic assessment of how the movement, due to the taint of Fascism, has long been overlooked or written out of art historical discussions of modernism for decades.52 Beginning in the 1950s, Reyner Banham suggested that the political component of Futurism was irrelevant to its study, which had a two-fold effect: usually only the first wave of the movement was addressed in the literature and when mentioned, the second wave futurists were divorced from their political affiliations.53 The complexity of futurist politics was only introduced in the 1970s and 1980s. Since the 1990s and with Futurism’s centennial in 2009, the intricacies of the movement have been carefully investigated. Yet there remains a focus on

51 Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in Illuminations, ed. by Hannah Arendt, trans. By Harry Zohn (New York, NY: Schocken Books, 1955), 217-252. [Orig. pub. 1936] I am employing Benjamin’s terminology in regards to the his larger argument about the role of Marinetti’s Futurism in the fascist “introduction of aesthetics into politics” as I will be discussing the similarities and overlaps with the communist program of “ politicizing art.”


Marinetti as the political epicenter of Futurism; however, this is problematic as it excludes studies of futurists who fell outside of his favor and by default, the favor of Fascism.

Scholarship by Adamson, Ruth Ben-Ghiat, Emily Braun, Emilio Gentile, and Marla Stone has demonstrated the livelihood of fascist modernisms. This dissertation, however, addresses a still understudied history: the agenda and production of an avant-garde faction that maintained a pursuit of socialist-communist ideals. A study of Paladini’s career imparts valuable insights into why and how leftist intellectuals worked within the fascist regime in Italy. Further, Paladini’s international contacts and travels in the 1920s and 1930s complicate previous interpretations of fascist cultural insularity or parochialism. Mussolini’s pluralistic patronage supplied Paladini with opportunities to continue contributing to the state-sponsored artistic milieu, implicating his project in regime propaganda, yet also allowed him a public platform, such as exhibitions and cultural journals, for the expression of his ideas. As such, the bulk of the evidence for this project is based on a close examination of his public works and published articles as they had the most direct impact on the development of a fascist aesthetic.

My thesis relies on interdisciplinary approaches to culture under totalitarian regimes of left and right. Vladimir Markov, a scholar on Russian literature, has written comprehensively on the futurist and imagist factions within Russia.\textsuperscript{54} John Bowlt and Anna Maltese Lawton’s translations of Russian manifestos published by the \textit{LEF} group and Christina Lodder’s extensive research on the Russian constructivists and productivists are foundational for contextualizing Paladini’s understanding of the Russian avant-garde.\textsuperscript{55} Recent exhibition catalogues, including

\begin{itemize}
\item Markov, \textit{Russian Futurism} and Vladimir Markov, \textit{Russian Imagism 1919-1924} (Giessen: W. Schmitz Verlag, 1980).
\item Bowlt, \textit{Russian Art}; Anna Maltese Lawton, \textit{Main Lines of Convergence between Russia and Italian Futurism} (Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms, 1979); and Christina Lodder, \textit{Russian Constructivism} (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1983).
\end{itemize}
those edited by John Milner, Ester Coen, and Didier Ottinger, have addressed the foundational interactions between the Italian and Russian futurists during the pre-World War I period.\textsuperscript{56} In addition, Walter Adamson and David Forgacs’s publications have examined Antonio Gramsci’s Marxist theories in context with the Italian avant-garde.\textsuperscript{57}

By contrast, the art historical literature on the 1920s political and aesthetic interactions between Russian and Italian Futurism is lacking in general and is particularly scant in relation to Paladini. Despite his increasing estrangement from the futurists, and later, the rationalists, due to their public support of Fascism, Paladini continued to work in Italy until the mid-1930s. Writers on Paladini often misconstrue the complexity of his relationship with Communism and Fascism by ignoring his work and writings after 1927, glossing over the basic details of his career trajectory until his departure for the United States, or mistakenly declaring him a convert to Fascism.\textsuperscript{58} This study extends beyond the well-studied period of his early work to explore his significant contribution to cultural debates after 1927 and his trips to Moscow, delving into the influence of his exposure to Soviet film, photomontage, and architectural theory.

The isolated scholarship on Paladini that exists depends, for the most part, on Giovanni Lista’s sweeping survey of the leftist futurist faction in selected political journals of the early


\textsuperscript{57} Forgacs and Nowell-Smith, \textit{Antonio Gramsci: Selections}; Forgacs, \textit{Antonio Gramsci Reader}; and Adamson, “Towards,” 38-64.

\textsuperscript{58} Carpi’s \textit{Bolscevico immaginista} and Lista’s \textit{Dal Futurismo} do not address the problematic nature of Paladini’s post-1927 works nor his complex relationship to the fascist regime. Carpi concluded his study of Imagism with a meditation on the myth of the Soviet Union and Lista suggested that Paladini’s last trip to Moscow left him disillusioned with the current state of affairs. A recent publication by Ilaria Schiaffini only mentioned a few photomontages by Paladini in the 1930s, but ignored that they were published in \textit{Quadrivio}. Berghaus’s \textit{Futurism and Politics} summarizes the situation by stating that Paladini could not continue his communist affiliations under Fascism.
1920s, and on Umberto Carpi’s more detailed chronicle of communist artists and writers in Rome during the 1920s.\(^5^9\) Within the Italian literature, Paladini has only garnered one monograph by Lista. His manifold relationships with the Russian avant-garde have barely been plumbed, preventing a fuller understanding of the Italian component of the international constructivist movement.\(^6^0\) A perfect complement to Lista’s monograph is Carpi’s above-mentioned social history. Carpi considers Paladini’s writings, but he does not analyze their connections to his artworks, their continued response to issues within the Russian avant-garde long after the idea of an Italian variant of Komfut became untenable, or their interrogation of the cultural policies of Fascism.\(^6^1\) Enrico Crispolti and Claudia Salaris have discussed Paladini’s fascination with the Russian avant-garde, but only in relation to the machine aesthetic in the 1920s.\(^6^2\) The basics of Paladini’s affiliation with Italian Rationalism have been covered by Michele Cennamo, but without exploring the ideological implications of his communist background.\(^6^3\) More recently, Illaria Schiaffini has written about Paladini’s explorations in photomontage, linking them to his interest in Soviet film, but she does not place this aspect of his career in a larger context, and fails to understand how photomontage related to his goal of shaping a revolutionary consciousness.\(^6^4\) Although each of these Italian historians has touched on the influence of the Russian avant-garde on Paladini’s oeuvre, none has delved into exactly how his writings and artwork directly correlate to the specifics of Soviet Constructivism,

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\(^5^9\) Carpi, *Bolscevico immaginista* and Lista, *Arte e politica*.

\(^6^0\) Lista, *Dal Futurismo*. Lista is more detailed in regards to Paladini’s relationship with the French avant-garde.

\(^6^1\) Carpi, *Bolscevico immaginista*.


\(^6^3\) Cennamo, *La Prima esposizione*.

photomontage, film, and architecture. This study, instead, tracks the evolution of Paladini’s career in relation to political and cultural developments in both Italy and the Soviet Union.

In the Anglo-American literature, very little has been written about Paladini and the leftist futurists, despite the recent flurry of scholarship on Marinetti’s movement around the 2009 centenary. Günter Berghaus merely recapitulates Lista’s and Carpi’s framing of Paladini as a Bolshevik futurist in the first half of the 1920s, and his survey texts on the development of fascist theater and literature include only brief references to Paladini’s contributions.65 Christine Poggi and Maria Elena Versari have each written essays on the second phase of Futurism that examine a few constructivist artworks produced by Paladini; however, neither scholar addresses his full career and continued communication with the Russian avant-garde.66 Most recently, Masha Salazkina’s article on film theory documents Paladini’s contacts with the Soviet Union, but her primary focus is on Umberto Barbaro, Paladini’s colleague and fellow Soviet-phile.67 Perhaps the most glaring oversight in the literature relates to his writings and affiliation with the Italian functionalist architecture movement, Rationalism. Garnering only passing references from Dennis Doordan in his study on the politics of fascist building, Paladini is completely omitted from Richard Etlin’s definitive survey of modern Italian architecture.68

Undoubtedly the lack of attention to Paladini stems from the vicissitudes of his career, the fact that he was more important as a critic than as an artist, and the paucity of works that remain, by comparison to other artists of the period. The latter is a result too, of his anti-fascist stance and eventual exile. To begin with, as an artist who worked during Futurism’s second phase, he is part of a general neglect of the movement between the wars by Anglo-American scholars. For example, the exhibition, *Italian Futurism, 1909-1944: Reconstructing the Universe* at the Guggenheim Museum in 2014 is the first ever in North America to deal with futurist artists and writers during the fascist *ventennio*. Yet the fact that only one work by Paladini (his revised rather than original mechanical manifesto) is included in the exhibition and none of his works are featured in the attendant catalogue is painfully ironic as he was one of the few openly anti-fascist futurists.\(^{69}\) Hence this show, while duly documenting the alliance between Futurism and Fascism, omits consideration of the dissent within the movement, especially in the form of Soviet inspired constructivist imagery. Another irony is the presence in this exhibition of a featured group of works by Pannaggi, who was initially a communist-Futurist and Paladini's co-author of “L’arte meccanica” manifesto. Pannaggi lived primarily outside of Italy, yet retained his alliance with Marinetti’s Futurism, which proved advantageous to the promotion and long-term legacy of his work. To the detriment of Paladini, Pannaggi is given precedence in the creation of the post-war machine aesthetic.

Paladini’s position was on the fringe of both Futurism and Fascism, pointing to a larger issue in assessing his oeuvre and giving him his due: the small amount of his production and the subsequent dispersal or loss of his works due to his leftist politics and his itinerant life. The majority of his artwork is no longer extant and a study of his corpus relies primarily on an

examination of reproductions in journals and newspapers from the 1920s and 1930s. Tracking down many of these publications is in itself a difficult task due to the destruction and elimination of many communist journals in the second half of the 1920s as well as the limited access to fascist journals and files from the 1930s at Italian libraries and archives. His earliest works, particularly those created during the height of his communist-futurist period in 1922, are all missing or destroyed.

Very few of Paladini’s works are in publicly held collections. These include one series of photomontages at the Museo di Storia della Fotografia Fratelli Alinari in Florence; his post-1950s architectural drawings at the A.A.M. Architettura Arte Moderna in Rome; and a small selection of his book cover illustrations from the 1930s and his post-1950s furniture designs at the Centro APICE (Archivi della Parola, dell’Immagine e della Comunicazione Editoriale) in Milan. Otherwise, the majority of his remaining artwork resides in private collections and has been distributed through auction houses, including L’Arengario Studio Bibliografico and Porro & C. Art Consulting. Because auction records are confidential, these works are particularly hard to locate; therefore, research requires reviewing incomplete information, improper dating, and reproduced images by the auction houses in catalogues and on their websites. Compounding the difficulty in researching Paladini, no formal archive exists of his correspondence, which is likely due to his constant travels and sudden relocations. I have tracked down many of his letters in the archives of their recipients throughout Europe and the United States. Because Paladini is not considered a major artist, often his correspondence is improperly filed or he is not listed on the finding aids. Furthermore, his contacts in the Soviet Union were inaccessible until recently due to the end of Communism and the Cold War as well as to the delayed implementation of digital databases and finding aids by Russian archives.
My dissertation is the first comprehensive study in English of Paladini’s writings on Soviet photomontage, architecture, theatre, and film that fully documents and contextualizes his dissemination of communist ideology and aesthetics into the Italian cultural milieu during the fascist ventennio. As a conduit for international styles within Italy and an ambassador for Italian modernism without, Paladini’s career evidences and revises the current literature’s supposition that the leftist faction only exerted influence on the development of the Italian avant-garde between 1920 and 1924. My dissertation follows a predominantly chronological order guided by different thematic considerations of Paladini’s art production and cultural writings. Each chapter also addresses how his work was motivated by the communist left and yet was commandeered by the interests of the fascist right in the 1920s and 1930s in Italy.

“Rise of the Machine Aesthetic: Communist-Futurism in Italy” primarily focuses on 1922, a critical year in the height and ultimate defeat of Italian leftist political and cultural aspirations. It documents the connections between Russian and Italian Futurism from 1918 to 1922 and provides essential background information for understanding the emergence of Paladini’s artistic agenda as a communist-futurist as he navigated between the ideas of Gramsci and Marinetti. Although fairly dormant in 1922, Italian Futurism had a history of activist art that was readily commandeered by both the right- and left-wing, and that would later yield complex overlaps between communist and fascist aesthetics. Marinetti supported Gramsci’s Turin branch of Proletkult and officially approved of its collaboration with Futurism, yet he emphatically rejected Communism. Likewise, Gramsci considered aspects of Marinetti’s Futurism conducive to a communist revolution for its anti-bourgeois stance, but denounced its fixation on individualism. During this same period, Russian futurists debated how they could best facilitate

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70 Berghaus, *Futurism and Politics*, 209.
the ongoing Revolution, which resulted in the development of new movements, such as Komfut. The latter became a key point of reference for Paladini.

I address discussions in communist cultural journals about creating an Italian variant of Komfut and focus on how Paladini’s contributions to this debate led to a machine style that resonated with its Russian counterpart. Influenced by Komfut’s cultural proselytizing, Paladini intended that his essays, artwork, and “L’arte meccanica” manifesto would propagate the positive role of the machine in both the worker’s life and the artist’s production. Here, an assessment of Gramsci’s interpretation of the failed Turin factory occupations and his contention that intellectuals should adopt an educative role to facilitate a proletarian revolution is vital, for it clarifies the Marxist basis of Paladini’s machine aesthetic. For Paladini, the form and function of machines could combine futurist aesthetics with Bolshevik politics in the common goal of cultural revolution. Yet, in following the model of Russian Komfut, he wrongly assumed that there was more in common between Italy and Russia than actually existed. Moreover, Paladini’s dependence on certain pre-war Italian futurist models inevitably contributed to the evolution of the futurist machine aesthetic, which ultimately became bound with Fascism and strident nationalism. Hence the forms and iconography of his proletarian man-machine were easily adapted by fascist futurists, such as Prampolini, toward the ends of depicting the steely fascist “new man.”

“Between Futurism and Fascism: The Constructivist Alternative” encompasses 1923 to 1924, the period when Paladini acknowledged the increasing incompatibility of his communist-Futurism with Marinetti’s Futurism. Aesthetic concepts based on the Russian avant-garde began permeating European art and literary journals due to the opening of borders between the East and West. Paladini turned his attention to Soviet Constructivism, which had been entwined with the
goals of Komfut. As I show, Paladini was the most perceptive critic in Italy, explaining the nuanced and rapid developments of Soviet aesthetics in a moment of intense infighting. Central to the chapter are Paladini’s writings that addressed the rise of constructivist tendencies in the international avant-garde, particularly his understudied *Arte nella Russia dei Soviets: Il Padiglione dell’U.R.S.S. a Venezia* (Art in Soviet Russia: The U.S.S.R. Pavilion in Venice), one of the most comprehensive reviews of the Soviet Pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 1924. His astute observations revealed his rudimentary understanding of two different types of Constructivism that were emerging out of the Russian avant-garde and their ideological divide along principles of Marxist materialism: The Moscow group *Obshchestvo molodykh khudozhnikov* (Russia’s Society of Young Artists, OBMOKhU) promoted the productivist principles developed by the Working Group of Constructivists and Kazimir Malevich’s Vitebsk-based *Utverditeli novogo iskusstva* (the Affirmers of the New Art, UNOVIS) continued to focus on suprematist spatial studies. Both OBMOKhU and UNOVIS were formed in 1919, but their concepts did not begin to filter into Western Europe until 1922 and their artistic production was unseen in Italy until the 1924 Venice Biennale. Paladini’s earliest designs for theater sets and architectural interiors document his adaptation of Soviet models. Tellingly, the futurists de-communized his projects and used them to promote their modernist aesthetic over the next decade.

This chapter seeks to un-tether Paladini from Pannaggi as it has negated his role as a mouthpiece for Constructivism in the Anglo-American literature. Although Paladini and Pannaggi’s differing interpretations of Constructivism have been noted in the Italian research (particularly by Lista), the nuances of their distinguishing characteristics require further elaboration. Pannaggi’s early writings and artwork indicated a focus on the formal values of
architectonic structures, while Paladini fixated on the revolutionary potential of construction. Conversely, Pannaggi was motivated by the growing interest in a variant of Constructivism that was predominant in Western Europe, particularly among Dutch and German architects. By publicly positioning himself and his artwork as politically neutral, Pannaggi’s machine aesthetic bolstered him to the highest ranks of Marinetti’s Futurism and allowed for his continued involvement in the movement. Paladini, on the other hand, both publicly and aesthetically began distancing himself from Marinetti’s Futurism as early as 1923.71

“Immaginismo: The Aesthetics of the Left under Fascism” places Paladini in the context of a small group of artists and writers who maintained their allegiance to Marxism and Anarchism, but understood that in fascist Italy, the goals of revolution could only be advanced in the realm of culture. This chapter takes as its departure Marinetti’s full embrace of Fascism at the First Futurist Congress in November 1924, when all hopes of a leftist component within Futurism were dashed. The imagist movement formed by Umberto Barbaro, Antonio Fornari, Dino Terra, Paolo Flores, and Paladini operated through a number of small journals, whose content promoted Soviet art and politics until they were suppressed by the regime. These journals included Fede! (1923-1926), Vita! Libertaria (1925), La Ruota Dentata (1927) and the small publishing company La Bilancia (1923-1925).72 Paladini’s determination to be a politically engaged artist was complicated and eventually compromised by the anti-Bolshevik and anti-communist policies of Mussolini’s regime that were enacted in 1926.

Within the orbit of Imagism, Paladini propagated the key aims of Gramscian Marxism, which was equally affirmed in his writings for anarchist journals during the mid-1920s.

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72 Fede! Settimanale anarchico di cultura e di difesa was published until late 1929 or early 1930; however, the journal was only printed in Rome until the end of 1926.
Although the proletariat had missed its opportunity for revolution, Paladini continued to assert a belief in the potential of creating the necessary groundwork, or what he called “spiritual necessity.” Imagism, however, marked a period of transition for Paladini in his own artistic production. He looked to international models for photo-collage and photomontage, specifically those of the left-wing Dada and surrealist movements. At the same time, he was strongly influenced by the verist branch of *Neue Sachlichkeit*, especially the works of George Grosz and their form of overt social criticism. Paladini aesthetically and ideologically adapted his hybrid man-machine, an emblem of the workers’ revolution, in flagrant defiance of the new conditions of the fascist regime. Through imagist collage – specifically his compositional strategies, narratives, and iconography – he aimed to stimulate and modernize the mind of the viewer, while at the same time, pondered the role of the intellectual in the new age of the masses. The chapter culminates in a discussion of Paladini’s photomontages featured on the cover of *La Ruota Dentata* and for the film *Luna Park traumatico*, both of 1927, as these represented the pinnacle of his imagist artwork and with it, a new means of artistic production.

Paladini’s interest in Soviet film theory from his initial encounter in 1927 through his last visit to the Soviet Union in 1934 is detailed in “From the Machine Aesthetic to the Mechanical Eye: Encountering Russian Film.” At the end of 1927, Paladini traveled to Moscow and his direct contact with the Russian avant-garde occurred at a critical moment in its development given that Joseph Stalin had just taken control of the Secretariat. Paladini’s visit to Soviet film studios had a direct impact on his work and encouraged his interest in filmic montage and documentary realism. Understanding montage’s constructivist and productivist foundations, Paladini focused on how film was a viable extension of his aesthetic and political beliefs first articulated in 1922. His texts on Soviet film also fueled his reputation as an arbiter of
international culture as he became a featured contributor to the flurry of new Italian cinema journals in the second half of the 1920s.

This chapter explores how Paladini’s writings informed the development of the state-sponsored film industry in Italy, which ultimately facilitated the increasing use of films for fascist propaganda. Impressed by his tours of Moscow film studios, he advocated for a restructuring of the Italian film industry based on the model of Soviet state-sponsorship. By merging elements of Imagism with ideas promoted by Soviet constructivists and film theoreticians, such as Alexei Gan and Dziga Vertov, Paladini envisioned a new form of agitational propaganda in line with his earlier, utopian goals of transforming the consciousness of the masses. Unfortunately, he witnessed with dismay the use and alteration of Soviet filmic montage and propaganda for fascist films. Despite his disillusionment with the Italian film industry, upon his return to Italy and well into the 1930s, Paladini’s interest in Soviet models did not wane. Instead he attempted to contact Vertov and continued advancing the Soviet filmmakers’ documentary realism and filmic montage strategies.

“Italian Rationalism and the Rise of a Fascist Architecture” addresses the significant influence Soviet architecture had on Paladini. After his trip to Moscow in 1927, he began endorsing Italian Rationalism as the best architecture to meet the needs of the masses. Paladini scathingly observed how rationalist concepts, many of which had been drawn from the Russian avant-garde, were usurped for regime building in the 1930s. The political leanings of his articles were readily acknowledged and resulted in his identification with Soviet Constructivism rather than the International Constructivism affiliated with Theo van Doesburg’s De Stijl.73 His criticism of the period overtly acknowledged the debt of Italian Rationalism to Soviet

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73 Karel Teige, “F.T. Marinetti + italská moderna + světový futurismus,” RED 2, no. 6 (1929): 201.
constructivist architecture, notably the Ob’edinenie sovremennykh arkhitektorov (Association of Contemporary Architects, OSA), whose impact was also seen in his own architectural renderings of the period. These roots would later haunt the Italian rationalist movement during the fascist anti-Bolshevik, anti-Semitic, and anti-modernist campaigns in the mid-1930s.

The second half of the chapter focuses on Paladini’s awareness of the increasing fascistization of Italian Rationalism and his willingness to speak out against it. I analyze his polemical response to the loaded issue of mediterraneità, a hallmark of rising fascist and nationalist rhetoric and a term increasingly used by certain functionalist architects in an attempt to curry favor with the regime or out of genuine belief in Fascism. His disdain for the architectural movement’s posturing and compromises resulted in a series of incisive essays and photomontages that caused his ousting from mainstream Rationalism with which he had been associated since its advent. Pannaggi, writing on Italian and German architecture from Berlin and Düsseldorf for Italian publications, is reintroduced in this chapter as a point of comparison to illuminate how his perspectives on Rationalism, state patronage of architecture, and mediterraneità differed from Paladini’s. By the end of the 1930s, Paladini and Pannaggi, who had once been highly praised for their international standpoint and contacts, were targeted due to the presumed “Judeo-Bolshevik” content of their earlier articles. These attacks were motivated by the passing of the Racial Laws in 1938 in Italy, which caused conservative critics aligned with Germany’s anti-Kulturbolschewismus (anti-cultural Bolshevism) policies to denounce modern and abstract art and architecture as being corrupted by Bolshevik and Jewish influence.

“Gadfly of Fascist Culture: Paladini’s Exhibition Reviews” examines Paladini’s work as a cultural critic between 1923 and 1934. From his first Venice Biennale review, which identified the seeds of nationalism and combated the premise that Fascism was revolutionary, to his last,
which coincided with the exhibition’s “consolidated institutional role as a centerpiece of official culture,” Paladini’s writings documented the shifting landscape of Italian culture in relation to the rise of Fascism. His critiques identified the conflation between official art and politics, revealing how the patronage system encouraged self-fascistization as a measure for artistic success. Paladini addressed not only the early period, when accommodating the regime was based on pandering to the new government and self-censorship, but also the 1930s, when coercion and censorship became increasingly enforced. Reviews in small journals (versus the mass press) provided him with a platform for anti-fascist polemics. It was one of the few options available to him in the ever-narrowing realms of acceptable public dissent. Exploiting Mussolini’s pluralistic and relatively tolerant cultural policy, Paladini was able to voice his opposition to the nationalist rhetoric of italianità and the underlying censorship of the patronage system. His reviews suggested the relative freedom enjoyed by artists and writers and yet revealed the carefully orchestrated, nationalist nature of the fascist patronage system.

Paladini’s exhibition reviews and assessments of Italy’s cultural programs under Mussolini are again put in relief to his former machine aesthetic collaborator. Pannaggi is included in this chapter to show the disparity between insider and outsider opinions of the fascist regime. Pannaggi, who was based in Berlin and writing for La Casabella and L’Ambrosiano, considered Mussolini’s patronage system sensible and open to the avant-garde in comparison to the Gleichschaltung programs instituted by Adolf Hitler and the National Socialists in Germany. Gleichschaltung was designed to systematically assert a cohesive German aesthetic and banned

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art that was modern, Bolshevik, or deemed “Jewish.”\textsuperscript{75} The policies resulted in extreme limitations on artistic freedoms, including the regulation of artistic production as well as the dismissal of artists from teaching positions and unions based on race. Pannaggi’s negative assessment of the German situation introduced the Italian public to the early stages of Aryanization and attacks on art considered “Judeo-Bolshevik” in Germany. Paladini, on the other hand, was one of the few cultural critics working within Italy who spoke openly against Mussolini’s cultural agenda and predicted its oppressive trajectory. To the end, Paladini contrasted the curtailing of freedom under fascist Italy with the promise of the Soviet Union’s art and cultural programs. His ideological zeal blinded him to the failures of the Bolshevik revolution, even after Stalin had developed his totalitarian state. When considered together, Paladini and Pannaggi’s exhibition reviews provide insight into how two artists affiliated with the left were able to exploit Mussolini’s pluralistic cultural policy in order to promote modern art, architecture, and their personal agendas. Because they documented the trajectory of fascist cultural policy from the façade of pluralism to the rise of nationalism and ultimately the institution of \textit{Gleichschaltung}-derived cultural reforms, Paladini and Pannaggi’s writings are a valuable indicator of the changing relationship between art and politics during the interwar years in Italy.

The final chapter, “The Politics of Photomontage and Photo-based Exhibition Design,” concludes this study’s appraisal of Paladini’s unwitting contribution to the fascist modernist aesthetic. I first consider how his writings on Soviet filmic montage and documentary realism permeated his own photomontage experiments. In addition, it considers how readily Soviet theories regarding cultural production for the masses could be adapted for the nationalist and

\textsuperscript{75} Berthold Hinz, \textit{Art in the Third Reich} (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1979). Hinz’s book is one of the earliest surveys of art and cultural policies during Hitler’s regime.
corporatist ideologies of Fascism. The chapter includes an evaluation of Paladini’s photomontages created in the 1930s for *Occidente* (1932-1935), the publishing company Le Edizioni d’Italia, and *Quadrivio* (1933-1941). Here, a division of his montages into those that have narrative illustrations and those that critique the cultural programs of the fascist regime proves helpful in establishing the ranges and uses of Paladini’s photomontage. Whereas *Occidente* was geared toward the international in art and literature, *Quadrivio* had a more complicated trajectory. Under its editor, Telesio Interlandi, the latter moved from being a politically centrist and culturally heterogeneous review, into a platform for militant Fascism and anti-Semitism. The fate of Paladini’s work for the journal shows ways in which right-wing fascist factions borrowed his style.

Fascist artists were fully aware of the innovative Soviet uses of documentary photography for propagandistic purposes by mid-1928 due to the *Internationale Presse Ausstellung* (*International Press Exhibition*, or Pressa) in Cologne where El Lissitzky employed photomontage, or photofriezes, in a total environment. As has been well documented in the literature, the influence of the Pressa exhibition was immediately felt in Italy, most notably with the *Mostra della Rivoluzione Fascista* in 1932. While Giuseppe Terragni’s Room O at the *Mostra della Rivoluzione Fascista* is usually compared to Lissitzky’s work, Paladini’s writings, it will be shown, directly informed Terragni’s design. Indeed, an examination of Room O and its accompanying catalogue text written by Dino Alfieri and Luigi Freddi reveals both to be steeped

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in the concepts of documentary, filmic montage introduced by Paladini’s writings in Italian journals in late 1927 and early 1928. The chapter concludes with his seeming accommodation to the regime when he created photomurals for the Italian pavilion at *L’Exposition Universelle et Internationale de Bruxelles* (the *Universal and International Exposition of Brussels*) in 1935. Rather than dismissing his photomurals as merely evidence of his capitulation to Fascism, I propose that it exemplified his strategy of entrism. The exhibition design was one of his only opportunities to demonstrate filmic montage and documentary realism based on the Soviet model. Finally, his participation in the exhibition provided Paladini with the opportunity to make an unannounced trip to New York City on the eve of the invasion of Ethiopia in 1935 in his first attempt to relocate to the United States.\(^77\)

The fascist period witnessed a twenty-year accommodation of Italian artists and intellectuals to the regime. The number of overt anti-fascists was small by comparison to the majority of ardent supports and opportunists. In an era marked by equivocation, Paladini stands out because he continued to promote aspects of Soviet avant-garde culture, even after mainstream Futurism and Rationalism refused to acknowledge its influence out of ideological bias. In addition, he used his reviews of developments in the Soviet avant-garde to point out the hypocrisies and compromises of modernism under Fascism. Finally, Paladini’s emigration from Italy to the United States rather than to the Soviet Union underscores the larger fate of the avant-garde under totalitarian regimes of left and right. It also acknowledged that the utopia represented by the USSR was as much a fallacy as the fascist state.

\(^{77}\) Lista, *Dal Futurismo*, 60.
Chapter 2

Rise of the Machine Aesthetic: Communist-Futurism in Italy

After World War I and in response to the 1920 failed occupation of factories by workers in Turin, Italian artists and writers on the left struggled to find a new means of cultural revolution that could be extended to a restructuring of society. A faction within the Rome-based futurists found inspiration in Komfut, the Russian group founded in 1919 and led by Vladimir Majakovsky and Osip Brik. The poet and critic, who were later essential to the politicized aesthetics of the journal LEF (Zhurnal levogo fronta iskusstv, 1923-1925), asserted that pre-October Revolution futurists could serve the new Soviet state by aligning themselves with the proletariat and destroying the bourgeois past.1 Supported by Anatoly Lunacharsky, Narkompros, and the IZO (Otdel izobrazitel’nykh iskusstv, the Narkompros division dedicated to the fine arts), Komfut engaged in agitational-propaganda and educational programs during the immediate post-October Revolution period.2

The emphasis on the artist’s integral role as a cultural worker, which was central to the organization of Komfut, began circulating as early as 1918 in the St. Petersburg journal, Art of the Commune.3 Articles written by Brik, Majakovsky, Boris Kushner, and Nikolai Punin asserted that artists should redefine themselves as constructors who were critically engaged with mechanical production. These early articles also highlighted a desire for intellectual workers to unite with the proletariat to develop a new culture in the wake of the communist revolution.

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2 Fitzpatrick, 120-127.
3 Lodder, Russian Constructivism, 76-78. Lodder’s book traces the foundations of Russian Constructivism and Productivism to Art of the Commune.
With only invocations for artists to enter the streets and production, Komfut suffered from an ill-defined strategy for how to rebuild Russian culture to serve the proletariat. Yet the emphasis on production and construction would ultimately become foundational for Russian Constructivism and the journal, *LEF*.

Although lacking a clear course of action, Komfut artists focused on agitational propaganda as a means to bridge the gap between the proletariat and intellectuals as well as on abandoning easel painting, as it was an ineffective means for communicating with the masses. Several artists, including Vladimir Tatlin, began working directly with government organizations and became teachers at the newly inaugurated Institute of Artistic Culture (*Institut khudozhestvennoi kul’try*, INKhUK) and the Higher State Artistic and Technical Workshops (*Vysshie gosudarstvennye khudozhestvenno-tekhnicaske masterkie*, VKhUTEMAS) in 1920. In addition, artists who identified themselves as communist futurists, such as Natan Altman, served on advisory and administrative boards for Narkompros that helped organize exhibitions, street decorations and demonstrations, and agitational propaganda targeted at the Russian proletariat. Altman’s decorations for the Palace Square in St. Petersburg to celebrate the first anniversary of the revolution (1918), Majakovsky’s ROSTA (Russian Telegraph Agency, 1919-1921) posters and window displays, and Tatlin’s *Monument to the Third International* (1919-1920) were among the most successful agitational propaganda projects defined as futurist collaborations with Narkompros.

Italian communist-futurists, like Vinicio Paladini, drew on the ideas of the Russian avant-garde, clashing frequently with the aesthetically conservative members of the PCI. In addition,

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4 Lodder, *Russian Constructivism*, 48-54.
5 Lodder, *Russian Constructivism*, 48. As Lodder has noted, the title “futurist” was given to most artists who were avant-garde and leftist in immediate the post-Revolution period.
Gramsci proposed the potential of using Marinetti’s Futurism to agitate for cultural and political revolution. As a result, a debate erupted within the pages of various communist journals about the viability of an Italian variant of Komfut. Italian artists, however, were unaware of the disparate nature of Russia’s Komfut and had a minimal understanding of its relationship to Narkompros. In Italy, the term “Komfut” became a catchall for revolutionary art with a communist agenda, but it was conflated with Marinetti’s Futurism. Paladini, however, seemed to have a more nuanced understanding of the specific ideology promoted by Majakovsky, Brik, and Punin, which had elements of nascent Russian Constructivism. Although a discussion of Gramsci and the cultural feuds of the left-wing is necessary to understand the context of Paladini’s role in the emergence of the post-war machine aesthetic in Italy, it is not the express purpose of this chapter; instead, it will focus on the nexus between the Turin Proletkult, Gramscian Marxism, and the debate regarding proletarian culture to demonstrate how and why 1922 was a critical year for Italian communist-Futurism.

**The 1922 Political Divide in Italy**

The 1922 debates on proletarian art and culture were triggered in part by F.T. Marinetti. Despite Marinetti’s political distance from Communism, Lunacharsky declared him a revolutionary at the Second World Congress of the Comintern in July-August 1920. Lunacharsky’s statement was even more surprising when compared to his pre-war negative reviews of Marinetti. Lunacharsky’s declaration immediately caused rumors to circulate that Marinetti had become a communist. Leftists throughout Italy, however, began to debate the merits of Lunacharsky’s statement and often dismissed it based on Marinetti’s earlier aggressive

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6 Markov, *Russian Futurism*, 149.
disavowal of Communism.⁷

Among those who joined the debate was Gramsci, who was one of the founding members of the PCI and the Turin Proletkult, a center for promoting the cultural education of the proletariat. He had been agitating for the reform of the Partito Socialista Italiano (PSI) since the 1917 Russian Revolution.⁸ In January 1921, when the PCI finally split from the PSI, Gramsci became one of Italy’s leading Marxist theoreticians. His journal L’Ordine Nuovo became a mouthpiece for the PCI and a repository for advocating social and cultural revolution.

Gramsci’s interest in Futurism had been established in 1913 with his essay, “The Futurists,” in which he lauded the agitational power of the movement.⁹ He continued writing about the potential of the futurists until he moved from Italy to Moscow in 1922. He also encouraged the inclusion of futurists in the educational components of the Turin Proletkult and provided protection to the leftist-futurists, who were at odds with their more reactionary aesthetic counterparts and the artistically conservative members of the PCI.¹⁰ Upon his return to Italy in 1924, the political climate and the merger between Fascism and Futurism diminished Gramsci’s interest in Marinetti and his group, a distaste that only increased after his imprisonment in 1926.¹¹ Nonetheless, through 1922 Gramsci’s interest in cultural education, his connection with Moscow, and his belief in the potential of Futurism made him the primary reference point for

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⁷ Lista, Arte e politica, 65-66. The essay that Lista is specifically referring to is Marco Ramperti, “Teatro Futurista” originally published in the December 1920 issue of Comunismo, which is reprinted in Lista, Arte e politica, 173-175.
⁸ Adamson, “Towards,” 38-64. Adamson provides a comprehensive review of the PSI/PCI debate and Gramsci’s role in it.
¹⁰ Berghaus, Futurism and Politics, 180-196.
¹¹ Forgacs and Nowell-Smith, Antonio Gramsci: Selections. Details about Gramsci’s life are included in section introductions throughout the book; however, Forgacs specifically notes the shift in Gramsci’s writing about Futurism on pages 47-48.
Italian communist-futurists. His writings were often echoed in the 1922 essays of Paladini and Duilio Remondino, the main spokesmen of communist-Futurism. Although these articles have been reviewed by Umberto Carpi, Giovanni Lista, and Günter Berghaus, it is necessary to summarize their content and context in order to understand how Paladini’s machine aesthetic emerged in the post-war years and how Marinetti’s Futurism altered it in accordance with Mussolini’s rise to power.\footnote{I rely heavily on Lista, Carpi, and Berghaus for background information and documentation of the 1922 debates regarding a merger between Futurism with Communism and Paladini’s role in it. Although this information has been covered in prior publications, it is an important starting point to understand Paladini’s later career and interest in the Russian avant-garde.}

Gramsci first addressed Lunacharsky’s assessment of Marinetti in his journal *L’Ordine Nuovo* in January 1921.\footnote{Berghaus, *Futurism and Politics*, 182-184.} Contrary to the written opinions of his fellow communists, Gramsci suggested that perhaps something could be learned from Marinetti and Futurism:

\begin{quote}
In their field, the field of culture, the Futurists are revolutionaries. In this field it is likely to be a long time before the working classes manage to do anything more creative than the Futurists have done. When they supported the Futurists, the workers’ groups showed that they were not afraid of *destruction*, certain as they were of being able to create poetry, paintings and plays, like the Futurists; these workers were supporting historicity, the possibility of a proletarian culture created by the workers themselves.\footnote{Antonio Gramsci, “Marinetti the Revolutionary,” in *Antonio Gramsci: Selections from Cultural Writings*, ed. David Forgacs and G. Nowell-Smith, (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1985), 97. [Orig. pub. January 5, 1921]}  
\end{quote}

Many scholars suggest that Gramsci was merely following orders from Lunacharsky or attempting to draw members to the newly founded PCI.\footnote{Berghaus, *Futurism and Politics*, 183-185 and Lista, *Arte e politica*, 65.} David Forgacs, however, has argued that Gramsci’s interest in Marinetti’s Futurism was bound to his own concerns about creating a new proletarian consciousness through cultural education. Futurism served an important purpose in Gramsci’s theory by actively filling a void during the time when the proletariat was “not yet
able to make its own organically revolutionary art.”

In this interim period, Futurism successfully removed all vestiges of prior culture in a manner that was, as Forgacs writes, “scored through with ‘productivist’ ideas and … the rationalization of factory production.”

Gramsci applauded the futurists in “Marinetti the Revolutionary” for carrying out the task of destroying bourgeois culture. This step was a vital precursor for the total revolution of production and culture and the new proletarian society that would emerge in its wake:

They [the futurists] have destroyed, destroyed, destroyed, without worrying if the new creations produced by their activity were on the whole superior to those destroyed…. 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. This sharply revolutionary and absolutely Marxist idea came to them when socialists were not even vaguely interested in such a question.…

Furthermore, Gramsci saw the need for Italian intellectuals to assist in educating the proletariat, so that the workers would have the means to create their own culture once they attained power.

His theories on proletarian education received reinforcement in 1920 when Lunacharsky established contact with workers’ organizations already in existence to develop official Proletkult branches in Italy. The overlap between Italian futurist aesthetics and the Proletkult system reflected Lunacharsky’s experience as one of the founders of Proletkult and director of Narkompros and the Russian futurist-filled IZO. Both Lunacharsky and Gramsci were attempting to navigate a middle ground between cultural Futurism and political Communism. In addition, each was invested in using art and culture as a conduit for the spread of communist

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16 Forgacs and Nowell-Smith, Antonio Gramsci: Selections, 47.
17 Forgacs and Nowell-Smith, Antonio Gramsci: Selections, 47.
18 Gramsci, “Marinetti the Revolutionary,” 96.
ideology. Unlike Lunacharsky, Gramsci and his contemporary Italian communists were coming to terms with the lost opportunity for revolution in 1920 due to the failed factory occupations and trying to piece together a cohesive plan for the survival of Communism in Italy to counter the rise of Fascism.

In the same month that Gramsci published “Marinetti the Revolutionary,” he also launched the Institute for Proletarian Culture in Turin, considered to be the first official Italian outpost of Proletkult. In 1922, a group of young futurists based in Turin led by Franco Rampa Rossi, Carlo Frassinelli, Luigi Colombo (also known as Fillia), and Alpinolo Bracci began working with the Institute and promoting an alliance between Communism and Futurism. The futurists’ involvement, which included organizing art training for the workers, exhibitions, and events, was not welcome by many members of the PCI who tended to have a more conservative opinion about art.

The problem that any historical analysis encounters heretofore is that Italian Futurism was not a cohesive movement in the early 1920s. Futurism was pulling away from its pre-war, revolutionary methods and young futurist groups arose like those in Turin, who asserted the distinction between Marinetti’s Futurism and their own. Marinetti had briefly retired from politics and many of the first-wave artists and writers had become reactionary and aligned with Mussolini. Because Futurism began as a political amalgam of anarchic syndicalism, socialism, and strident nationalism, it provided a resource for both the reactionary right-wing fascists and the experimental left-wing communists. The left-wing faction, taking its cue from Gramsci and inspiration from Russia’s Komfut, saw Futurism as a means of destruction in order to reach a

21 Berghaus, Futurism and Politics, 185-186.
22 Lista, Arte e politica, 80-81.
zero point from which to begin building a new society. Communist-futurists based in Rome commandeered heroic Futurism’s imagery of the glorified machine in order to empower the worker to take control of, rather than being alienated by, the means of production. They envisioned the combination of the machine aesthetic and Russian-born Constructivism as a new language of representation for the proletariat, and minimized the role of “bourgeois” easel painting, which had dominated the fine arts of pre-war Futurism.

One of the main theoreticians and artists of the Italian futurist machine aesthetic was Paladini. Extremely verbose in his communist political views and his distaste for Marinetti’s affiliation with Fascism, Paladini saw the revolutionary potential of Futurism, but looked to Russia’s Komfut as his model. Joining the 1922 debates, Paladini not only contributed to the theoretical foundations, but also revitalized the futurist machine aesthetic to facilitate the development of an Italian Komfut.

**Avanguardia and the Struggle for an Italian Komfut**

Emblematic of the diversity of Futurism since its inception, Duilio Remondino was a committed socialist and futurist, who began to distance himself from Marinetti’s Futurism prior to World War I due to its promotion of a nationalist agenda. As Lista has demonstrated, Remondino’s 1914 article “Il Futurismo non può essere nazionalista” (“Futurism Can Not Be Nationalist”) asserted the “interdependence between artistic and social progress” and the movement’s revolutionary potential. Debates regarding the nature of the relationship between Russian and Italian Futurism, initially triggered by Marinetti’s 1914 visit to Russia, resurfaced

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24 Lista, *Arte e politica*, 26-28 and 141-154. Lista provides the most comprehensive discussion of the development of left-wing Futurism. In addition, he documents the related debates, reprints many of the source texts from *Avanguardia*, and traces the beginning of the split between left- and right-wing Futurism to its inception.
during the immediate post-war period. The seemingly successful merger between Russia’s
Komfut and Narkompros inspired a discussion about the possibility of a similar merger between
leftist art and politics in Italy. The potential collaboration between Communism and Futurism
was a recurring topic in Gramsci’s *L’Ordine Nuovo* and the Milan-based journal, *Comunismo*,
between 1919-1921. With the resurgence of the Roman communist cultural journal,*Avanguardia*, and the advent of the Bologna-based *Gioventù socialista* in 1921, the discussion quickly turned into a heated debate.

Communist journals, such as *Comunismo, Avanguardia, Gioventù socialista*, and *Pagine Rosse*, became a primary source in the early 1920s for disseminating ideas about Komfut in Italy. *Avanguardia* attracted established left-wing, first-wave futurists, such as Remondino, as well as a new generation of futurists, like Paladini. Remondino supported an Italian variant of Komfut and, like Gramsci, considered it a prime starting point for revolution, “Art of today must have more in it, more than a futurist exterior and its dizzy cerebralism. It should also have a look and spirit that moves toward revolution.”

His ideas were not entirely welcomed by other writers at *Avanguardia*, including Alba Curdie, who declared, “Futurism is bourgeois and empty of content.” Curdie’s assessment typified one faction of communist cultural writers who aligned with Leon Trotsky and argued that only art created by the proletariat would be revolutionary and

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26 Lista, *Arte e politica*, 82-110.
avoid the bourgeois taint of prior art movements, including Futurism. Rezio Buscaroli and his journal, *Gioventù socialista*, represented yet another perspective on the development of a revolutionary art. Buscaroli questioned the viability of Futurism as a revolutionary aesthetic and accused the movement of being capitalist, bourgeois, philistine, individualist, and irrelevant to revolution. Buscaroli’s argument reflected the aesthetically conservative members of the PCI who considered art movements like Futurism indicative of the underlying nationalism and capitalism that resulted in Italy’s entry into World War I. Lacking in the debate between *Avanguardia* and *Gioventù socialista* was a defined course of action for creating a communist art, perhaps reflecting a similar ambiguity found in Russia. Instead, each journal published various suggestions, including a requisite focus on the figure of the worker and the necessity of the utopian built environment. *Avanguardia* also consistently featured articles outlining the importance of propaganda to promoting the tenets of Communism.

The culture war waged in the pages of Italy’s communist journals mirrored the contemporary discussions in Russia about the role of art in the new Soviet society. One particularly contentious debate arose between the Association of Artists of the Revolution (*Assotsiatsiya khudozhnikov revolyutsionnoi Rossii* or AKhRR) and Komfut. AKhRR, founded in 1922 and supported by traditional painters like Sergei Gerazimov and Isaak Brodsky,

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29 Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution.*
31 Between 1921 to 1923, the writers of *Avanguardia* and *Gioventù socialista* suggested several different approaches for creating art for the proletariat, debated the merits of past art movements (with Futurism frequently featured), and asserted the necessity of involving the workers in cultural developments without a specific plan of inclusion. This was determined by reviewing both journals during this time period.
32 This was determined by reviewing several issues of *Avanguardia*. An example is Giandante, “Cultura e Propaganda,” *Avanguardia* 16, no. 2 (January 8, 1922): 2.
considered Komfut untenable in post-Revolution Russia.\textsuperscript{33} AKhRR advocated for an art that was more readily identifiable by the proletariat and focused on presenting realistic scenes about the October Revolution whereas Komfut wanted to advance a program of agitational-propaganda based on avant-garde strategies. Common to the Russian and Italian debates were accusations that the opposing group was based on bourgeois intellectualism that alienated the proletariat and denied the worker access to the means of artistic production. In Russia, the debate on the best art form to serve the proletariat would continue throughout the 1920s and ultimately be resolved by the monolithic, official policy of Socialist Realism at the First All Union Congress of Writers in 1934.\textsuperscript{34} In Italy, the nearly identical argument became exacerbated by the uneasy relationship between the PSI and PCI. Although the PCI was initially more radical than the PSI, the two developed a compromised alliance and aesthetic to counter the increasing power and visual force of the fascist party in the mid-1920s.\textsuperscript{35}

Paladini became an important contributor to *Avanguardia* due to his personal ties to Russia and his role as one of the few writers who was also an artist interested in reinvigorating pre-war Futurism with post-October Revolution Bolshevism. Paladini’s belief that Futurism could serve a proletarian revolution prompted him to enter into the 1922 cultural debates with four articles in *Avanguardia*. According to Berghaus, his contributions “were less polemical, more sophisticated, and more radical in outlook” than those of the other communist-futurists.\textsuperscript{36}

\textsuperscript{35} Adamson, “Towards,” 38-64 and Berghaus *Futurism and Politics*, 172-217.
\textsuperscript{36} Berghaus, *Futurism and Politics*, 201. Berghaus references the three essays reprinted in Lista’s *Arte e politica*; however, his translations tend to focus on the political side of the debate
Likely informed by L’Ordine Nuovo, Paladini’s articles demonstrated his deep familiarity with Gramsci’s opinion of the revolutionary potential of Marinetti’s Futurism and also Komfut’s “Program Declaration” of 1919. Furthermore, they advocated for the alignment of intellectuals with workers to counter rising bourgeois intellectual elitism in Italy. He believed Italian Futurism was as capable as Russia’s Komfut in destroying the bourgeois past and assisting the development of a culture for and of the worker that would enhance collectivist production and solidarity. This facet of his 1922 writings reflects the constructivist impulse featured in the early writings of Majakovsky, Brik, and Punin. Paladini’s arguments also addressed the nationalism inherent in Marinetti’s Futurism and looked to correct it with the internationalism of Communism. He also acknowledged that Marinetti’s glorified machine was based on capitalistic desire, but that it could be remodeled into an aesthetic that contributed to liberating the proletariat. Paladini’s essays culminated in two major collaborations with Pannaggi: “L’arte meccanica. Manifesto futurista” (the “Manifesto of Futurist Mechanical Art”) and the Ballo meccanico futurista (Futurist Mechanical Ballet). While these creative endeavors attested to their commitment to leftist politics, they also betrayed some of their ideological foundations in pre-war Futurism – contradictions that the two artists would continue to face in the subsequent decade.

Throughout 1922, Paladini struggled to meet the demands of reinvigorating Futurism rather than the aesthetic implications. This is the only book in English that attempts to summarize Lista and Carpi’s writings and source documents on communist-Futurism.

37 Komfut, “Program Declaration,” 164-166. The lag between Paladini’s writings and the Komfut “Declaration” are likely the result of the delayed period of interaction between Russia and Western Europe. In 1922 Russia opened its borders and more actively pursued the goals of Narkompros’s International Section and the Third International.

38 Paladini would not fully develop his understanding of Constructivism until 1923-1924, which is the focus of the next chapter. It is also important to note that he seems to be referring back to the Russian Komfut “Declaration” of 1919, which is also not the fully developed Constructivism featured in LEF.
with Bolshevism. In addition, his desire to address the various points raised in Italian communist journals about creating a proletarian art resulted in Paladini’s merger of the machine aesthetic and mechanical man of pre-war Italian Futurism with an incomplete understanding of Russian Komfut and its undercurrent of emerging Constructivism. By celebrating the figure of the worker while utilizing the machine aesthetic of Futurism, Paladini created a new variant of the mechanical man that would have a lasting impact on Second Futurism. Clearly familiar with Marinetti’s “Extended Man and the Kingdom of the Machine” (written in 1910, but not published until 1915), Paladini maintained one aspect of the original manifesto: the transformative role of the machine for man. Casting aside the assertions in Marinetti’s manifesto that the extended man would become a “nonhuman, mechanical species…cruel, omniscient, and warlike” yet retaining his suggestion that the lower classes “devoid of any culture or education whatsoever, are nonetheless gifted with … great mechanical intuition,” Paladini found a way to resolve the dilemma of merging the worker with Futurism. Subverting Marinetti’s desire for man to triumph over the biological constraints of the body by evolving into a mechanical, warlike cyborg, Paladini instead focused on the machine as the means for the workers’ evolution and revolution due to its familiarity and transformative power. Unlike Marinetti, Paladini considered the machine representative of constructing the new environment, culture, and mindset of the worker that would pave the way for a communist revolution. Loosely defining construction as an amalgam of built environments, propaganda, and revolution, Paladini created hybrid man-machine paintings and drawings and wrote manifestos about the necessity of

41 I use the term cyborg as it has been retroactively applied to describe Marinetti’s concept of the “Extended Man” by scholars such as Jeffrey Schnapp, Christine Poggi, and Anja Klöck.
construction and the machine. His writings, however, lacked a concise explanation of his machine aesthetic and concept of construction, which reflected the greater debates about defining a path for the PCI after its split from the PSI and the attendant cultural debates in *Avanguardia, Pagine Rosse, Comunismo,* and *Gioventù socialista*. Not until 1923 would his definitions of construction and Constructivism reveal his full awareness of the advancements of Russia’s Working Group of Constructivists.

Paladini’s first article, “La Rivolta Intellettuale” (“The Intellectual Revolt”), was printed in *Avanguardia* on April 23, 1922. Recalling Gramsci’s words in “Marinetti the Revolutionary,” Paladini insisted that the machine could facilitate the destruction of the bourgeois past, create a merger between intellectuals and workers, and elevate the worker to the new aristocracy of men because it was symbolic of the modern era and the new mentality that was born of the industrial age. The article began by declaring that a true communist revolution must combine both an economic-political and spiritual revolution. A new type of intellectual, he averred, must rise out of the working class and replace those who are mired with a bourgeois upbringing and education.\(^2\) Paladini asserted the need for a total destruction of the past as “better than rotting in the baseness of the capitalist cerebral miasma” and his article heralded the day when Communism would revolutionize culture and education.\(^3\)

For Paladini, the machine represented more than a mere symbol of modernity and a novel subject matter; rather, in line with Marxist tenets promoted by Gramsci, he perceived it as vital for revolutionary art due to its integral role in transforming the economic structure. Paladini’s article located beauty in the mechanical world, factories, and construction cranes, because they

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\(^3\) Paladini, “La Rivolta Intellettuale,” 3. “…se non vale meglio sorfì putrefarci di basezza nei miasmi cerebralì capitalistì.”
were indicative of the working class. Upon revolution, the proletariat would embrace the mechanical means of production, as they would “no longer [be] the property of the capitalists and instruments of exploitation, but marvelous machines that will work for the material betterment of the new humanity. And we will destroy, destroy all which is bourgeois with all of our marvelous hatred.”

Paladini’s invocation resounded with deliberate echoes of Gramsci’s praise for the futurists, yet he also countered the underlying elitism of Marinetti’s movement. His article appropriated Marinetti’s concept of an elite intellectual cadre, but with a class reversal: Paladini asserted that this group must facilitate the formation of a “new aristocratic and noble race that Communism will give to the earth.”

Rejecting Marinetti’s strident nationalism, Paladini claimed current art forms were typified by a “national (provincial) character,” but would be necessarily replaced by “international, elevated, new, interpretative, analytically, synthetically, and robustly constructive” art. Paladini’s definition of the new constructive art suggested his familiarity with the foundational threads of Russian Constructivism contained within Komfut. Not only would the artist become “a constructor in a solid, harmonious, and new architecture,” but communist art could also draw on the transformative power of painting and find inspiration in the machine.

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44 Paladini, “La Rivolta Intellettuale,” 3. “…quando non saranno più proprietà di capitalisti e strumenti di sfruttamento, ma macchine meravigliose che lavoreranno per il benessere materiale dell’umanità nuova. E distruggiamo, distruggiamo tutto ciò che è borghese con tutto il nostro meraviglioso odio.”

45 Paladini, “La Rivolta Intellettuale,” 3. “…vogliamo sulla terra una nuova razza aristocratica e nobile quale il Comunismo ci deve dare.”


47 Paladini, “La Rivolta Intellettuale,” 3. “…e poi costruttore in una salda, armonica a nuova architettura.” Unlike the contemporaneous Russian constructivists who abandoned easel painting in 1922, Paladini still retained a belief that painting had transformative capabilities.
Paladini’s May 1, 1922 article in *Avanguardia*, an untitled manifesto, is frequently overlooked in the art historical literature (Fig. 2.1). This special May Day edition of *Avanguardia* was dedicated to the current state of the communist party in Italy and focused on the international celebration of workers. Paladini’s inclusion was indicative of his high regard among leftist intellectuals and also that, in Italy, Futurism was still considered a viable option as a revolutionary art at the beginning of 1922. The article served as both a dirge and a manifesto that directly addressed the proletariat. Within the article Paladini proclaimed his disappointment with the failure of the Turin factory occupations and mourned those who had been lost in the revolutionary fight. In contrast to the celebratory tone featured throughout the edition, his article noted that this May Day was a time for workers in Italy to reflect on their past struggles and that “It will not be a day of celebration until Communism is a radiant reality.” Yet hope was presented in the form of the factory and machines, which Paladini considered to be justly possessed by the proletariat as “your right to life.”

The manifesto was also accompanied by a drawing, *Primo Maggio* (“First of May”; Fig. 2.2). The small sketch featured a machine-man rising out of the factory and wielding hammer and sickle with the words “1 Maggio” (May 1) prominently foregrounded. The shape of the figure recalled the dressmaker dummies of *pittura metafisica*, but more robotic and mechanical. Significantly, Paladini’s figure was not intentionally ambiguous like Giorgio de Chirico’s dummies; rather, they were strong machine men capable of decisive, revolutionary action. Yet

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48 Many scholars discuss Paladini’s accompanying drawing of a proletariat; however, the essay placed directly below the image has been overlooked.
50 Paladini, “Primo Maggio,” 3. Paladini’s article insists upon “your factory,” “your fantastic machines of steel,” and “il tuo diritto alla vita.”
the ambiguity of *pittura metafisica* allowed Paladini’s machine man to become an “everyman,” symbolic of all workers. Literally rising up from the factory floor and taking over the means of production, Paladini’s hybrid man-machines perfectly straddled the Italian communist cultural debates to create art that featured the figure of the worker. The riveted metal plate body dissolved at the waist into a cogwheel creating the impression that the gears were pushing this hybrid-man machine forward to his destiny. In the background a smokestack bedecked with a flag symbolized the red communist and black anarchist flags that were raised by the workers during the Turin factory occupations.\(^{51}\) Paladini’s article clarified that this flag was the red communist flag, “red with strength, destruction, and death.”\(^{52}\)

In April and May of 1922, Paladini also created two related paintings, *Il Proletario* (*The Proletariat*; Fig. 2.3) and *La Nona Ora* (*The Ninth Hour*; Fig. 2.4). It is evident that a variety of stylistic influences shaped these works, including *pittura metafisica* as filtered through Mario Sironi’s faceless automatons. *Il Proletario* seems to have drawn heavily on the style of Sironi’s factory occupation series, which featured faceless protagonists in a similarly forceful, if dehumanizing style (Fig. 2.5).\(^{53}\) But *Il Proletario* was more than just a faceless automaton; instead, he was a specifically hybrid man-machine with a metal welder’s mask rather than a dummy’s head. In one hand he held a hammer and a rifle replaced his other arm. In the background the imprint of the hammer and sickle were offset from the Cyrillic acronym for

\(^{51}\) Versari, “Futurist Machine Art,” 156-157. Versari’s essay reviews the individual elements in the painting and identifies the meaning of the black flags, as does Lista in his monograph on Paladini. Red flags were symbolic of the communists whereas the black flags were for the anarchists.

\(^{52}\) Paladini, “Primo Maggio,” 3. “…bandiere rosse, rosse di forze di distruggere, rosse di morte.”

Russian Soviet Federal Socialist Republic.\textsuperscript{54}

\textit{La Nona Ora} advanced the style of \textit{Il Proletario} and \textit{Primo Maggio}. Clearly inspired by de Chirico’s mannequins (Fig. 2.6), Paladini’s proletarian man-machine had now transformed from a soft dressmaker dummy into an industrial automaton that appears to be made of polished steel. Yet again, the worker emerged from a cogwheel holding the hammer and sickle in each hand, while factory smokestacks dominate the background. The title of the painting, \textit{La Nona Ora}, was particularly important as it recalled the moment during crucifixion when Jesus asked why he was forsaken.\textsuperscript{55} Significantly absent were the factory occupation red flags of Communism celebrated in Paladini’s manifesto, “Primo Maggio.” The proletariat and the potential for a communist revolution had been forsaken; Paladini, like Gramsci, was reprimanding the PSI for failing to support the Turin workers and potential revolution in 1920.\textsuperscript{56}

Maria Elena Versari has traced the evolution of Paladini’s proletarian pieces in relation to the avant-garde and the rise of International Constructivism.\textsuperscript{57} She has claimed that his dependence on the style of \textit{pittura metafisica} resulted from his “classically ‘Marxian’ reflection of the status of the industrial worker and his relationship with the machine, to which he becomes ‘a mere living appendage;’” alienation, Versari has asserted, was Paladini’s main theme.\textsuperscript{58} Her conclusions, however, do not stand up to the evidence of his writings, wherein Paladini implied that he was envisioning the future man who was no longer an “appendage” to production, but

\textsuperscript{55} Matthew 27:46 (The New American Catholic Study Edition) and Lista, \textit{Dal Futurismo}, 17. I am suggesting an alternative interpretation from Lista, who suggests that the title of the piece refers to reduced work hours in a day.
\textsuperscript{56} Adamson, “Towards,” 38-64. Adamson reviews Gramsci’s assessment of the weakness of the PSI and its failure to support the workers during the factory occupations that ultimately led to the failure of the factory occupations and the founding of the PCI.
\textsuperscript{57} Versari, “Futurist Machine Art,” 149-175.
\textsuperscript{58} Versari, “Futurist Machine Art,” 159.
rather, a worker as futurist superman liberated by his “marvelous machines.” *Primo Maggio* was the clearest indicator that Paladini did not consider the workers as being alienated from production; rather, the attached manifesto heralded the day when they would “feel [themselves] masters of the world…it is your factory that screams divinely, beautiful in your fantastic machines of steel.”

Herein Marinetti’s pre-war fantasy of a mechanical man of component parts who triumphs over biological deterioration by being non-organic and self-procreative was replaced by the new steely man of a communist productive utopia.

Indeed, by comparing Paladini’s imagery to contemporary Russian futurist depictions of labor, it becomes clear that his vision of the worker-machine relationship was inspired by and yet at odds with Komfut. Vladimir Lebedev, for example, a Russian futurist who collaborated with Vladimir Mayakovsky on the ROSTA (Russian Telegraph Agency) posters and window displays, typified the post-Revolution futurist agitational-propaganda style. Although he drew from different source material, the visual results were not too far removed from those of Paladini. Lebedev’s *Worker with Hammer – Industry into One’s Hands* (1920; Fig. 2.7) and *Get to Work – A Rifle is Near By!* (1921; Fig. 2.8) had many thematic overlaps with Paladini’s proletarian series and his figures also featured blank-faced workers, who hold utilitarian tools of revolt and production. The key difference was that Lebedev’s aforementioned figures were redolent of the sparsely rendered, simplified “everyman” characters found in the primitivizing

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60 An important review of the depictions of labor in Italian futurist art is Salaris, *Lavoro e rivolta*; however, she does not provide a comparison to their Russian counterparts.

61 Elena Barkatova, “‘Modern Icon’ of ‘Tool for Mass Propaganda?’: Russian Debate on Poster Art,” in *Defining Russian Graphic Arts: From Diaghilev to Stalin, 1898-1934*, ed. Alla Rosenfeld (Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1999), 132-165. Barkatova’s article provides a complete discussion of these posters and the relationship between Mayakovsky and fellow ROSTA members.
pre-Revolution works of Mikhail Larinov and Natalia Goncharova.\textsuperscript{62} Borrowing from the folk tradition allowed artists to theoretically communicate directly with the proletariat in a language common to all Russians rather than alienating the workers via images that reinforce an aesthetic elite.

By contrast, Paladini began with the metaphysical dummy figure, established as a symbol of estrangement and alienation by de Chirico. Although attempting to transform the dummy into a universal symbol of the worker through modernization and mechanization, Paladini’s machine men suffered from residual ambiguity inherent in \textit{pittura metafisica} that would not effectively serve the cause of either left or right.\textsuperscript{63} More to the point, Paladini’s images melded man with the standardized production parts of modern industry and were firmly situated in a factory, suggesting an integration of man, production, and industrialization. In contrast, Lebedev’s posters retained a focus on manual labor and divorced the figures from the machine. Whereas the archaic tools of hammer and sickle appeared as weapons welded to the hands of Paladini’s automaton, they still served as the means of production for Lebedev’s worker. Furthermore, the rifle in Lebedev’s \textit{Get to Work – A Rifle is Near By!} was placed next to the worker, but in Paladini’s \textit{Il Proletario}, the rifle became his mechanical arm. Paladini’s grafting of machine parts onto the anonymous mannequin updated \textit{pittura metafisica} with the futurist iconography of the standardized mass man. The violent edge and fusion of man and machine unwittingly


\textsuperscript{63} Versari, “Futurist Machine Art,” 158-159. In contrast to Versari, who considers de Chirico’s influence on Paladini’s proletariats an assemblage of “‘monsters’ in a much more literal sense than the one envisioned by Gramsci,” lacking the satire of Grosz, and resistant to “any directly political celebratory enlistment,” I am considering the significance of why he reverted to de Chirico’s sense of ambiguity and estrangement to be representative of the worker. The “ambivalent identity” Versari assigns to Paladini’s workers bypasses the significance of why he combined the machine and the dressmaker dummy.
reiterated Marinetti’s vision of the cyborg future man in his pre-war manifesto “Extended Man and the Kingdom of the Machine.”

Ultimately, Paladini’s images of 1922 failed to resonate with the masses given the small circulation of the publication. Rather than crafting a style that emanated from the workers’ daily experiences, as Gramsci and Russian Komfut would have it, Paladini grafted a mechanized proletarian worker onto *pittura metafisica*. Paladini obviously realized that the automaton figure was at odds with Russian Komfut ideology: his style constantly changed throughout 1922 in an effort to strike a balance between representing the worker’s liberation through industry and representing the dynamism of Futurism’s pre-war machine aesthetic. In addition, his writings became increasingly articulate about the relationship between the machine aesthetic, revolution, and the collective, while downplaying individualism. Similarly, Komfut lost its favored position within Narkompros and the IZO by 1922, the group began to focus on built environments, film, photomontage, and theater as a more direct and effective way to engage with the masses – a trajectory that Paladini would also follow after 1922.

Shortly after Paladini’s “La Rivolta Intellettuale” was published in *Avanguardia*, the opening of the *Esposizione Futurista Internazionale* in Turin intensified the contemporary debate on the viability of communist-Futurism in Italy. The exhibition was a collaborative effort between futurists and the Turin branch of Proletkult. Participants included not only the new generation of futurists, like Paladini and Pannaggi, but also first-wave futurists such as Giacomo

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Balla and those who bridged the two, notably Enrico Prampolini. In *Avanguardia*, Remondino acknowledged the significant participation of both Marinetti and Gramsci’s *L’Ordine Nuovo* in the exhibition. Remondino praised the contributions of Futurism to art, freedom, and the creation of new forms of expression and asserted, “…we affirm that the futurist movement must revolutionize all art.” Furthermore, Remondino extended his argument to establish a link between Komfut in Russia and Italian futurists, “Today in Russia, after the proletarian revolution, Komfut (communist futurists) initiated the working class in the dynamic synthesis of their youth, of their new world in formation.” His positive review of the exhibition was met with disdain by Buscaroli who attacked Remondino in the pages of *Gioventù socialista* by declaring him insufficiently Marxist in his understanding of revolution and identifying the specter of Fascism lurking behind Futurism.

**Paladini and Pannaggi’s Collaboration**

Much of Paladini’s collaboration with Pannaggi in 1922 was a direct response to the backlash among PCI members against an Italian variant of Komfut. A closer examination of their joint projects suggests that the two artists were only loosely connected by their interest in Futurism’s fascination with the machine. Their first collaborative project was the *Ballo...

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67 *Esposizione futurista internazionale*. The pamphlet does not include publisher, date or curator information, but it has a detailed list of contributors to the exhibition. See also Lista, *Dal Futurismo*, 11-12.


69 Remondino, “Esposizione Futurista a Torino,” 205. “Oggi nella Russia dei Soviets dopo una rivoluzione proletaria i com-fut (comunisti futuristi) iniziano la classe operaia alla sintesi dinamica della loro vita giovane, del loro nuovo mondo in formazione.”

meccanico futurista (Futurist Mechanical Ballet), which premiered at the Circolo delle Cronache d’Attualità at the Casa d’Arte Bragaglia on June 2, 1922. The performance featured three dancers who embodied different aspects of modern society: a worker, a seductive woman, and a factory robot. Dancing to the sound of two motorcycle engines revving and rotating polychrome lighting indicating changes of action, the Ballo meccanico futurista countered the bourgeois with the proletariat, the dance hall with the factory floor, and the sensual with the mechanical. The premise of the performance was a worker torn between his desire for both the woman and the robot. The seductress as a rhetorical figure of decadent materialism and bourgeois society was a common theme in first-wave Futurism with Bragaglia’s film, Thaïs, being the most cohesive statement. The worker, however, was also drawn to the robot, which symbolized modern factory production and his potential liberation from bourgeois capitalism. The performance concluded with all three characters exiting to a new space lit in red, indicating that all have been redeemed as they move on to a revolutionary new world.

The costume designs for Ballo meccanico futurista implied the political tone and allegiance of the two artists. Pannaggi’s robot costume (Fig. 2.9), although quite similar to Fortunato Depero’s robot marionettes for Balli plastici (Plastic Dance; Fig. 2.10) in 1918, was entirely red, black, and metallic gray, which recalled the colors of Communism and Anarchism.

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71 Berghaus, Italian Futurist Theatre, 425.
72 Berghaus, Italian Futurist Theatre, 424-426.
73 The most extensive description of this performance and its intended meaning is found in Berghaus, Italian Futurist Theatre, 417-30. Pannaggi’s earliest recounting of the performance is in Maske un Kothurn: Vierteljahrsschrift für Theaterwissenschaft (Vienna: Hermann Böhlau Nachf., 1966). As Berghaus notes, Pannaggi only discussed the robot and the proletariat in his recollections of the Ballo meccanico futurista, but photographs also show a female dancer.
74 Millicent Marcus, “Anton Giulio Bragaglia’s Thaïs; or, The Death of the Diva + the Rise of Scenoplastica = The Birth of Futurist Cinema, South Central Review 13 (Summer-Fall 1996): 63-81. Marcus provides a discussion of the significance of the destruction of the diva in futurist theater and film.
frequently featured in leftist journals during this period. Yet, Pannaggi’s costume created an unsettling lineage between the pre- and post-war futurists working with the machine aesthetic. Fake metal boxes completely obliterated the human form to emphasize the mechanical appearance, evoking Marinetti’s cyborg future men. Paladini, however, retained the hybrid proletarian man-machines central to his recent paintings and drawings in his design for the worker’s costume, which featured a cogwheel protruding from the torso of the dancer and a metallic mask (Fig. 2.11).

Interestingly, Patrizia Veroli has noted the preference among the Italian futurists in the 1920s for cumbersome robot costumes that hindered the body of the dancer, citing the work of Depero and Prampolini, in comparison to the contemporaneous Russian avant-garde, which utilized machine parts conceptually both for costuming and to enhance a dancer’s performance, especially in the creations of Viktor Gsovsky and Bronislava Nijinskaja. This divide can be seen in the costumes created by Paladini and Pannaggi. Pannaggi quoted and perpetuated the Italian futurist style of the constricting robot costume for many years, including his designs for Ruggero Vasari’s *L’angoscia delle macchine* (*Anguish of the Machines*, 1927; Fig. 2.12). Paladini, on the other hand, followed the Russian avant-garde pattern of supplementing a dancer’s body with mechanical parts, which affirmed his belief in the machine’s ability to enhance the life of the proletariat.

The performance was followed by Paladini’s essay “Arte Comunista” (“Communist Art”), which appeared in the pages of *Avanguardia* on June 18, 1922. The essay completely

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75 Pannaggi, *Maske un Kothurn.*
77 Poggi, “Return of the Repressed,” 245-249. Poggi also discusses how the design perhaps reflects Vasari’s concern with the limits and restrictions of the machine as featured in his play.
renounced Marinetti’s “Beyond Communism” (written in November/December 1919, but not published until August 15, 1920). Unlike Marinetti’s manifesto, which asserted his distaste for Communism and declared it “an outdated exponent of mediocrity” and “a German cancer,” Paladini’s article instead celebrated the concept of artists serving the proletariat and a communist revolution. Although Marinetti applauded the Russian futurists for being revolutionary artists, noting their skills at decorating Lenin’s trains with designs that he insisted were inspired by the Italian futurists, he maintained that every nation must have a revolution related to the needs of its people and affirmed his belief in the significance of Italian individuality and nationalism. 

Paladini, in contrast, promoted the importance of internationalism to counter rising nationalism and asserted that the needs of the worker and collective should have precedence over individualism.

Following closely to the constructive aims promoted by Russian artists and critics, which declared that artists must become constructors and part of industrial production, Paladini outlined in “Arte Comunista” a new role for artists as society proceeds toward Communism:

We will create for the people (and this will be practically more important) new stages, original for the performances that will occur in communist theater. We will create the most beautiful decorations, luminous and advanced, for his rooms, even his dishes, so as to establish around him a pleasant, new environment. It will be a place where he can liberate his mind, so that he can become accustomed to and broaden himself by becoming intimate with the matter transformed by the painter. It will be a place where the worker will free his thoughts from tradition, from the memory of the moldy, filthy environment that the bourgeois was accustomed to living in.

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80 Vinicio Paladini, “Arte Comunista,” *Avanguardia: giornale della Federazione italiana giovanile socialista aderente al P.S.I.* 16, no. 23 (June 18, 1922): 3. “Creerà per il popolo (e questa sarà la parte praticamente più importante) scene nuove, originali per le recite che verranno date nei teatri comunisti, creerà le decorazioni più belle, luminose ed avanzate per le sue stanze,
Paladini’s focus on the artist’s role in creating theater and daily wares for the proletariat was noteworthy as it demonstrated his increasing awareness of the socialist-inspired aesthetics of the Bauhaus and the developing productivist program at the VKhUTEMAS in Russia. The article also signaled Paladini’s growing realization that artistic production via easel painting was not sufficient, and in fact inherently problematic, as a revolutionary art form. Advancing ideas from his prior essay, “La Rivolta Intellettuale,” Paladini asserted that the foremost task of the artist was to turn away from traditional, contemplative art and toward building a utopian environment that encouraged the workers’ revolution.81 His refusal to define a specific style of art for the new proletarian culture echoed Gramsci’s belief that a collectivist aesthetic could not immediately arise from the workbenches and factories, but had to be preceded by a period of education. Only then could a true proletarian culture arise, organically, from the workers themselves. In the meantime, artists and intellectuals were to have a role, Paladini opined, in helping to facilitate the proletarian revolution.

Immediately following “Arte Comunista” and as a complement to their Ballo meccanico futurista, Paladini and Pannaggi co-authored the “L’arte meccanica. Manifesto futurista,” which was published on June 20, 1922 in the first issue of La Nuova Lacerba (Fig. 2.13). The manifesto began by asserting that some of the early futurists had lost their way, but that as a collective, the group still had work to do:

per i suoi vasellami, in modo da stabilire intorno a lui quell’ambiente piacevole, nuovo, libero dove la sua mente diverrà elastica, si abituerà ad approfondirsì nell’intimità della materia trasfigurata dal pittore, dove l’operaio si sentirà libero dall’assiduità della tradizione dal ricordo, dall’ammuffito e sporco ambiente dove la borghesia l’aveva abituato a vivere.” Similar sentiments were expressed by Komfut artists and writers, such as Osip Brik and Nikolai Chuzhak in Art of the Commune as noted in Lodder, Russian Constructivism, 76-77. Lodder details the articles and argument as Brik and Chuzhak defined the role of an artist as a constructor of new environs built for the proletariat.

81 Paladini, “La Rivolta Intellettuale,” 3
Now we are gripped by a compelling need to free ourselves from the last ruins of old literature, symbolism, decadence, in order to reach new starting points for revolt that are based on what makes up our life today. Based on MACHINES…. Gears wipe away the misty and indecisive from our eyes, everything is **more incisive, decisive, aristocratic and sharp**. We feel mechanically, and we sense that we ourselves are also made of steel, we too are machines, we too have been mechanized by our surroundings.82

Yet again, Paladini’s interest in wedding Marinetti’s manifesto, “Extended Man and the Kingdom of the Machine,” to a communist aesthetic was apparent. Although it lacked any overt mention of revolution, Paladini’s intention could be divined from the overlaps between the manifesto and his recent essays in *Avanguardia*. As discussed earlier, he defined the new aristocracy as the proletariat and the basis of the revolution as an alignment of the workers with the liberating forces of machines. Within the manifesto, the machines of industry were no longer alienating forces; rather, they would “wipe away” the “indecisive” mist from the worker’s eyes, thus revealing a clear path to revolution.

In addition to the machine, the manifesto focused on how modernity itself had generated a new aesthetic. Finding beauty in typography, advertising, and “the fantastic architecture of a construction crane,” the manifesto hinted at a new direction for art, while retaining remnants of pre-war Futurism.83 The transition within the manifesto from machine to advertising and architecture mirrored the development in Paladini’s writings of 1922 in which the nebulous influence of the machine and modernity became tied to a specific program of direct engagement with the built environment, graphic design, and theater. Although reminiscent of Paladini’s “Arte Comunista,” the manifesto was vague in its directive for artists to begin engaging in production that affects daily life.

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Paladini’s glorification of the machine also unsettles. Despite the desire for revolution, traces of futurist individualism and machine worship surfaced in the manifesto in the form of a new aristocratic machine culture defined by the artist. Although Paladini’s evocation of “aristocratic” in his other essays was firmly attached to the proletariat, here it betrayed his infatuation with Marinetti’s love of mechanistic power and violence, and the fantasy of a body that could transcend biological destiny. By contrast, the Russian avant-garde, including Komfut, focused on promoting collectivism as a corrective for individualism and bourgeois culture. The differences revealed a key ideological divergence between Italian and Russian Futurism, which was already being noted by Italian communists who were against communist-Futurism and would soon be addressed in letters exchanged between Trotsky and Gramsci. Although he rejected individualism and nationalism in his 1922 essays, Paladini’s later writings would correct these problematic futurist undertones by becoming more resolute in the demand for new art forms to serve the needs of the proletariat and by distancing the artist from the role of creative impresario – an idea that he had voiced in “Arte Comunista.”

Confirmation of Paladini’s political intention with the “L’arte meccanica. Manifesto futurista” was found in his accompanying drawing of a worker simply entitled Proletario (Proletariat; Fig. 2.14). More advanced in its machine aesthetic than the worker in the Ballo meccanico futurista, the figure merged wholly with mechanical parts and welder’s mask. The human form was virtually consumed by the cog and he became an amalgam of man, machine, and factory, thus uniting all facets of production. Paladini’s anthropomorphic construction

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84 Bowlt, Russian Art, 161 and 164; Komfut, “Program Declaration,” 164-166; and Altman, “Futurism and Proletarian Art,” 161-164.
looked to the mechanical drawings of dadaists, such as Francis Picabia (Fig. 2.15), and to
Fernand Léger’s mechanical aesthetic of machine parts and disks (Fig. 2.16). Both artists’
works had been reproduced in various cultural journals, including 391 and Valori Plastici. Overall, the manifesto and the drawing advanced Paladini’s earlier idea of the “marvelous
machine” as a liberator rather than oppressor. In Proletario, Paladini suppressed all vestiges of
individualism in a nearly complete merger of man and machine, the organic and the inorganic.

Also accompanying the manifesto was a small drawing by Pannaggi titled Composizione
meccanica (Mechanical Composition; Fig. 2.17). Although both drawings contained references
to the importance of the machine, Pannaggi’s sketch lacked the complexity of Paladini’s work.
Instead, it could be read as simplified geometric shapes and machine parts arranged
axonometrically rather than the collage of smokestacks, cogwheels, and pinions of Paladini’s
man-machine. Labeled “HP” for horsepower, Pannaggi’s composition aesthetically derived more
from his contemporaneous enrollment in an architectonic composition class at the Scuola di
architettura in Rome than from the revolutionary potential of the machine. Void of any overt
political message, Pannaggi’s drawing was emblematic of the increasingly de-communized
variant of International Constructivism that emerged in Western Europe during the 1920s and

———. "IP," 122-123. An image of Pannaggi’s class enrollment was reproduced within the
essay. See also Versari, “Futurist Machine Art,” 151. She has identified the meaning of the HP
as not only a personal symbol for Pannaggi, but also as a reference to “Horse Power.”
was typified by Hans Richter’s journal, *G: Material zur elementare Gestaltung*.89

The manifesto, “L’arte meccanica,” was quickly followed by Paladini’s last essay published in *Avanguardia*, “Appello Agli Intellettuali” (“Call to Intellectuals”), in July 1922, in which he subverted Marinetti’s capitalist technological dream by giving precedence to the figure of the proletariat in the new machine aesthetic. Key to Paladini’s argument was not the glorification of the machine itself; rather, he celebrated the machine as belonging to the proletariat:

A wonderful new divinity has emerged in our tormented soul: the proletariat and their machine! We feel that our art, due to our belief in the proletariat and the revolution, can become the concrete form of our spiritual and mental constructivity…. Artists of the world, revolutionary artists free of traditions and full of revolutionary sentiments, eternal dreamers, all gathered under the red flag of the Soviets. For a Communist art!90

He proclaimed the arrival of the “Proletariat God,” which was the combined force of the proletariat and their machines. The essay also suggested that the resultant machine aesthetic could serve as a guiding force for not only artists, but also for a new proletarian consciousness. The emphasis on the effect of modernity on consciousness, also featured in the mechanical manifesto, would become a recurring theme throughout Paladini’s writings well into the 1930s.

Because Italy was delayed in its industrialization, he believed that it was necessary to activate the average, passive viewer with the ultimate means of modernity and modern life, the machine. The machine was a revolutionary agent because it simultaneously represented modernity as well as signified the worker arresting the means of industry.

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89 Lodder, “El Lissitzky,” 27-46. Lodder points out that *G’s* first issue included a quote by Marx; however, later editions were less overt about the political nature of Constructivism. See also Detlef Mertins and Michael W. Jennings, ed. *G: An Avant-Garde Journal of Art, Architecture, Design and Film, 1923-1926* (Los Angeles, CA: Getty Research Institute, 2010).

Immediately following the publication of this essay, Paladini finished the painting *Il Proletario della IIIª Internazionale construzione meccanica* (*The Proletariat of the Third International Mechanical Construction*; Fig. 2.18), which exemplified his final iteration of the proletarian man-machine series. The propinquity of “Appello Agli Intellettuali” and this image suggested that *Il Proletario della IIIª Internazionale construzione meccanica* was Paladini’s vision of the new “Proletariat God.” The similarity in form to his earlier images of the proletarian machine-man was immediately apparent; the figure, however, was now entirely abstracted into a seamless amalgam of body and factory. Very little vestiges of a human were left save for the round shape of a head and goggle-covered eye peering from behind a welding mask. The proletariat was now composed entirely of sleek metallic cogs, pipes, vents, and a brick factory smokestack. The title, as well as the spiral shape of the cogs and vents toward the smokestack, recalled Tatlin’s *Monument to the Third International*, which had recently been featured in El Lissitzky’s Russian cultural journal, *Vešč'/Gegenstand/Objet*, and Bruno Taut’s architectural journal, *Frühlicht*.* Il Proletario della IIIª Internazionale construzione meccanica* drew international attention from Josef Peeters, a Dutch constructivist who published a reproduction of the painting in *Het Overzicht* in November 1922. In his review on the current state of Futurism, Peeters praised the work for Paladini’s ability to evolve the movement with his thematic content, harmonious use of construction, and symbolic integration of man and

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91 *Proletario della IIIª Internazionale construzione meccanica* is difficult to analyze as the original was destroyed and only a poor reproduction in the Dutch journal *Het Overzicht* exists.

92 Lista has asserted that Paladini had access to international journals at Balla’s studio and through Bragaglia’s circle. His selection of title, use of similar shape, and content of writings in 1922 suggest that Paladini did indeed have access to international journals that reproduced images of Tatlin’s *Monument*. As will be discussed in the next chapter, his pamphlet *Arte d’avanguardia e futurismo* (1923) reveals a thorough knowledge of international avant-garde art movements.
Considering its temporal proximity to the mechanical manifesto and the *Ballo meccanico futurista*, an exhibition of futurist works at the Palazzo del Convitto Nazionale in Macerata should be reconsidered as essential to understanding the disparity between Paladini and Pannaggi’s definitions of the machine aesthetic in regards to its appearance, political affiliation, and relation to Futurism. Pannaggi organized the exhibition, which opened on June 25, 1922. In addition, he wrote the supplementary catalogue text and two articles, which were featured in local newspapers. Despite exhibiting two proletarian pieces by Paladini, Pannaggi’s Macerata exhibition and related writings omitted any overt references to leftist politics or the possibility of an Italian Komfut.94

Unlike Paladini, Pannaggi’s writing did little to assert his definition of the machine aesthetic or his political affiliation. Instead, it read like a pre-war manifesto by Marinetti declaring in the catalogue text that the exhibition was a “punch in the eye to the bourgeois public” and a “luminous rocket.”95 The only time he used the term “revolution” was in relation to the aesthetic developments of great Italian artists, such as Giotto and Michelangelo. In an article related to the exhibition, “Futurismo” (“Futurism”), published in a Macerata newspaper, *La Provincia Maceratese*, on June 22, 1922, Pannaggi also did not discuss the machine aesthetic or construction. Instead, he focused on the importance of art creating the sensation of beauty through chromatic and plastic values.96 Focusing on the “rhythmic necessity for the

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95 Pannaggi, *Macerata: Prima*.
architectonic completeness of the work,” Pannaggi’s defining characteristics of art recalled De Stijl and Theo van Doesburg more than post-war Futurism.97

An extended version of “Futurismo” was published in the Macerata-based Cronaca degli spettacoli on July 30, 1922 and it was one of Pannaggi’s few articles in which he discussed the Russian avant-garde.98 His text, however, resounded with Marinetti’s sentiments in “Beyond Communism” as Pannaggi asserted that every nation had its own artistic character. He even used the same example as Marinetti by noting that Russian artists borrowed from Italian Futurism when they decorated trains and festival plazas to celebrate the October Revolution. Although Pannaggi criticized newspapers for publishing falsified photographs that depict post-Revolution Russia as a miserable and barbaric state, Pannaggi shied away from an in depth analysis of the October Revolution or the Russian avant-garde in his articles and catalogue text.99 Even more telling of the political and ideological disparity between the two artists was the complete absence of any reference to the proletariat in Pannaggi’s writings of 1922.

Pannaggi also never included the proletarian man-machine hybrid or the technologized body in his paintings during this period. He only created two paintings of labor between 1921 and 1922, both abstracted images of women sewing: Donna alla macchina (Woman at the Machine, also known as My Mother Sewing; Fig. 2.19) and Donna che cuce (Woman Sewing). Unlike Paladini’s proletarian machine-men, an individual woman sewing at home was hardly an image of industrialization. Lacking in Pannaggi’s works from 1921-1922 was a clear rendition of the human body; rather, the focus was primarily on the machine. Even in Donna alla

97 Pannaggi, “Futurismo” (Crispolti), 152.
99 Pannaggi, “Futurismo” (Toni), 145-146.
macchina, the flywheel whirling on the sewing machine obliterated a view of the woman. From the same period, but very different, Treno in corsa (Speeding Train; Fig. 2.20) merged a train in the landscape, which instantly recalled Umberto Boccioni’s States of Mind (1911-12; Fig. 2.21) and Balla’s Velocità astratta (Abstract Speed, 1913; Fig. 2.22) more than Paladini’s work. Instead of focusing on the industrial domain of the proletariat, Pannaggi’s train was reminiscent of early futurist subject matter as it sliced through the landscape with his use of force lines and interpenetrating planes.

By contrast, Paladini’s landscapes from the period adhered to the theme of the industrial worker and the revolutionary potential of the proletariat. For example, the painting he submitted to the 1922 exhibition in Macerata was titled Proletario + paesaggio (Proletariat + Landscape). Unfortunately, no image survives, but its political content can be assumed from its title and it is very likely that its appearance was similar to Ritmi meccanici (Mechanical Rhythms; Fig. 2.23). Ritmi meccanici, which has been dated as late 1922 or early 1923, was one of the few documented works created by Paladini from this period that did not include the figure of the proletariat, even as it continued the theme of the worker. Ostensibly an industrial landscape, the painting was rife with political content. Paladini created a landscape that was entirely dominated by factories both visible in the obvious smokestacks of the upper half and the repetitive curved vents of the lower section. The hallmarks of factory architecture were then mirrored continuously between the planes, creating a sense of endless industry. The appearance of this landscape was quite different from Paladini’s images of the worker within the factory. Utilizing Balla’s rhythmic dynamism, the factories spread out infinitely as they sprawled both back toward the horizon and then jutted up at an angle toward the top right corner of the canvas. The last thing the eye sees at the edge of the canvas is the scaffolding of another factory under
construction. The endless proliferation becomes a stand in for the unstoppable rise of the proletariat.

**The March on Rome**

Gramsci was distanced from the debates that fueled Rome’s communist journals as he had relocated to Moscow in the spring of 1922, but he was aware that the relationship between the communist-futurists and Turin Proletkult had become strained. Without Gramsci’s support and involvement, the communist-futurists slowly lost any connection they had to the Turin Proletkult and the increasingly conservative tastes of the PCI eventually pushed out the few avant-garde artists that remained. Reflecting the increasing political instability in the rising fascist tide, the Turin communist-futurists fractured along two lines: Fillia returned to Marinetti’s Futurism and Rampa Rossi aligned with Paladini’s communist-Futurism in Rome.

After the March on Rome in October 1922, the communist-futurist faction continued to dwindle and some left-wing futurists, such as the Parma communist-futurist Piero Illari, fled Italy in response to the unsettling political climate, while others dropped their communist agenda and joined Marinetti’s ranks. The 1924 First Futurist Congress in Milan officially re-launched the movement, coinciding with the announcement of Marinetti’s alliance with Fascism. At first Paladini and Pannaggi applauded the emphasis on a revolutionary art movement, but the reality of Marinetti’s political intentions behind the Congress quickly surfaced. Paladini continued

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100 Gramsci, Letter to Trotsky, 100.
102 Berghaus, *Futurism and Politics*, 199. See also Carpi, *Bolscevico immaginista* as it details the immigration of Italian communist-futurists in the 1920s.
103 Vinicio Paladini, telegram to F.T. Marinetti, November 21, 1924, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti Papers, Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library, New Haven, CT and Ivo Pannaggi, telegram
his awkward position as a communist-futurist by publicly noting that his affiliation with Futurism was not political, but strictly a means for artistic innovation.\textsuperscript{104} It was in this period that futurist art began its well-documented transition to Fascism, steadily abandoning, at least publicly, its pre-war anti-clerical and anti-monarchical stance, and any remnants of its original left-wing political platform.

One of the most striking blows against the communist-futurist machine aesthetic developed by Paladini and Pannaggi was the altered version of their manifesto that appeared in the May 1923 issue of \textit{Noi}. This Rome-based journal was originally founded and edited by Enrico Prampolini as a conduit for the international avant-garde from 1917 to 1920, but it reemerged in 1923 dedicated to Marinetti’s Futurism.\textsuperscript{105} According to Claudia Salaris, the journal’s reconfiguration was indicative of increased political activity within Marinetti’s Futurism and his desire to position the movement as the official art of Fascism.\textsuperscript{106} Prampolini retained his position as editor and his interest in pan-European art, but the emphasis shifted to a promotion of Futurism within this international context. Prampolini became one of the most important proponents of second Futurism and helped retain the movement’s modernist and avant-garde basis, due to his participation in the May 1922 Congress of International Progressive Artists in Düsseldorf and through his connections to De Stijl. At the same time he promoted futurist modernism as a perfect complement to Mussolini’s fascist revolution.

Because Prampolini had attended the Congress of International Progressive Artists, he would have been aware of the splinter group, the Constructivist Faction, formed by Theo van

\textsuperscript{104} Giovanni Lista, \textit{Marinetti et le Futurisme} (Lausanne: L'Age d'homme, 1977), 25.
\textsuperscript{106} Salaris, \textit{Riviste}, 449.
Doesburg, El Lissitzky, and Hans Richter. Prampolini understood that Paladini and Pannaggi’s mechanical manifesto could be utilized as an Italian statement on Constructivism and thereby reestablish the relevance of Futurism to international modernism after World War I. Furthermore, the manifesto provided continuity with the pre-war futurist worship of the machine, while adapting it to new post-war political realities.

Prampolini and Marinetti were keenly aware that Paladini and Pannaggi’s mechanical manifesto was steeped in Bolshevik sentiments and gave it a major revision as part of its iteration in Noi. They first changed the date of the manifesto to October 1922 to coincide with either the March on Rome or with Prampolini’s essay “The Aesthetic of the Machine and Mechanical Introspection in Art” published in Broom, an important international journal dedicated to modernism. According to Versari, Prampolini’s Broom article was intended to distance himself from the more utopian constructivist models of the machine aesthetic discussed at the 1922 Congress of International Progressive Artists. In addition to the new date, any suggestion of the revolutionary power of machines was removed; instead, the machine became merely “inspiration for the evolution and development of the plastic arts.” The revisions by Marinetti and Prampolini successfully countered not only suggested leftist politics of the original mechanical manifesto, but also Paladini’s concurrent articles promoting communist-Futurism in Avanguardia, such as “Appello Agli Intellettuali.” Whereas Paladini asserted that the unification

108 Versari, “Futurist Machine Art,” 162-166. Versari has proposed the new date was meant to coincide with the publication of Prampolini’s “The Aesthetic of the Machine and Mechanical Introspection in Art” in Broom.
of the worker and the machine yielded a “Proletariat God,” Prampolini and Marinetti subverted his intent and the machine alone was “the new divinity.”¹¹⁰ Pannaggi’s Donna alla macchina and Paladini’s Ritmi meccanici were included in the May 1923 issue of Noi that featured the version of the mechanical manifesto stripped of any communist connotations. Significantly, Paladini’s overt proletarian images, such as La Nona Ora and Proletario, were absent from the journal.

Changes to the manifesto upset the two younger artists. Paladini anticipated that the altered language of the manifesto might result in mechanical art being commandeered for non-revolutionary purposes; he therefore included an addendum in Noi next to the revised manifesto that attempted to emphasize the significance of the machine aesthetic for revolution.¹¹¹ Herein he asserted that the machine was not merely “a new subject (we can not over emphasize the unimportance of subject matter as critical element), but a valuable means for the artist…” ¹¹² Paladini opined that beyond subject matter, “the machine has signaled a period of revolution in the economic structure of society and, consequently, has influenced modern thought...”¹¹³

Nonetheless, the revised manifesto successfully undermined Paladini’s intended message that Communism and Futurism could collaborate for social revolution. Within one year of its creation, the pro-fascist futurists appropriated Paladini and Pannaggi’s machine aesthetic and manifesto. The standardized, streamlined forms of the machine aesthetic would evolve, throughout the 1920s in Italy, as a style for fascist modernity. Paladini’s mechanical art, which

¹¹² Paladini, “Estetica meccanica,” 2. “Non si tratta di un nuovo soggetto (non ripeteremo mai abbastanza il nessun valore del soggetto come elemento critico), ma del suo valore inferenziale...”
¹¹³ Paladini, “Estetica meccanica,” 2. “La macchina ha segnato un periodo di rivoluzione nella struttura economica della società e, di conseguenza, ha influito sul pensiero moderno...”
asserted the importance of the proletarian man-machine hybrid for communist-Futurism, unwittingly contributed to the emerging totalitarian propaganda.

The Legacy of Paladini and Pannaggi’s “L’arte meccanica”

Paladini and Pannaggi’s “L’arte meccanica” and the imagery they developed for the machine aesthetic had a lasting impact on Italian Futurism. Although many second-wave futurists (including Fillia, Depero, and Fedele Azari) utilized the machine aesthetic in their work beginning in the mid-1920s, Prampolini was critical in transforming it from Paladini’s Komfut-inspired iteration to its fascist incarnation. In addition to commandeering their manifesto, many of the forms and iconography used by Paladini and Pannaggi informed Prampolini’s version of the machine aesthetic. Prampolini divorced his imagery from Paladini’s political ideology, but retained key elements that resulted in a different kind of machine man amalgam that was better suited for the tenets of Fascism than Communism. By examining a selection of Prampolini’s works from the mid-1920s, a lineage can be established between Paladini and Pannaggi’s works and the rise of the fascist machine aesthetic.

In his revision of the “L’arte meccanica” manifesto, Prampolini dissolved any references to Communism and the proletariat, focusing instead on a generic renovation of arts via the machine.114 His intent to de-communize the machine could be seen as early as his cover for Broom that accompanied his essay “The Aesthetic of the Machine and Mechanical Introspection in Art” in October 1922 (Fig. 2.24). The cover was made using a photocollage technique in which Prampolini combined painted typography with photographic images of turbine wheels to

Prampolini’s first foray into the machine aesthetic was driven more by his international contacts than by Paladini and Pannaggi’s work. Fresh from the Congress of International Progressive Artists, Prampolini recycled Lissitzky’s and Malevich’s suprematist square in the upper left corner, which implied a utopian world-building model in Western Europe rather than an overt political engagement. The machine was inactive and lacked any specific political connotations. Cut from their factory domain, the turbines instead became strictly subject matter that could be used to renovate the avant-garde. Paladini specifically warned against using the machine in this manner in his 1922 articles, because it omitted the revolutionary relevance of the machine to the proletariat.

Prampolini’s *Geometry of Delight* from 1922-1923 signaled his first borrowings from Paladini and Pannaggi, as well as his hesitation to abandon the canon of Boccioni’s Futurism (Fig. 2.25). *Geometry of Delight* used a play of angles and interpenetrating planes, redolent of first-wave Futurism, and combined it with a geometric abstraction of forms similar to Pannaggi’s *Treno in corsa* or *Portrait of Paladini* (1922; Fig. 2.26). But unlike Pannaggi’s shifting axionometric planes in his *Composizione meccanica* or his focus on the whirling motion of the sewing machine’s flywheel in *Donna alla macchina*, Prampolini depicted a classical reclining nude. *Geometry of Delight* failed to satisfy the criteria of the reworked version of the

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116 A similar square was featured in Western European journals, such as El Lissitzky’s *Vešči/Gegenstand/Objet* in 1922 and Hans Richter’s *G: Material zur elementare Gestaltung* in 1923. De Stijl and Bauhaus also incorporated the square in their publications. Lodder, “El Lissitzky,” 27-46. Paladini addressed the faults of Suprematism as early as 1923 and asserted that it was ineffective for the creation of art for the proletariat. This will be discussed in a later chapter.
The painting instead combined first-wave Futurism and Paladini and Pannaggi’s geometric constructions, which caused *Geometry of Delight* to appear retrograde in comparison to the works of the young machine aesthetic collaborators.

Prampolini’s engagement with the mechanical and industrial did not fully emerge until his *Portrait of Marinetti* in 1924-1925 (Fig. 2.27). The timing of this painting was significant as it coalesced with the First Futurist Congress in November 1924. As such, the painting should be contextualized in relation to the re-launching of the movement. A closer examination of the painting suggests that the machine aesthetic came to the forefront of the movement as a means to reassert Futurism’s significance within the post-war avant-garde.

Prampolini’s *Portrait of Marinetti* aligned ideologically with Marinetti’s “Extended Man and the Kingdom of the Machine” more than with Paladini’s invocations of the machine as the sign of proletarian revolution. Yet Prampolini pilfered elements from both Paladini and Pannaggi’s artwork from 1922. His painting was yet again incredibly similar to Pannaggi’s *Portrait of Paladini* in color and format. Both artists enlarged the subject’s head and broke it down into essential geometric elements. *Portrait of Marinetti* also corresponded to Paladini’s proletarian machine hybrids with their welder goggle eyes and rifle arms. Marinetti’s head became mechanized, but the light reflecting off of his forehead recalled the “steel-toned frame of

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117 Prampolini, Pannaggi, and Paladini, “L’arte meccanica,” 175. “La Macchina è la nuova divinità....” See also Poggi, “Return of the Repressed,” 232-266 and Versari, “Futurist Machine Art,” 165-166. Versari addresses how Prampolini’s cover design and article for *Broom* coincided with the publication of Paul Strand’s essay, “Photography and the New God.” She notes that his design was intended to visually merge their two essays together. Telling of their different visions of the machine aesthetic, Strand focused on photography and the liberating power of the camera, but Prampolini returned to oil painting. He, therefore, did not follow the dictates of the “New God” machine outlined by Strand or by Paladini and Pannaggi.
mind” of the extended man. His eye was replaced by the barrel of a gun and his mouth filled with a conflation of mechanical parts. The militarization of Marinetti’s body evoked the ultimate evolution of the extended man into a “mechanical species, built for constant speed… cruel, omniscient, and warlike.” Within Prampolini’s painting the futurist leader yielded to a mechanized version of himself, who could rapid-fire his poetic declamations. Prampolini also superimposed Marinetti’s head on an industrial landscape marked by scaffolding in the background. Scaffolding and factory smokestacks had figured prominently in Paladini’s industrial landscapes of 1922, such as Ritmi meccanici, as hallmarks of the proletariat. By the mid-1920s, the insertion of industrial references into the landscape, however, was readily becoming indicative of fascist corporativism, which was a program implemented to modernize Italy. Corporativism had been a talking point of Fascism since its inception and was officially enacted by the Charter of Labor in 1927.

Prampolini extended his warlike, mechanized man typology to his 1925-1926 Portrait of Mussolini (Fig. 2.28). The image of the Duce became even more streamlined and mechanized than the Marinetti portrait. Again, a tubular gun barrel structure projects from the eye socket. The portrait lacked any sense of the human; instead, the head looked like a combination of sleek sheet metal and machine parts. Although stylistically resonant with the welded and riveted steel bodies of Paladini’s hybrid proletariats, the evolution of Prampolini’s machine aesthetic showed a complete separation from their ideological basis. Whereas one of Paladini’s proletariats had a mechanical rifle-arm to defend the worker’s right to ownership of the factory in fulfillment of the communist revolution, Prampolini’s portrait of Mussolini suggested that the new leader was

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119 Marinetti, “Extended Man,” 86.
armed and ready to defend Fascism. Furthermore, Paladini’s mechanized hybrids were intended to signify the everyman status of the worker. Prampolini’s mechanization of Mussolini instead evolved the fascist leader into a cyborg superman. As per Marinetti in his pre-war manifests, the role of God was displaced from human existence by supplanting the body with the machine and mankind assumed a proprietary role in the creation of his own cyborg body. Prampolini’s pictorial extension of this paradigm to Mussolini rendered the party leader into a fascist god.

Paladini and Pannaggi’s machine aesthetic and “L’arte meccanica” manifesto served a vital role in reviving Futurism in the post-World War I period. Their resurrection of the machine from the ashes of war in 1922 was at a critical juncture in Italian history. Paladini repurposed elements of the pre-war futurist love of the machine in order to symbolize the 1920s factory occupations in Turin and the potential to modernize Italy through an economic and social revolution. In doing so, he revamped the futurist machine and gave it relevance in the post-war period. By the end of 1922, the political turmoil in Italy culminated in the victory of Fascism. Yet the machine served both the agenda of the left, as it signified the proletariat, as well as the rising fascist right, which agitated for a corporativist restructuring of the nation. Marinetti and Prampolini astutely understood that the machine could be successfully utilized to promote not only the significance of pre-war Futurism on the contemporary avant-garde, but also the new fascist regime. Prampolini’s changes to the mechanical manifesto and the machine aesthetic coincided perfectly with the March on Rome, the First Futurist Congress, and the launch of corporativism. By co-opting aspects of Paladini and Pannaggi’s manifesto and imagery, Prampolini established the basis for a viable machine aesthetic in the service of Fascism that would eventually evolve into aeropittura.
Chapter 3

Between Futurism and Fascism: The Constructivist Alternative

In the wake of the PCI’s refusal in 1922 to accept Futurism as a revolutionary aesthetic, Paladini struggled to find a new artistic path suited to his Bolshevik beliefs. Like many artists of the period, he had to operate within the uncertainty of the political situation in Italy. Between the March on Rome in October 1922 and the declaration of dictatorship in January 1925, Mussolini’s objectives were not obvious; his constant shifts of position were a result of opportunism rather than ideological conviction. Fascism was still an amalgam of socialist, capitalist, militaristic, and stridently nationalist elements. Fascist aggression toward Communism began to escalate with the arrest of the General Secretary of the PCI, Amadeo Bordiga, in 1923.\textsuperscript{1} It became untenable for Paladini to uphold publicly his Bolshevik allegiance after the murder of Giacomo Matteotti, the leader of the Partito Socialista Unitario (PSU) and vocal anti-fascist, in June 1924. The fascists’ role in Matteotti’s murder and subsequent protests led to a crisis of leadership in Italy, causing Mussolini to instigate total control and censor the press.\textsuperscript{2} Beginning in 1925 the fascist government began limiting the viability of oppositional political parties, which ultimately resulted in the 1926 Exceptional Decrees that banned Communism.\textsuperscript{3} Gramsci, who had returned to Rome in 1924 to serve as the communist representative in parliament after Bordiga’s imprisonment, was arrested in 1926 in tandem with the enactment of the Exceptional

\textsuperscript{1} Forgacs, \textit{Antonio Gramsci Reader}, 19-21.
\textsuperscript{3} Forgacs, \textit{Antonio Gramsci Reader}, 20 and 135-136. See also Cannistraro, \textit{Historical Dictionary}, 189-190.
Decrees.\textsuperscript{4} Thereafter, the PCI had to go underground due to the imminent threat of fascist reprisals against them.

Furthermore, Paladini was not entirely prepared to relinquish his affiliation with Futurism as it was one of the most celebrated avant-garde movements in Italy and provided a haven for experimental artists. He ceased, however, to promote the machine aesthetic as the incarnation of the proletariat once Marinetti and Prampolini hijacked the style and iconography of \textit{Ritmi meccanici} and \textit{Proletario}. Yet Marinetti was still a convenient ally for Paladini during the post-March on Rome period of political turmoil in Italy. Marinetti was not ready to compromise his anti-bourgeois and anti-passéist beliefs in the face of Mussolini’s embrace of conservative groups. Marinetti had broken with Mussolini in 1920 at the Fascist Congress in Milan as he had disagreed with the party’s stance on workers’ strikes, the monarchy, and clericalism.\textsuperscript{5} Regardless, Paladini’s association with Futurism was problematic due to Marinetti’s “Beyond Communism” manifesto, which made his anti-left-wing position plain. The manifesto signaled a retreat into art versus his previous advocation of merging art and life with political interventions and activism.\textsuperscript{6} Marinetti envisioned a futurist revolution of the arts that would in turn “solve the social problems artistically.”\textsuperscript{7} Although this belief likely encouraged his participation in the 1922 \textit{Esposizione Futurista Internazionale} with the Turin Proletkult, Marinetti was against the leveling of society and anti-individualism of Communism. He opted to strategically ally with Mussolini at the First Futurist Congress in November 1924, despite his concerns for Fascism’s conservativism. Precipitating the maneuver was Marinetti’s growing awareness that Futurism,

\textsuperscript{4} Forgacs, \textit{Antonio Gramsci Reader}, 19-21.
\textsuperscript{5} Berghaus, \textit{Futurism and Politics}, 153-155. Marinetti believed the workers should be allowed to strike without government reprisals. He also advocated for anti-clericalism and anti-monarchism.
\textsuperscript{6} Berghaus, \textit{Futurism and Politics}, 218.
\textsuperscript{7} Marinetti, “Beyond Communism,” 263.
unlike the rival art movement Novecento, lacked the support of the fascist regime and therefore might lose its relevance in the post-war period. Marinetti’s concerns were not unfounded. The potential collapse of the movement seemed probable after the futurists were excluded from the 1924 Venice Biennale.  

During this short period between 1922 and 1924 that was marked by Marinetti’s retreat from active politics and unstable governmental rule, Paladini hedged his bets between an ongoing affiliation with Marinetti’s Futurism and a firm commitment to supporting constructivist currents still clearly identified with Bolshevism. Here too, however, political and aesthetic developments in Russia blurred the fine distinctions among the avant-garde, such as the divide between Obshchestvo molodykh khudozhnikov (Russia’s Society of Young Artists, OBMOKhU) and Utverditeli novogo iskusstva (the Affirmers of the New Art, UNOVIS). As made clear in his writings, Paladini was one of the few in Italy to perceive and understand the evolving cultural changes in Moscow. He provided his peers with an informed analysis on the transition from Russian Constructivism to Productivism (not to mention its significance for fulfilling a leftist political and aesthetic agenda). His texts continued to probe the ways in which to negotiate the divide between Russian Komfut and Italian Futurism, radical art and radical politics. The timing of his writings was critical as it reflected a period when Paladini was still able to expound in print on Communism and the Bolshevik Revolution as well as to address the dangerous political momentum against liberalism, let alone Communism, within Italy. In a way, like Marinetti, though with different ideological intent, Paladini chose the path of least resistance, ceasing to agitate openly for revolution, and identifying, instead, a space of operation within the cultural sphere.

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8 Berghaus, *Futurism and Politics*, 220-221.
The timing could not have been better, or more ironic, when, in the summer of 1924, just as the Matteotti crises started to unfold, the Fourteenth Venice Biennale opened with a revelatory exhibition mounted in the new Soviet Pavilion (the Padiglione U.R.S.S.). Russian artists had first participated in the Biennale in 1895 and the Russian Pavilion was inaugurated in 1914, but the intervening years of war and revolution had caused a ten-year lapse in the nation’s participation.⁹ Paladini’s extensive review of the exhibition allowed him a prime platform for expressing his views and to explain the social goals of the new art. Furthermore, his review introduced the Italian public to a heavily politicized variant of Russian, or Soviet, Constructivism that countered the increasingly de-communized International Constructivism that was gaining acclaim in Western Europe via the Bauhaus and De Stijl.¹⁰ The importance of this exhibition and its influence has been understudied in the literature, as has Paladini’s role as the chief interlocutor in Italy.

Elements of nascent Russian Constructivism had been at the forefront of his 1922 *Avanguardia* articles; Paladini, however, was not ready to abandon easel painting like the productivists. In 1923 he began looking beyond the canvas toward new forms of cultural commitment. In addition to his growing role as an art critic in these years, he extended his reach to stage design and the built environment under the influence of Russian examples. Infused with a constructivist sensibility, his initial foray into avant-garde theatrical, architectural, and interior

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design ostensibly provided access to a larger public and the opportunity to inculcate utopian communist values of egalitarianism and Productivism. By the end of 1924, Paladini’s constructivist foundations were stripped of their political intent due to his involvement with Marinetti’s Futurism and the intensifying anti-communist sentiments in Italy, causing him to yet again alter his artistic production.

**Paladini’s Relationship to Soviet Constructivism**

Following the opening of the borders between post-October Revolution Russia and Western Europe in 1922, there was an influx of ideas flooding from East to West about Constructivism and the state of the Russian avant-garde, but in Italy not all leftist artists wanted to be affiliated with the Bolshevik aspects of the new movement.\(^{11}\) Paladini’s attention to utopian facets of construction and the built environment partially reflected discussions of the Russian avant-garde that were circulating throughout Europe, but with a very specific focus on the potential of a communist revolution beyond the borders of the Soviet Union. His interest in the built environment, architecture, and construction based on politically driven Russian models was integral to his 1922 *Avanguardia* articles. This is significant as Paladini was one of the first Italians to promote the concept of Constructivism and he continued to discuss its political relevance for revolution into the 1930s.

Although the International Faction of Constructivists (or Constructivist Faction) of the May 1922 Congress of International Progressive Artists in Düsseldorf is justly given prominence in the dissemination of Constructivism in Western Europe, this correlation does not unilaterally

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apply in the case of Paladini. The Constructivist Faction, headed by Theo van Doesburg, El Lissitzky, and Hans Richter, formed as a splinter group in opposition to the Congress of International Progressive Artists. They too advocated for a socially driven art and against individualism, but they lacked any mention of construction, architecture, or the proletariat in their 1922 “Statement by the International Faction of Constructivists” published in De Stijl. Furthermore, their statement included a notation that clarified the term Constructivism and was “presumably an effort by van Doesburg to distance the meaning of the term from its Russian origins.” In contrast, Paladini’s first essay vaunting construction and the role of the constructor was published just prior to the Congress of International Progressive Artists and he affirmed that Communism and the Soviet Union inspired his concept of construction. Furthermore, he rarely referenced the principle members of the Constructivist Faction in his texts written between 1922 and 1925. When he briefly mentioned van Doesburg and Lissitzky in relation to Constructivism, Paladini deemed their work retrograde, politically ineffective, and strictly decorative.

The question becomes, if not the Constructivist Faction, what informed Paladini’s writings and how did they both relate to and differ from other constructivist currents in Western Europe? Unlike his machine aesthetic collaborator, Pannaggi, who reflected the ideas disseminated by the Constructivist Faction, Paladini seems to have been primarily informed by

17 Paladini never mentions Hans Richter in any of his articles.
the Soviet constructivists whose artistic production derived directly from Marxist ideology.\(^{18}\)

Although he does not mention the groups by their official titles, his *Avanguardia* articles correlate to the constructivist program established by the OBMOKhU faction of the Working Group of Constructivists, which was formed by Aleksei Gan, Varvara Stepanova, Aleksandr Rodchenko, Karl Ioganson, Konstantin Medunetskii, and the Stenberg brothers (Georgii and Vladimir) in March 1921.\(^{19}\) The reason for this was that Komfut merged with the constructivists in the early 1920s. Like Paladini and Komfut, the Working Group of Constructivists emphasized the symbiotic relationship between the artist and the proletariat, the built environment and revolutionary potential. What is also remarkable is that Paladini’s writings between 1922 and 1925 identified two variants of Constructivism within Russia. He categorized one as a form of Dutch and Russian Constructivism derived from Suprematism and the other as Russian Constructors working directly with production.

Paladini’s understanding of Constructivism reflected the ideological divide between two artist organization in the Soviet Union: UNOVIS and OBMOKhU. UNOVIS became foundational for International Constructivism whereas OBMOKhU was significant in the development of Soviet Constructivism. Lissitzky described the ideological divide between UNOVIS and OBMOKhU in his journal *Vešč'/Gegenstand/Objet*, which was published in Berlin in 1922, the key year for the spread of International Constructivism.\(^{20}\)

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Two groups claimed Constructivism, the OBMOKhU …and the UNOVIS …. The former worked in material and space, the latter in material and plane. Both strove to attain the same result, namely the creation of the real object and of architecture…. Some members of OBMOKhU went as far as a complete disavowal of art and in their urge to be inventors, devoted their energies to pure technology. UNOVIS distinguished between the concept of functionality, meaning the necessity for the creation of new forms, and the question of direct serviceableness…

The two groups seemingly had much in common. Both were aligned politically and aesthetically with the left and several of the artists, like Aleksandr Rodchenko, began their artistic experimentation via Kazimir Malevich’s Suprematism. UNOVIS, which was founded in 1920 by Malevich in Vitebsk, derived directly from suprematist spatial studies. OBMOKhU, on the other hand, formed in 1920 in Moscow and consisted primarily of the Working Group of Constructivists. The location of each group would ultimately have an impact on Paladini’s understanding and promotion of Constructivism as he traveled frequently to Moscow, but there is no record of him ever visiting Vitebsk.

Several factors contributed to the ideological and aesthetic divide between UNOVIS and OBMOKhU. The primary distinction between the two groups was that UNOVIS retained the significance of the artist and continued to utilize easel painting; however, the artist was charged with creating new forms. In contrast, OBMOKhU went through a brief laboratory phase in which they researched new forms, but by 1922 the group called for the end of art and proclaimed

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Sophie Lissitzky-Küppers (Greenwich, CT: New York Graphic Society, 1968), 330-340. Lissitzky reiterated and further clarified the divide between OBMOKhU and UNOVIS in subsequent articles and speeches between 1922 and 1923.

22 Bowlt, Russian Art, 152.
23 Bowlt, Russian Art, 116.
24 Bowlt, Russian Art, 238.
the need for artists to enter directly into production. Another major ideological split between the two groups resulted from OBMOKhU’s dictate of working directly with reality, a distinction that they believed aligned their aesthetic program more directly with Lenin’s dialectical materialism. As a result, OBMOKhU adhered to the concept of *faktura* developed by Vladimir Tatlin and centered around the constructivist theories of Aleksei Gan, Nikolai Punin, and Rodchenko. Moreover, the Moscow-based constructivists focused on art for the public and the creation of multiples for mass production unlike UNOVIS, which created singular artistic works that could only be owned by one person.

Although there was infighting within the OBMOKhU group over the exact aims of Constructivism, Gan’s treatise, *Constructivism*, published in 1922 provided the most succinct definitions of their terminology, like *faktura*, and the group’s goals for serving the proletariat. Gan’s booklet proclaimed an “unconditional war on art” as it was speculative and ineffective for creating the new environs needed by the proletariat. Imbued by a Marxist definition of materialism, the treatise explained that all artists must be “Marxist educated” and “become constructors” to better facilitate the actual building of the “revolutionary environment.” In addition to Gan’s treatise on Constructivism, Komfut had allied with the emerging constructivist

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26 Eva Forgács, “Definitive Space: The Many Utopias of El Lissitzky’s *Proun Room*,” in *Situating El Lissitzky: Vitebsk, Berlin, Moscow*, ed. Nancy Perloff and Brian Reed (Los Angeles, CA: Getty Research Institute, 2003), 55. Forgács notes that their concept of reality referenced construction in real space as well as a “communist expression of material structures” (Forgács is quoting Lodder, *Russian Constructivism*, 85 and 94 and Rodchenko, “Programme,” 317-318.)


28 Gan, “From *Constructivism*,” 320.

29 Gan, “From *Constructivism*,” 319-320.
group and their collaboration soon yielded the journal *LEF* organized by Vladimir Majakovsky in 1923. Contributors to *LEF*, like Boris Arvatov, tracked the new movement’s lineage from the material experiments of Futurism and Cubism to its current constructivist and productivist goals. Ultimately, the constructivists’ desire for art to move into production, which was drawn from several groups including the short-lived Komfut, OBMOKhU, and *LEF*, found resonance in the newly formed VKhUTEMAS (officially founded in November 1920). Yet the emerging productivists asserted an ideological separation between their Constructivism and the architectonic, spatial, and volumetric studies of Malevich.

Lissitzky became central to disseminating both groups’ ideas to Western Europe, likely due to his involvement with Soviet programs established to encourage international outreach and the spread of communist ideology, such as the International Section of Narkompros. He was heavily influenced by and worked with Malevich at the Vitebsk Popular Art Institute (*Vitebskoe Narodnoi khudozhestvennoi uchilishche*). In addition, he was interested in the program of the Working Group of Constructivists. He adopted elements of OBMOKhU, while retaining and

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30 Lodder, *Russian Constructivism*, 78 and 252.
32 Lodder, *Russian Constructivism*, 112-113. Lodder notes that the foundation of the school was part of a larger governmental program to improve industrial production.
emphasizing Malevich’s suprematist architectonic and volumetric principles.\[37\] The result was an extension of Lissitzky’s *Proun* series, the *Prounraum* built in Berlin in 1923 (Fig. 3.1 and Fig. 3.2). Ultimately, his variant of Constructivism became integral to the development of International Constructivism in Western Europe for several reasons, including its confluence with De Stijl and the Constructivist Faction at the 1922 Congress of Progressive Artists and its centralized location of dissemination in Germany.\[38\] Furthermore, despite its leftist political foundations and Lissitzky’s own communist commitment, International Constructivism became de-communized and adopted as a style in part due to the post-war turmoil in Western Europe.

Although aware of Lissitzky’s pivotal role in the spread of Constructivism to Western Europe, Paladini was little interested in his work and rarely referred to him in his own writings. When he did, it was only to acknowledge Lissitzky’s tangential relationship to Suprematism and Malevich.\[39\] Paladini’s emphasis on construction for the proletariat reflected the tenets of Soviet Constructivism advocated for by the OBMOKhU group, *LEF*, and the Working Group of Constructivists. In addition, his personal ties to Moscow brought him more directly into contact with Soviet constructivists based in the city. Paladini’s 1923 short pamphlet *Arte d’avanguardia e futurismo* (*Avant-garde Art and Futurism*) highlighted his understanding of the various international incarnations of Constructivism and his review of the 1924 Soviet Pavilion at the Venice Biennale *Arte nella Russia dei Soviets: Il Padiglione dell’U.R.S.S. a Venezia* (*Art in the Russia of the Soviets: The Pavilion of the U.S.S.R in Venice*) specifically addressed the


\[38\] Bowlt, *Russian Art*, xxxviii and Lodder, “El Lissitzky,” 27-47. Drawing attention to his role as the primary spokesman for Russian art and his part in redefining the parameters of Constructivism, Lodder suggests that Lissitzky was the key component to the spread of Western, or International, Constructivism and that his reformulation of Constructivism provided “little evidence of an alternative conception actually existed.”

constructivist divide in Soviet Russia. Both essays sought to strategically use Constructivism as a foil to Marinetti’s Futurism, which was waffling on its remove from politics.

**Paladini’s Ambivalent Relationship with Marinetti’s Futurism**

Paladini’s clarification of his Bolshevik stance on construction was in response to developments in the Italian avant-garde that interlaced with the changes being wrought on the cultural landscape due to Fascism. On one hand Margarita Sarfatti’s Novecento, which was founded in 1922, allied itself with Fascism. Novecento artists, like Mario Sironi, adopted the constructor as a symbol of Fascism erecting a new Italy, which recalled the massive empire building of the ancient Romans. Paladini considered Novecento bound to tradition and official cultural policy and therefore at odds with both modernity and his political agenda. On the other hand, he was jockeying for position with and against Futurism by evolving from the machine aesthetic to a specifically Soviet Constructivism. Complicating matters further, Paladini’s affiliation with Futurism and his interest in the Russian Komfut artists strained his relationship with the conservative faction within the PCI.

Paladini’s ambivalent relationship to Marinetti’s Futurism was exemplified by three texts in 1923: “I Diritti artistici propugnati dai futuristi italiani: Manifesto al governo fascista” (“Artistic Rights Defended by the Italian Futurists: Manifesto to the Fascist Government”), *Arte d’avanguardia e futurismo* (*Avant-garde Art and Futurism*), and “Arte, Comunismo, e Nazionalismo” (“Art, Communism, and Nationalism”). Each text also responded to the problematic nature of Marinetti’s Futurism, with its rampant nationalistic claims and burgeoning fascist rapprochement, in relation to his own Bolshevism. Yet Futurism supported Paladini’s

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41 Paladini, *Arte nella Russia*, 34.
preference for the avant-garde whereas the PCI considered it unfavorable and insufficiently Marxist. The avant-garde was under attack by not only the extreme left, but also the extreme right, who deemed it un-Italian. Groups, like Futurism and Novecento, used insular arguments to defend their avant-garde status against conservative factions, while claiming international relevance. Nationalism, however, was contrary to Paladini’s zeal for the Communist International. Striking a balance between his artistic and political interests became an increasingly difficult and ideologically compromised venture for Paladini in 1923.

Shortly before Marinetti and Prampolini altered the original version of “L’arte meccanica” manifesto, Paladini signed the first directive of “I Diritti artistici propugnati dai futuristi italiani: Manifesto al governo fascista.” This manifesto was first published in March 1923 in *Il futurismo: Rivista sintetica illustrata mensile* and called for increased support of Italian avant-garde artists.\(^4^2\) The list of directives was prefaced by an introduction written by Marinetti that not only reviewed the history of Futurism but also claimed Mussolini as a member. Marinetti asserted that the basis of the futurist program was “Italian pride” and that the movement was typified by its patriotism.\(^4^3\)

The introduction reflected the tension between Futurism’s status among the international avant-garde, its fervent nationalism, and its politically tenuous position. Marinetti pointed out that the Italian movement was extremely influential and had spawned subsequent Futurisms throughout the world, including Russia. Under the Soviets, he noted, Futurism had become an official state art, but the Italian movement did “not necessarily share their political beliefs, e.g.

\(^{43}\) Marinetti, “Artistic Rights,” 357.
the Bolshevik politics of Futurism in Russia.”\textsuperscript{44} Although he claimed that Italian Futurism “becomes involved in politics only in time of grave peril for the Nation,” Marinetti followed with a list of futurist involvement in political events, including the rise of Fascism.\textsuperscript{45} His introduction played a game of suggesting similarities with Russian Komfut, to perhaps encourage official state status for the Italian movement, while denying any specific political attachments. His intent, no doubt, was to advance the cause of Futurism based on Italian precedence, its inherent nationalism, and Mussolini’s relationship to the movement.

Of the eleven directives listed, Paladini only signed the first one, which called for safeguards for the inclusion of futurists and avant-garde artists in state-sponsored exhibitions, like the Venice Biennale.\textsuperscript{46} His decision to sign the first directive could be attributed to his desire to garner government support for the avant-garde at a time of economic uncertainty and in the face of traditionally conservative juries. A program of government funding for the arts and support for artists would have been completely in line with his communist ideals and a left-wing futurist agenda. Other artists who had similar political beliefs, such as Pannaggi and Piero Illari (a leftist futurist who fled Italy in 1924 due to Fascism), also signed the first directive.\textsuperscript{47} But Marinetti’s introduction, with its thinly veiled overtures to Fascism, obscured Paladini’s political commitment. He immediately clarified in a letter dated March 1923 to Illari that he signed “I Diritti artistici propugnati dai futuristi italiani” for artistic and aesthetic reasons, and disavowed any political affiliation with Marinetti’s movement.\textsuperscript{48} Illari then published Paladini’s letter in his

\textsuperscript{44} Marinetti, “Artistic Rights,” 357.
\textsuperscript{45} Marinetti, “Artistic Rights,” 357-358.
\textsuperscript{46} Marinetti, “Artistic Rights,” 359.
\textsuperscript{47} Marinetti, “Artistic Rights,” 357 and Berghaus, Futurism and Politics, 199.
\textsuperscript{48} Lista, Dal Futurismo, 29.
leftist futurist, anti-fascist Parma-based journal, Rovente.49 Paladini’s oscillation between signing the “I Diritti artistici propugnati dai futuristi italiani” and disavowing his concurrence with a fascist Futurism reflected not only his ambivalence toward Marinetti’s Futurism, but also the political fluctuations of the period and of the movement.

By signing the directive, Paladini sought to protect young avant-garde artists from state exclusion. One likely reason was that art movements, such as Novecento, were garnering official fascist recognition while advocating for a return to order, an emphasis on Italian tradition, and anti-abstraction.50 The first directive of “I Diritti artistici propugnati dai futuristi italiani” countered that Futurism and the avant-garde was undeniably Italian and asserted that it was anti-Italian to exclude experimental artists from state exhibitions. The tone of the remaining directives reinforced the Italian-ness and nationalism of Futurism. Paladini refrained, however, from signing any subsequent directives that promoted enforced Italian nationalism, such as the third one entitled “Defense of Italianism.”51 Proposed by several futurists, including Marinetti, Prampolini, Virgilio Marchi, and Depero, this directive called for the “obligatory Italianization” of all signage and correspondence, publications, and architecture within Italy and the exclusion of foreign influences.

In the first half of 1923, Paladini also published a pamphlet titled Arte d’avanguardia e futurismo, which highlighted the international nature of the avant-garde and served to pointedly

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offset Constructivism from Marinetti’ Futurism.\textsuperscript{52} Arte d’avanguardia e futurismo appeared as a special imprint of Umberto Barbaro’s Roman publishing company, La Bilancia. Barbaro became a political ally and lifelong friend of Paladini during this period.\textsuperscript{53} Loosely, associated with the leftist Italian futurists, Barbaro was interested in the Russian art and literature, and was one of the foremost translators of Russian texts during the 1920s and into the 1930s. By publishing with La Bilancia, Paladini distanced himself from Prampolini’s journal Noi, for which he had written in the recent and which was an official mouthpiece for Marinetti’s Futurism.

The pamphlet provided a strategic way for Paladini to highlight Futurism as integral to the development of the international avant-garde, while continuing to promote the necessity for artists to look beyond the borders of Italy. He opined that art had taken three distinct directions after post-Impressionism: Objectivism (“the visible through our senses” as exemplified by Cubism), Subjectivism (that which is “outside of our pure senses”, such as German Expressionism), and Constructivism (“formal creation”).\textsuperscript{54} Shrewdly lauding the “genius of Marinetti” and the influence of Futurism on the world, Paladini assigned the movement a significant role straddling Subjectivism and Objectivism.\textsuperscript{55} The interpenetrating planes of futurist pre-war canvases were deemed objective whereas the emphasis on the states of mind typified the subjective impulse in art. Countering the purely Italian claims of Futurism, Paladini

\textsuperscript{52} Lista, Dal Futurismo, 115. An exact date on publication is not available, but scholars, such as Lista, suggest it was published shortly after the revised mechanical manifesto between May and July.

\textsuperscript{53} Carpi, Bolscevico immaginista, 21-34. Carpi dedicates a chapter to Barbaro’s La Bilancia and its cultural politics. Within the chapter he relays the working relationship and friendship that developed between Barbaro and Paladini.

\textsuperscript{54} Vinicio Paladini, Arte d’avanguardia e futurismo (Rome: La Bilancia, 1923), 3-5. “1 Oggettismo (il visibile attraverso la nostra sensibilità); 2 Soggettismo (esternamento della nostra sensibilità pura); 3 Costruttivismo (creazione formale).”

\textsuperscript{55} Paladini, Arte d’avanguardia, 5. “(gloria al geniale Marinetti!)” [parentheses in the originial text]
asserted that each of the original futurists “represented disparate currents and disparate research,” including Carlo Carrà and Ardengo Soffici, who utilized French Cubism.\textsuperscript{56}

Paladini’s pamphlet culminated in a discussion of the third tendency in art, Constructivism. Although he did not denounce Futurism or rescind his affiliation with the movement in the pamphlet, the trajectory of his discussion implied that Futurism had contributed significantly to the development of art, but Constructivism was now at the forefront of the international avant-garde. Paladini omitted Futurism from his discussion of Constructivism and by default the movement became relegated to the past.

Paladini identified that Constructivism had taken two directions in recent years, the painterly and the architectural, but that they both had formal creation in common. He also stated that all formal creation ultimately culminated into architecture, whether in two or three dimensions. According to him, Purism focused on the painterly creation of “image-objects.”\textsuperscript{57} Essentially, purists utilized formal elements that existed in the real world in order to construct these “image-objects.” Yet he indicated that their work often suffered from being confused with decorative art. His assessment of Purism omitted any discussion of Le Corbusier’s architectural projects, whether from his lack of interest or awareness is unknown. Similarly, he noted that the Dutch constructivists, Theo van Doesburg and Josef Peeters, also tended to fall into the decorative category.

\textsuperscript{56} Paladini, \textit{Arte d’avanguardia}, 5. “tutti questi individui rappresentarono disparate correnti, disparate ricerche… Carrà e Soffici più traendo dal cubismo francese”

\textsuperscript{57} Paladini, \textit{Arte d’avanguardia}, 6. “imagini-oggetti”
According to Paladini the definitive manifestation of Constructivism to date was Tatlin’s *Monument to the Third International*.\(^{58}\) Even though the central form of Paladini’s *Il Proletario della IIIª Internazionale costruzione meccanica* was redolent of Tatlin’s *Monument*, this was his first direct mention of the structure in his writings. Calling Tatlin’s *Monument* a dynamic, “real construction in iron and cement” and van Doesburg’s work decorative, “rhythmic and colorful arabesques,” Paladini echoed the divide between OBMOKhU and UNOVIS.\(^{59}\) Although Tatlin’s *Monument* was never built, it satisfied the Working Group of Constructivist demands for real works for the proletariat rather than an exploration into the theorized forms in space. He extolled the *Monument’s* virtues, underscoring his affinity with Eastern, rather than Western, models of Constructivism. Even so, Paladini declared that the constructivist spirit was supranational and transcended borders, in line with communist internationalism.\(^{60}\)

Paladini reasserted his idea that the factory and machine were the source of Constructivism. The essence of the movement, he wrote, derived from “architecture, engineering, and consequently the machine, and therefore the great love for the factory and the mechanical that we find in the spirit of all the newest and youngest people among whom Constructivism developed (Russia, Latvia, Holland, etc.).”\(^{61}\) When placed in context with his 1922 *Avanguardia* articles, Paladini’s promotion of Constructivism was not only bound to his interest in the machine, but also provided a new aesthetic direction for him to explore after his


\(^{59}\) Paladini, *Arte d’avanguardia*, 6. “vera costruzione in ferro e cemento” and “Spesso quest’arte si riduceva alla creazione di un semplice arabesco ritmato e colorato come in Van Doesburg…”


\(^{61}\) Paladini, *Arte d’avanguardia*, 6. “Tutto questo movimento, per la sua stessa essenza, si riattaccò all’architettura, all’ingegneria, e conseguentemente alle macchine, e quindi il grande amore per l’opificio, per il meccanismo che ritroviamo nello spirito di tutti i nuovissimi e giovanissimi popoli fra cui il costruttivismo si sviluppò (Russia, Lettonia, Olanda ecc.)”
proletarian machine-man hybrids. As such, the machine signaled the creation of the built environment for the proletariat in the service of revolution, hence his concerns regarding constructivist tendencies that could be deemed merely decorative. By evolving his mechanical aesthetic to align more exactly with Soviet Constructivism, Paladini circumvented the futurist commandeering of his manifesto and retained the social purpose of the machine for the proletariat. Repeating his invocation from “Estetica meccanica,” Paladini concluded *Arte d’avanguardia e futurismo* by instructing all artists to focus on fulfilling a new doctrine: “Today the law is: Construct, Build!”

Unlike the widespread metaphors of construction in post-war Italy at this time, as exemplified by Sironi and the Novecento artists, Paladini did not invoke construction in the name of the new fascist regime nor did he reference the need to rebuild after the war. Whether due to its competing role with Futurism or personal reasons, Paladini omitted Novecento from *Arte d’avanguardia e futurismo*. Likely, he wanted to distance his concept of Construction from that of the Novecento artists. Sarfatti had similarly proclaimed construction as vital for the Italian avant-garde, but with an emphasis on its historic Roman foundations. Paladini subtly countered the traditionalism and classicism of return to order aesthetics that riddled...
contemporaneous art movements, like Novecento and Sironi’s paintings (Fig. 3.3). He asserted that modern art no longer had a distinct style, but was instead driven by research and construction. These two tendencies had in turn become the new tradition and he declared, “tradition is evolution and involution. When we stop seeing that, all is lost.”

An early example of Paladini’s experimental design for a practical and utilitarian constructivist architectural interior was featured in the June/July 1923 issue of Noi, when he was still overtly affiliated with the Futurist movement. The streamlined, functional space labeled Camera da letto per albergo (Bedroom for a hotel; Fig. 3.4) resonated visually with the constructivist projects at the VKhUTEIMAS for multiuse interiors (Fig. 3.5). His hotel room was a multiuse space that served both sleeping and bathing needs. A sink and shower spigot occupied a small space in the far right corner. Only a sliding door separated the bathing zone from the rest of the room. He made the furniture boxy, which gave it a modular appearance. In particular, the multipurpose blocks beneath the window could serve as both a window seat and step stool. Paladini’s design stood in stark contrast to the swirling dynamic futurist patterns of the image featured directly below it on the page, Prampolini’s Cabina d’aeroplano (Airplane Cabin; Fig. 3.6). As a design for the interior of an airplane, Prampolini’s drawing was completely based on fantasy and lacked any references to the specific needs of flight. Instead, the cabin looked like the interior of a high-end bar complete with rounded booths and a stage. The differences between the two designs underscored Paladini’s engagement with Constructivism and his distance from Marinetti’s Futurism in mid-1923.

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65 Paladini, Arte d’avanguardia, 6. “La tradizione è evoluzione e involuzione e quindi vediamo che essa non si è spenta.”
66 Lista, Dal Futurismo, 28. Lista suggests Paladini’s influence came from Purism and De Stijl.
Paladini’s third salient text of 1923, entitled “Arte, Comunismo e Nazionalismo,” further illuminated his continued difficulty in navigating between his political and aesthetic interests. According to Giovanni Lista, Paladini’s article was written in response to the recent publication of Jacques Mensil’s *Nationalism in Art* in Italy. Yet Paladini’s essay clearly stated his reason for writing “Arte, Comunismo e Nazionalismo.” Published in the September 30, 1923 edition of the Milan-based communist journal *Pagine Rosse*, he affirmed that it was in direct response to an earlier edition of the journal, which featured a discussion of Russian art and its relationship to the proletariat, intellectualism, and government support.

Paladini was likely responding to Frida Rubner’s “Il Futurismo in Russia” ("Futurism in Russia"), which discussed NEP funding, the *LEF* group of artists, and Lunacharsky’s support of their program. Rubner asserted that Futurism was inherently politically problematic, pointing out that futurists in Italy adhered to Fascism, but in Russia they claimed to be communists. She concluded her argument by declaring that *LEF* artists (who she correctly understood to be related to Russian Futurism) were counter to the tenets of Communism in Russia, because they did not arise naturally from the proletariat. Furthermore, she contested the claims made by *LEF* that artistic labor was part of production, indicating awareness of the Russian futurists merger with the constructivists and productivists. Paladini countered Rubner by contending that government support of certain artists was a direct reflection of the important role assigned to the arts in the Soviet Union. In contrast to Rubner, he averred that “The value of painting, theatre, and poetry is evident in a proletarian dictatorship” and that a revolutionary spirit imbued all within the

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69 Paladini, “Arte, Comunismo,” 16. Paladini stated that his article was in response to “*Pagine Rosse* (no.4).”
Soviet Union, “transforming the Soviet nation into one of the main centers of modern art…”  

His retort sidestepped any mention of funding as specifically geared toward the futurists; instead, he focused on the overarching importance of the arts for the entire nation.

Paladini also clarified his position on nationalism, which corresponded to issues raised by Marinetti’s “I Diritti artistici propugnati dai futuristi italiani.” He acknowledged that even in the Soviet Union there has been a debate about artistic nationalism that has centered around as disparate concepts as Pan-Slavism, the Byzantine style, popular culture, and the czars’ promulgation of French and German artistic traditions. But he warned, “There is something Marinetti must understand when he spoke/speaks of artistic nationalism. He must observe the consequences of his just principles.”

Every country, Paladini stated, has its own traditions and spiritual force that made it impossible to entirely remove tradition from arts and culture. He claimed that, unlike Marinetti and the Italian futurists, the communists had resolved the issue of national tradition and international innovation. According to Paladini, Communism was not opposed to the individual characteristics of each nation; however, like its economic model, it had the ability to diffuse the tension between the international and the national via a focus on the communal.

Paladini believed that fighting among artistic groups could only be resolved if the different tendencies of each nation were respected and yet amalgamated. First and foremost, he hypothesized that this would result in greater diversity in the production of art, because there would no longer be uniformity of dictated national styles. Second, it would resolve issues of

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nationalism, which caused competition and an emphasis on uniqueness of styles. According to Paladini, “competition and emulation” would continue to exist, but only inasmuch as they helped to fight capitalist interests and further the development of humanity.\footnote{Paladini, “Arte, Comunismo,” 16. “La competizione e l’emulazione esisteranno, ma invece di essere lotta di interessi capitalistici saranno molla di propulsione dello sviluppo dell’umanità”} For Paladini, Communism was the balm that would unite all for the betterment of mankind. With no small degree of naïveté, he declared:

International nationalism, aristocratic democracy – Communism has been known to unite opposites with a magic force that is contained in its superb vision of the world! I want all to understand that the framework of modern thought conforms to the great communist idea.\footnote{Paladini, “Arte, Comunismo,” 16. “Nazionalismo internazionalista, democraticismo aristocratico, il Comunismo ha saputo unire gli opposti con la magica forza che è racchiusa nella superb visione del mondo! Questo vorrei che tutti intendessero affinché’ l’ossatura del moderno pensiero fosse tutta conformata alla grande idea Comunista.”}

The Soviet Pavilion at the 1924 Venice Biennale

The Soviet Pavilion at the Venice Biennale, which opened in the summer of 1924, was a decisive moment for Paladini’s aesthetic and political development. Inspired by the works on view and the catalogue text for the Soviet Pavilion written by Boris Ternovetz, Paladini published a booklet with La Bilancia early in 1925 titled, Arte nella Russia dei Soviets: Il Padiglione dell’U.R.S.S. a Venezia.\footnote{The date imprinted on the pamphlet is 1925; however, Arte nella Russia dei Soviets: Il Padiglione dell’U.R.S.S. a Venezia may have been published as early as December 1924 as there is an advertisement for it in the anarchist journal Fede 2, no. 63 (December 21, 1924): 3.} As one of the most extensive reviews of the exhibition, it was a key text for disseminating information in Rome about the current state of post-Revolution Russian art, yet it has been mostly overlooked in the Anglo-American scholarship about the Russian presence at the 1924 Venice Biennale.\footnote{Barnett, “The Russian Presence,” 466-73. Vivian Endicott Barnett has extensively documented the genesis of the Soviet Pavilion at the 1924 Biennale, including reconstructing a list of works} Furthermore, his review revealed that he had
been closely following the developing relationship between avant-garde artists and the Soviet government since 1922. In an aside, he alluded to his disappointment with Anatoly Lunacharsky for withdrawing his support of Tatlin and artists of the left, which likely referred to Lunacharsky’s recent withdraw of support for the Russian futurists.  

Due to World War I and the Russian Revolution, 1924 was the first opportunity since 1914 to view a major exhibition of Soviet art in Italy. The 1922 Erste Russische Kunstausstellung (First Russian Art Exhibition) in Berlin had set the precedent and many of the same works were later sent to the Venice Biennale. In addition, artworks were gathered from all facets of artistic production in Russia, including the decorative and applied arts. Lunacharsky and Petr Kogan, the exhibition commissioner, were actively involved in gathering, funding, and coordinating artist submissions for the Soviet Pavilion. Boris Ternovetz, the secretary general of the exhibition commission, prepared the catalogue that accompanied the exhibition. The text, which is quoted extensively by Paladini in his booklet, provided an overview of the main currents and basic history of the developments in Russian art since 1900.

Paladini introduced his booklet by continuing his meditation on the problem of nationalism discussed in “Arte, Comunismo, e Nazionalismo.” He praised the highly eclectic...
nature of the Soviet Pavilion, which he considered perfectly reflective of the combined internationalist program of the government and the national pride that had evolved after the revolution. Unlike Western Europe, whose nationalism he said was designed to “cover up shady ambitions and commercialism,” Russia’s was born from a sense of isolation enforced on the nation because the rest of the world reviled its revolution. Setting a celebratory tone for the liveliness and diversity of the Russian avant-garde, Paladini’s booklet quoted “The Scythians” by Aleksandr Blok. The poem was a meaningful choice, as it not only commemorated the October Revolution, but it also invited Europe to join in Communism. The selection quoted by Paladini was strategic as it heralded the strength and international diversity of Russia’s revolutionary foundations. For Paladini, the Russian avant-garde had synthesized all the best parts of the international avant-garde and avoided the “sick manifestations of the Western world” – Metaphysical painting, Symbolism, and the return to order.

Once he had established the extreme diversity and strength of Soviet art, Paladini then provided a detailed review of the pavilion and a meditation on the history and development of the Russian avant-garde, interweaving direct quotes from Ternovetz’s text. In particular, Paladini focused on the recent politically motivated transition of artists from easel painting to production as well as on developments in theater and the decorative arts. The Soviet Pavilion, Paladini noted, both affirmed and recalled his articles from 1922 to 1923, specifically his “ardent

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83 Paladini, Arte nella Russia, 8. “…questo nazionalismo è ben altra cosa dell’orpello falso e retorico con cui si cercano oprire torbide ambizioni ed affarismi nel nostro mondo.”
84 The part of the poem quoted alludes to the Germanic foundations of Communism, the revolutions of France, the political upheavals in Venice, and factory occupations in Germany.
85 Paladini, Arte nella Russia, 9. “Metafisicismi, simbolismi, ritorni, nulla di queste manifestazioni false ed ammalate del mondo occidentale sono qui rappresentate.”
desire for a union between the political left and the artistic left.”86 He continued with an assessment of the two major directions taken by “left” avant-gardists in post-Revolution Russia. Paladini had already introduced this concept in Arte d’avanguardia e futurismo, but here he clarified the distinction between Suprematism and a group he called the Constructors. Vaunting the significance of the Constructors over their suprematist and futurist contemporaries, Paladini aligned himself with the tenets of construction and faktura, which were featured in Aleksei Gan’s book, Constructivism, and the journal, LEF.87 Although he did not mention them by name, Paladini’s evaluation of the two groups mimicked, and therefore provided valuable insight about, the ideological and political divide between UNOVIS and OBMOKhU.88 The dichotomy between the two Russian leftist factions also served as a fundamental framework for reception and interpretation that would resurface in his later writings on art and architecture. Furthermore, it introduced Italians to key information about the developments of the Russian avant-garde that few would have encountered unless they had visited the 1922 Erste Russische Kunstausstellung in Berlin or had access to El Lissitzky and Ilija Ehrenburg’s journal, Vešč'/Gegenstand/Objet, which was only briefly published in 1922.

Within Arte nella Russia dei Soviets: Il Padiglione dell’U.R.S.S. a Venezia, Paladini critiqued Suprematism for its excessively theoretical, rather than practical pursuits. He considered Suprematism firmly bound to pictorial art and, like De Stijl (what he termed Dutch

86 Paladini, Arte nella Russia, 23-24. “Credo inutile ripetere il mio pensiero su questa scabrosa e complessa questione della quale mi sono da tempo occupato con passione grandissima significando il mio ardente desiderio di una unione completa e viva tra sinistra politica e sinistra artistica.” Paladini also listed his essays from 1922 to 1923 on art and Communism as a reminder of his dedication to the subject.
88 Paladini did not specifically cite UNOVIS and OBMOKhU, but his discussion identified two tendencies in Russian leftist art that are both ideologically and aesthetically similar.
Constructivism), less directed toward practical application in a new culture of the worker. He added that many of the Russian paintings on view, such as those by Aleksandra Exter, were poor iterations of Suprematism and guilty of being “absolutely inconclusive, terribly insincere in spirit, and nothing much in value...that speak more of a badly understood Futurism than anything else, in which one could find none of the results of the problems of faktura or construction.”

Despite its identification with the leftist avant-garde, Paladini admonished Suprematism for being too aloof from reality and for being intellectually elitist. Non-representational abstract art required mediation for the audience via explanation and was therefore not readily usable for the development of a revolutionary consciousness. Paladini disparaged the suprematists’ lack of focus on reality in favor of strictly pictorial value, which resounded with OBMOKhU’s criticisms leveled at UNOVIS. His analysis recapitulated Gramsci and Trotsky’s concerns that the use of overly abstract images and concepts only regurgitated the language and educational preparation of the bourgeoisie, thus further alienating the worker. Suprematism could therefore no longer serve as a revolutionary art due to its self-referential qualities and inherent intellectual elitism, which impeded rather than facilitated the proletariat’s rise to power.

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90 This was a main topic of discussion in the pages of *Avanguardia* in 1922 and stemmed from Antonio Gramsci’s writings (in particular “Marinetti the Revolutionary”) as well as his role in the recent opening of the Turin branch of Proletkult. For additional information, see Berghaus, *Futurism and Politics*, 199-209; Gramsci, “For a Cultural Association;” and Gramsci, Letter to Trotsky.
The paintings that Paladini most harshly negated were those by Lyubov Popova, Aleksandr Rodchenko, and Varvara Stepanova, even though his understanding of faktura and construction was seemingly informed by the Working Group of Constructivists, to whom these three artists belonged. The reason for the contradiction is clear: the works on view by Popova, Rodchenko, and Stepanova derived from their earlier suprematist period and were categorized as such in the catalogue that accompanied the exhibition. As evidenced by documentary photos of the exhibition, Rodchenko was represented by his 1918 color experiments that preceded his constructivist work proper and did not yet correspond to the ideas of material analysis applied to utilitarian ends (Fig. 3.7 and Fig. 3.8). Nor did the pavilion include photographs, photomontages, or his productivist works that would have been contemporaneous with the Biennale. The pavilion’s content, in short, was not up to date with the Russians’ practice. The West would have to wait until the following year, at the Exposition internationale des arts décoratifs et industriels modernes (International Exhibition of Contemporary Decorative and Industrial Art) in Paris, to witness Rodchenko’s productivist Workers’ Reading Room and the architecture of Konstantin Melnikov. Both successfully combined material analysis with social purpose, featuring designs that equated the worker with the state, such as modular furniture that could transition to serve both workers’ leisure time and communist party meetings (Fig. 3.9 and Fig. 3.10).

In his review of the Venice Biennale, Paladini lamented the absence of work by the Constructors and therefore relied on Ternovetz’s text to supplement his assessment of their contribution to contemporary Soviet art. Citing Ternovetz, Paladini wrote that a group “gathered

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91 Barnett, “The Russian Presence,” 469. Barnett’s research also reveals that all the works on view were from the prior decade.
under the common denomination of ‘Constructors’ have expressed explicitly their profound aversion to the traditional forms of easel painting and attempted to prove in their direct participation in the process of the textile, metallurgical, or polygraphic industry the resolution of the problem…”.

Hence, the Constructor movement was synonymous with the Russian constructivists and productivists who had abandoned the experimental, or laboratory phase, and focused instead on a direct engagement with production and agitational propaganda. Paladini asserted that Constructors were artists who led the transition of art into the production of utilitarian and practical objects and were committed to partnering with the proletariat. As such, they exemplified the positive relationship that could exist between workers and bourgeois intellectuals, because “These Constructors are supporters of an art that departs from the factory floor and will be born out of manual labor that puts the proletariat directly in contact with creative action.”

Paladini seemingly imprecise use of the terms “Constructivism” and “Constructor” reflected the fluctuations between 1920 and 1922 when members of Komfut and the Working Group of Constructivists merged and eventually launched the journal, LEF, in 1923. Former Russian futurist writers used LEF as a platform to discuss the new focus on the constructive and productive in art. The journal proclaimed its members as the “Bolsheviks of art” and that the

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93 Paladini, Arte nella Russia, 31. Ternovetz was likely referring to the reaction against easel painting in the 1921 debates at INKhUK, the 1921 Obmokhu exhibition, Aleksei Gan’s Constructivism published in 1922, and the launch of LEF in 1923. Paladini quotes Ternovetz: “La maggior parte di costoro, radunati sotto la commune denominazione di «costruttori», hanno espresso esPLICITAMENTE la loro profonda avversione per le forme tradizionali della pittura da cavalletto e tentano di trovare nella partecipazione diretta ai processi dell’industria tessile, metallurgica, o poligrafica la risoluzione del problema…” [The ellipses is from Paladini’s text.]

94 Paladini, Arte nella Russia, 31. “Questi costruttori sono i fautori di un’arte che parte dall’officina e sia frutto di un lavoro manuale che porti direttamente il proletariato a conatto con il fatto creativo.”

95 Lodder, Russian Constructivism, 75-76.
Russian futurists were the first to merge political and social revolution in their art by virtue of their dedication to construction for the proletariat.\(^96\) Constructor and its implied meaning can best be conveyed by the term *Soviet Constructivism* assigned by Karel Teige in 1929, or the more recent title, Productivism, given by contemporary Soviet art historians.\(^97\) Paladini’s terminology also accentuated the time lag between what had been written about the developments of the Russian avant-garde and what could be seen in Italy heretofore. By using Constructor, he was able to distinguish the politically driven Soviet variant from the better-known version of Constructivism that had been circulating in Western Europe since 1922 and that stemmed from the Constructivist Faction at the Congress of International Progressive Artists.

Taking his lead from Ternovetz’s account, Paladini organized the ten plates in his review to illustrate the evolution of the Russian avant-garde from a turn of the century group affiliated with the art journal, *Mir Isskustva (World of Art)*, to the Soviet constructivists. The reproductions begin with Boris Kustodieiev, who was a member of *Mir Isskustva*, followed by Georges Annenkov’s cubo-futurist fractured planes, continuing through the Suprematism of Aleksandra Exter (as Paladini termed her work), and culminating in Altman’s October Revolution mass demonstrations and, ultimately, Tatlin’s *Monument to the Third International*,


Although the latter was not included in the Biennale, Paladini’s strategic ordering of the images and his discussion heralded Tatlin’s *Monument* as emblematic of the move from fine art to utilitarian construction.

Paladini celebrated the Constructors because they worked directly in production on behalf of the proletariat. Indeed, they considered the suprematist easel paintings on view at the Biennale to be useless and “a manifestation of a decidedly bourgeois mentality.”

In commending the Constructors’ involvement in industry, Paladini turned his attention to the applied arts and ceramics on view in the Soviet Pavilion, which included vases, plates, boxes, and figurines. Here too his agenda was to show how artists could be the middle men in educating the proletariat on how to overcome the constraints of the bourgeois past and its aesthetic traditions, and seizing the means of art production in line with industrial production.

In the pavilion, ceramics designed by the avant-garde were displayed next to the items made by factory artisans, making the point that artists were attempting to engage directly in production of practical items that could be used to create a new environment for the workers. Paladini praised the work of the Decorative Institute of Leningrad for maintaining the important role occupied by the applied arts during the Revolution. Aleksandra Exter, who was criticized in an earlier section of his article for her bourgeois and overly stylistic suprematist paintings, was now complimented, along with Natalia Goncharova, for the utilization of motifs on the surfaces

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of the ceramics that borrowed directly from the workers. He was likely referring to their incorporation of techniques inspired by *lubki* (indeed, he included one of Goncharova’s *lubki*-style woodcut prints on the cover and on the final text page of the booklet; Fig. 3.12). Paladini then contrasted the products of the Decorative Institute, which continued to make serviceable wares, with the luxury items also on view that had been produced by the State Porcelain Factory – in his opinion, pieces better suited for Versailles than for a worker’s home. The applied arts must not fall into the pattern of decorating for the wealthy, Paladini concluded, but rather for the “brash, vast, and new spirit of the communist worker.”

Interspersed in his discussion of the Russian avant-garde, Paladini addressed theater costuming and stage design. He assigned theater a foundational role in the development of contemporary art due to Sergei Diaghilev, who had been the editor of _Mir Isskustava_ and was the director of the Ballets Russes. As mentioned earlier, the journal and the group of artists related to it were given precedence as the originators of the Russian avant-garde. Paladini strategically introduced Diaghilev’s, as well as Léon Bakst’s, theater work to create a parallel to his discussion of Exter. The correlation that Paladini seemed to be drawing was that art of the left has a history of providing a direct point of contact between artists and the proletariat. Yet again addressing the need for “new forms of art that could contribute to the formation of a new generation of men, free from the bog of the false and idiotic bourgeois education,” Paladini

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101 The combination of the industrial laborer and farming peasant were symbolic of the working classes of the Revolution. Here, Paladini conflated the two.
102 Paladini, _Arte nella Russia_, 33. “…si addaterebbero all spirito più rude, vasto, nuovo, di un operaio comunista.”
turned to Exter’s recent costumes and set designs to identify how to successfully engage with the proletariat via the theater and film.¹⁰³

Paladini discussed two aspects of Exter’s recent work: her stage and costume designs for Aleksandr Tairov’s production of *Romeo and Juliet* at the Kamerny Theater in 1921 and those for the film, *Aelita: The Queen of Mars* (1924). Although she traveled between Paris and Moscow, Exter began working with Tairov’s Kamerny Theater in 1916.¹⁰⁴ Tairov was known for his collaborations with experimental avant-garde artists, including the constructivists Lyubov Popova and Aleksandr Vesnin.¹⁰⁵ Paladini acknowledged Exter’s reputation as one of the most celebrated Russian artists among the international avant-garde due to her work for Tairov, but he damned her with faint praise. The problem with her designs for Tairov was that they relied on already outmoded styles of Expressionism, Cubism, and Futurism (Fig. 3.13). Paladini asserted that her costumes and set designs had an “excessive analysis of movement,” which he considered “Exter-esque defects,” and were “harmful from a scenic point of view.”¹⁰⁶ The reason for his critique derived from his issues with Suprematism being a leftist art that was too removed from the proletariat. He alluded to this connection by stating that he would review her paintings when he addressed Suprematism. Paladini was likely also acknowledging the growing criticism of Expressionism, Cubism, and Futurism as signifiers of bourgeois intellectualism. Paladini, however, lauded Exter for her costume and set designs for a film about Mars, which clearly

¹⁰³ Paladini, *Arte nella Russia*, 24. “…di evolvere ed educare questo proletariato abituandolo a nuove forme d’arte che tanto potrebbero contribuire alla formazione di una nuova generazione di uomini liberi dalle vecchie pastoie della falsa ed idiota educazione borghese.” Here Paladini has posed the question of cultural education for the workers and immediately turned to Exter’s work in theater to exemplify how the left is revolutionary in this regard.


¹⁰⁶ Paladini, *Arte nella Russia*, 25. “…non potremo fare a meno di riproverare una eccessiva analisi di movimento…che sentono fortemente di questo difetti.”
referenced *Aelita: The Queen of Mars* (released September 1924), an early science fiction movie created to serve as communist propaganda. The basic premise of the film was that a Russian engineer traveled to Mars and helped lead a workers’ revolution. Exter’s costumes were to Paladini’s liking, for they derived from “mechanized forms borrowed from industrial life, factories, and the marvelous machines that are the soul of modern life.” Yet again, he returned to his conviction that the machine symbolized everything that was progressive about modernity. As such, Exter’s designs succeeded due to their relationship to construction and production.

*Arte nella Russia dei Soviets: Il Padiglione dell’U.R.S.S. a Venezia* is particularly significant because Paladini was one of the few Bolshevik cultural writers to review the exhibition in Italy. It should be noted that several of the main Italian communist journals that were still operational in 1924 and early 1925, including those that Paladini wrote for, did not respond to the exhibition, a silence which perhaps could be attributed to the intensity of the Matteotti crisis. One of the only mentions of the Soviet Pavilion at the Biennale was an announcement heralding Paladini’s forthcoming booklet. The lack of interest in the pavilion suggests that mainstream PCI membership was no longer interested in Bolshevik-inspired avant-garde art in Russia. One article, “La Mostra di Arte Russa in Venezia” (“The Exhibition of Russian Art in Venice”) by Ernesto Longobardi, was published in *L’Ordine Nuovo* in November

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109 “Edizioni della Bilancia,” *Fede!* 2, no. 63 (December 21, 1924): 3. I reviewed several left-wing and communist cultural journals available at the Fondazione Giangiacomo Feltrinelli library, including *Fede* and *Pagine Rosse*, but this is the only reference to the 1924 Soviet Pavilion that I found.
1924. Longobardi, a frequent contributor to *L’Ordine Nuovo*, applauded the diversity of the Soviet art on view, but he only briefly mentioned the Constructors as a point of contrast for the painters who worked in a realistic style documenting the Russian Revolution. Longobardi did not address the variances within the leftist artists working in the Soviet Union nor did he reference Constructivism or Suprematism. Paladini’s extensive review was ostensibly the only communist-driven discussion in Italy that proclaimed the political significance of Soviet Constructivism. This void created an absence of awareness of the communist aspects of Constructivism that made it vulnerable for futurist and fascist repurposing.

**Paladini and the Internationale Ausstellung Neuer Theatertechnik**

Frederick Kiesler, a leading innovator of theater, architecture, and graphic design, organized the *Internationale Ausstellung Neuer Theatertechnik* (*International Exhibition of New Theater Techniques*), which opened in Vienna in September 1924. It highlighted recent international avant-garde experiments in theater and cinema, including works representative of Germany’s Bauhaus and Russia’s theaters directed by Aleksandr Tairov and Vsevolod Meyerhold. Futurists dominated the Italian section and Prampolini was the most extensively represented. Not only did he have an essay, “L’Atmosfera Scenica” (“Set Design”), published

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110 E.C. Longobardi, “La mostra di arte russa in Venezia,” *L’Ordine Nuovo* Third Series 1, no. 6 (November 1, 1924): 41-42. Longobardi only includes three sentences in his two page review that relate to the Constructors.

111 A discussion of Soviet Constructivism as it relates to film, architecture, photomontage, and exhibition design will be central to the next chapters.


in the exhibition catalogue, he also had set designs and costumes for twenty-two theater productions on display. Paladini and his former collaborator, Pannaggi, were included due to their recently acclaimed production, *Ballo meccanico futurista*.

The exhibition was significant as it brought attention to the two young artists in an international forum. Pannaggi had several of his set design sketches on display, including one for the production *La Torre Rossa* (*The Red Tower*; Fig. 3.14), two that were generically titled *Architettura d’ambiente* (*Architectural interior*), and two titled *Allestimento scenico futurista* (*Futurist set design*). Pannaggi’s contributions to the exhibition were marked by their indebtedness to Futurism, both in their titles and stylistic similarity to sets designed by Prampolini (Fig. 3.15). For example, Pannaggi’s *La Torre Rossa* relied on innately Italian elements like rounded archways and medieval towers that were likewise featured in designs by the senior futurist. His most celebrated work was a photomontage of the robot’s costume in *Ballo meccanico futurista* (Fig. 2.10). The latter brought him instant acclaim and impressed Herwarth Walden, who was one of the financial supporters of the *Internationale Ausstellung Neuer Theatertechnik*, owner of Der Sturm gallery in Berlin, and had been the first to exhibit Italian futurist works in Germany in 1912. Walden later reproduced an image of Pannaggi’s photomontage in July/August 1925 as part of a special theater edition of his journal, *Der Sturm*.

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116 Herwarth Walden, ed. *Der Sturm* (July-August 1925): 113 and Georg Brühl, *Herwarth Walden un «Der Sturm»* (Leipzig: Edition Leipzig, 1983), 262. According to Brühl the image was also published in *Der Sturm* XVII, no. 3 (1926): 3. This version was also located, but the binding of *Der Sturm* available in the archive section of the Unter den Linden location of the Staatbibliothek in Berlin made it impossible to determine the month of publication.
By contrast, Paladini’s designs departed from his past futurist work and had a clear affinity for Constructivism and Productivism, which suggests the direct influence of the Soviet Pavilion on his artistic production in 1924. During this period the majority of Paladini’s set and costume designs were speculative sketches and models made for Bragaglia’s Teatro degli Indipendenti, but were never used for theatrical productions. This arrangement, while problematic for reaching the masses, provided Paladini with freedom to experiment. His set designs exhibited at the Internationale Ausstellung Neuer Theatertechnik omitted any reference to the machine aesthetic and futurist dynamism and were a complete departure from his Ballo meccanico futurista costumes. Instead, they were concise designs that had the appearance of architectural renderings. He exhibited two set design sketches for Anatema (Anathema), one costume and two set designs for Salomé, and one set design for Il Candelaria (Candle Mass). Reproduced images of his Anatema and Salomé set designs were featured in Noi and have been recently reprinted in Lista’s monograph on Paladini; unfortunately, no evidence of Candelaria remains.

Paladini’s designs for Anatema revealed his interest in the built environment for the proletariat. He originally designed the cover of an Italian translation of Leonid Andreev’s Anatema, which was published by La Bilancia in 1923. The set designs, however, were likely created specifically for the Internationale Ausstellung Neuer Theatertechnik. Written by the Russian playwright Andreev in 1909, the tragedy focused on an evil spirit named Anathema,

\[\text{117} \text{ Lista, Futurism and Photography, 147.} \]
\[\text{118} \text{ Kiesler, Internationale Ausstellung, 35 and 49.} \]
\[\text{119} \text{ Lista, Dal Futurismo, 29. This cover design image was reprinted in Noi, no. 3-4 (June-July 1923): 15.} \]
\[\text{120} \text{ I cannot find evidence that these sketches existed prior to the exhibition.} \]
who wanted to enter the unknown world beyond the Gate of Destiny. Anathema was denied entry and therefore decided to seek his revenge by sending a poor man, who he had corrupted with money, through the Gate. His ploy failed miserably as the poor man retained his kindness, was martyred, and allowed to enter. Paladini’s set designs were a contemporary interpretation of the story, updated to reflect the class struggle. Rather than looking like a set design, one sketch had the appearance of an affordable housing project (Fig. 3.16). Each house along the street had the exact same modular construction. His other set design recalled the sprawl of factories across the urban landscape (Fig. 3.17). Here, Paladini’s Gate of Destiny appeared as a factory entrance complete with riveted metal doors and endless cylindrical shapes reminiscent of industrial smokestacks. The set designs correlated to Paladini’s writings heretofore – just as proletarian art and revolution would arise from the factory, Andreev’s poor man attained enlightenment by entering the Gates of Destiny symbolized by factory doors.

Paladini’s designs for Salomé were developed for a performance at the Teatro Olympia in Milan in 1924 and were even sparser and more constructivist than those created for Anatema. According to Giovanni Lista, stage designs by Aleksandra Exter and Sergei Kozlovsky for the Russian film, Aelita: Queen of Mars (Fig. 3.18), inspired Paladini’s Salomé (Fig. 3.19 and Fig. 3.20). Paladini’s stark layout for the stage featured a long staircase descending from the left, a circular well placed in the middle, and a wall of tall cylindrical forms along the right-hand side. Visually, there is a clear cohesion between Paladini’s minimal set décor and the spiraling

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122 Lista, Dal Futurismo, 32.
123 Lista, Dal Futurismo, 32.
labyrinth of Aelita’s lair. His set designs, however, corresponded more with Aleksandr Vesnin’s 1922 set designs for Tairov’s Kamerny Theater productions *Phaedra* and *The Man Who Was Thursday*, which were also featured in Kiesler’s exhibition (Fig. 3.21 and Fig. 3.22). Six works by Vesnin had been on view at the *Erste Russische Kunstaugstelling* in 1922 and were sent to the 1924 Venice Biennale. As there was quite a bit of overlap among the Russian avant-garde works that traveled for exhibition during the early 1920s, it is highly probable that Vesnin’s artworks exhibited at the *Internationale Ausstellung Neuer Theatertechnik* were the same ones displayed at the 1924 Venice Biennale. Both Vesnin and Exter utilized staircases as central elements in their designs, but Vesnin also incorporated tall cylindrical forms in *Phaedra*. In Paladini’s model for *Salomé*, he also had a latticed element that recalled Vesnin’s *The Man Who Was Thursday*. This latticework, however, was not a feature found in Exter’s set designs.

Paladini’s new design direction propelled him into a unique position straddling both Soviet Constructivism and Italian Futurism. Kiesler featured the *Salomé* set design within the exhibition catalogue, granting it a half-page reproduction (Fig. 3.23). Furthermore, Kiesler’s design layout for the catalogue suggested that he also considered Paladini’s work to be an intersection between the Russian and Italian avant-garde: his set for *Salomé* was placed beneath an article by Luigi Russolo on futurist sound music and a Russian example of typography for theater placards.

Similarly, Anton Giulio Bragaglia emphasized the cohesion between Paladini’s set designs and the Russian avant-garde. Bragaglia published “Avanguardia italiana e teatro russo”

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125 Barnett, “The Russian Presence,” 470; Kiesler, *Internationale Ausstellung*, 69; and Nebbia, *La Quattrodicesima*, 159-175. As Barnett has documented, the exact art objects exhibited in Venice are difficult to document as there were discrepancies between what was shipped, stored, exhibited, and listed in the exhibition catalogue.
He focused on the aesthetic rapport between Italian futurist and Russian theatre, but distinguished between their political affiliations. He asserted a continued relationship between the Russian and Italian avant-garde, but claimed that the influence was strictly aesthetic and flowed from West to East, from the Italian futurists to their Russian contemporaries. Similar to Marinetti’s introduction to “I Diritti artistici propugnati dai futuristi italiani: Manifesto al governo fascista,” Bragaglia asserted the Italian precedent for Futurism and its subsequent impact on theater and propaganda in Russia. Equally, he focused on the political division between the two groups and attempted to separate Italian Futurism from politics. Bragaglia declared that, “When Russians think of the Italian nation, the first man they think of is Marinetti. In politics it is Mussolini, but politics has nothing to do with this discussion.” Despite declaring a separation between art and politics, his article was clearly marked by the current political climate in Italy with its rise in anti-Bolshevism and his desire to stake Futurism’s claim as an important art movement with a significant international influence.

Bragaglia’s essay also served to un-tether the machine aesthetic and the subsequent theatrical costumes and set designs created by Paladini and Pannaggi from their Soviet contemporaries. He considered their Ballo meccanico futurista inspirational to the Russians, an

128 Bragaglia, however, did not make the distinction that the Russian artists were constructivists and instead called them futurists. For the sake of clarity, I draw attention to the disparity between artists he identified as futurist and their actual engagement with constructivist and productivist principles.
idea which entirely ignored Paladini’s political and aesthetic foundations. Although Bragaglia considered Paladini and Pannaggi fraternal spirits to Aleksandr Vesnin and acknowledged their stylistic similarities, he attributed this to all three artists’ indebtedness to Italian Futurism. His assessment, however, circumvented the direct effect of LEF and Constructivism on Paladini and, therefore, a theatrical aesthetic associated with leftist politics. Bragaglia intentionally ignored any overlap between the two movements, denied any Russian influence on Second Futurism, and served to diffuse the debates about an Italian variant of Komfut that had raged in the pages of *Avanguardia, Gioventù socialista*, and *Pagine Rosse* in 1922. Just as Trotsky wanted to separate post-Revolution Russia from the bourgeois and fascist incarnation of Futurism in Italy, many Italian futurists were removing any affiliation with their communist counterparts.

A similar agenda was put forth in a 1924 special edition of *Noi* dedicated to theater. Prampolini likely organized the spread, as he was the director of the journal. Within the special edition, constructivist costumes and set designs by Vladimir Tatlin and Varvara Stepanova were identified as futurist (Fig. 3.24). Furthermore, futurist dynamism and the machine aesthetic were emphasized and given an Italian futurist lineage. Pannaggi’s photomontage from the *Ballo meccanico futurista* was featured, as were Depero’s robot costumes from *Anikam de 2000* (titled *Anihccam del 3000* in other publications; Fig. 3.25). Paladini’s proletarian hybrid costume from the mechanical ballet was omitted, but his set designs for *Anatema* were included. Rather than being labeled constructivist, his designs were listed as futurist scenographic examples (Fig. 3.26).

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130 Interestingly, Bragaglia does not make any connections between Paladini and Pannaggi’s *Ballo meccanico futurista* and Fernand Léger’s *Ballet mécanique*, which was produced in 1924 and premiered at the *Internationale Ausstellung Neuer Theatertechnik*.

131 *Noi* 2, no. 6-9 (1924), 45-47.
Despite the underlying constructivist nature of his sets for *Anatema* and *Salomè*, Paladini’s designs were promoted as exemplars of experimental futurist theater designs for the next decade. After the 1924 *Internationale Ausstellung Neuer Theatertechnik*, the same set designs were featured in exhibitions organized by Bragaglia, including the *Mostra organizzata dai sindacati artistici futuristi* in Turin (Exhibition Organized by the Futurist Artistic Syndicate, 1925), *Prima Mostra del Sindacato Nazionale Fascista di Belle Arti* in Florence (First Exhibition of the National Fascist Syndicate of Fine Art, 1933), and *Exposicion de Escenotecnica Italiana* in Buenos Aires (Exhibition of Italian Scenographic Technique, 1935).\(^{132}\) Paladini’s continued inclusion in futurist exhibitions ultimately subverted any awareness of the underlying politics and aesthetics of Soviet Constructivism contained within his theater designs in the early 1920s.

Beyond a strict documentation of artistic developments in the Soviet Union, Paladini’s extensive exhibition review, *Arte nella Russia dei Soviets: Il Padiglione dell’U.R.S.S. a Venezia*, endeavored to redress the omission of the political aspects of Constructivism. Published at the beginning of 1925, his review tried to correct the Italian futurists’ claims on the movement and the PCI’s denial of its validity per Marxism. Yet his appreciation of the situation was marred by the political climate of Fascism and anti-Communism, which had escalated with the murder of Matteotti. His text illuminates the degree of political and cultural uncertainty within both Italy and the Soviet Union between 1923 and 1924. Within his discussions of Constructivism and the Constructor movement, Paladini identified Italian Futurism’s initial rapprochement with Fascism as well as with the post-NEP turmoil of Soviet Constructivism. He noted divergences within Constructivism as markers of different approaches for art serving the new Soviet nation. Although it was his longest and most in depth assessment of the Russian avant-garde and its

political features, Paladini’s review of the Soviet Pavilion was also one of his last texts that
directly addressed the communist revolutionary power of art. Thereafter, his claims became
more vague and retreated further into the cultural sphere. The First Futurist Congress in
November 1924 and the 1925 Conference of Fascist Culture further complicated Paladini’s
engagement with Futurism and caused him to develop a new movement based on another
Russian precedent, Imagism.
Chapter 4

Immaginismo: The Aesthetics of the Left under Fascism

Marinetti’s political alliance with Fascism was tentative at best between 1922 and 1924, due to his difficulty in accepting Mussolini’s increasingly conservative stance on the monarchy, workers’ unions, and the church.¹ These changes within the party conflicted with Futurism and its anti-monarchical and anti-clerical position; Marinetti, however, was confronted with the dawning realization that the movement would only survive under the auspices of the fascist government.² Rather than sheepishly returning to Fascism after his break from the party in 1920, he asserted Futurism’s significance for the international avant-garde and aggressively lobbied for its relevance as the official art of the fascist state. Marinetti, along with fellow futurist Mino Somenzi, organized the First Futurist Congress in Milan as the official re-launching of the movement in November 1924.³ Marinetti’s overtures to the new government leading up to the event quickly became apparent: he included prominent fascists on the executive committee of the congress and began proclaiming the foundational role of Futurism in the rise of Fascism in a flurry of publications.

Yet the First Futurist Congress provided an open forum for debate; the leftist, anarchic, and revolutionary factions presented speeches against unilaterally aligning with Fascism. That Paladini was himself unsure of the direction that Marinetti would take is indicated by a telegram sent by him to the futurist leader shortly before the First Futurist Congress. In it he declared his

¹ Berghaus, Futurism and Politics, 172-217. This section of the book discusses Marinetti’s relationship with Fascism from 1920-1924. See also Claudia Salaris, Artecrazia: L’avanguardia futurista negli anni del fascismo (Firenze: La Nuova Italia Editrice, 1992), 25-63.
² Berghaus, Italian Futurist Theatre, 333.
³ Berghaus, Futurism and Politics, 218-227. Berghaus has extensively detailed the First Futurist Congress in 1924 and the Congress of Fascist Culture in 1925.
enthusiasm “for the triumphant renewal of the futurist movement.”\textsuperscript{4} The response of fascist supporters to the left-wing presentations is undocumented, but the proceedings resulted in a vague declaration that emphasized Futurism’s “artistic orientation and its renunciation of political engagement…but also reminded Mussolini of his revolutionary heritage….”\textsuperscript{5} Ultimately, the First Futurist Congress established Marinetti’s interest in potentially working with the fascist government and in garnering official status, but he was not yet prepared to join Mussolini’s ranks.

Marinetti’s Futurism officially allied with Fascism at the Congress of Fascist Culture in Bologna in March 1925.\textsuperscript{6} Organized by Giovanni Gentile, a member of the Fascist Grand Council and founder of the Istituto Nazionale di Cultura Fascista (National Institute of Fascist Culture), the event essentially was a public relations venture designed to appeal to intellectuals and literati in the wake of the Matteotti Crisis. The subsequent Aventine Secession, an anti-fascist group led by Antonio Gramsci, launched a campaign against Mussolini in the press, drawing in many cultural critics who aired concerns about the new regime’s suppression and disdain for the intellectual community.\textsuperscript{7} In response to the political unrest that dominated the summer and fall of 1924, Mussolini declared a dictatorship in January 1925 and a press lockdown. The Congress of Fascist Culture was intended to show the newly minted fascist regime’s desire to support the intellectual community for the betterment of Italian culture.\textsuperscript{8} The

\textsuperscript{4} Vinicio Paladini, telegram to F.T. Marinetti, November 21, 1924, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti Papers, Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library, New Haven, CT. “Invio entusiasti affettuosi saluti auguro rinnovamento trionfo movimento futurista.”

\textsuperscript{5} Berghaus, \textit{Futurism and Politics}, 223.

\textsuperscript{6} Berghaus, \textit{Futurism and Politics}, 224-225.

\textsuperscript{7} Cannistraro, \textit{Historical Dictionary}, 44-45 and 331-333.

\textsuperscript{8} Berghaus, \textit{Futurism and Politics}, 224. Berghaus, directly quoting Mussolini, has shown that the Congress of Fascist Culture was intended to overturn the “stupid legend of the incompatibility of Fascism and culture.”
main outcome of the assembly was the “Manifesto of Fascist Culture,” which was drafted by Gentile and signed by many noteworthy artists and intellectuals, including Marinetti. The manifesto established a precedent for the regime’s cultural policy – it did not outline any specific styles or requirements for fascist art. It was a shrewd maneuver that instituted pluralism as a divide and conquer tactic. Each movement jockeyed for favored positions as arbiters of official fascist culture, fighting with each other rather than against the regime.

Paladini, who had been distancing himself from Marinetti’s overtures to the fascist government since the 1923 “I Diritti artistici propugnati dai futuristi italiani: Manifesto al governo fascista,” responded to the “Manifesto of Fascist Culture” by disengaging with Futurism and launching his own movement, *Immaginismo* or Imagism. Between 1924 and 1927, Paladini and a close group of associates in Rome, Umberto Barbaro, Antonio Fornari, Dino Terra, and Paolo Flores, began to collaborate on projects and publications that ultimately developed into Imagism. The group consisted primarily of writers, save for Fornari and Paladini, and maintained a foundation in left-wing politics and modernist aesthetics. With no possible future with the futurists, Paladini refocused his efforts on a communist agenda driven by Gramsci’s theories and published them in anarchist journals, like *Fede*. This period of his career was marked by changes in his artistic production, including his initial foray into creating photocollages and photomontages. Paladini’s artistic experimentation was driven by his goal to find a medium that would serve to revolutionize the mind of the proletariat.

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10 *Immaginismo* translates directly as Imaginism. According to Vladimir Markov, who wrote about Russian Imagism, “Imagism” is an alternate and more accurate translation due to the Russian movement’s interest in the evocative power of images (See Markov, *Russian Imagism*). I will follow Markov’s precedent and use the term Imagism for the Italian group, considering its name was derived from the Russian movement.
The Foundations of Italian Imagism

The first iteration of Imagism in Italy can be traced to 1924 when Paladini organized an exhibition of Antonio Fornari’s art at Casa d’arte Bragaglia in Rome.\textsuperscript{11} Fornari, Paladini’s close friend and set designer for the Teatro degli Indipendenti, was living in Paris during this period and kept him abreast of the latest developments in the French avant-garde. Clearly inspired by the nascent surrealist movement, Fornari’s drawings featured bizarre, dreamlike, and often nightmarish images chaotically mixed together to bring forth a subconscious response from the viewer (Fig. 4.1).\textsuperscript{12} According to Umberto Carpi’s research, a conference held in tandem with the Casa d’arte Bragaglia exhibition was the first occasion when the term “imagist” was used by Paladini to describe Fornari’s works on view.\textsuperscript{13} The official launch of Imagism, however, did not occur until 1927.

In the interim period, many of the artists and writers who formed Imagism initially congregated at Anton Giulio Bragaglia’s Teatro degli Indipendenti and Casa d’arte Bragaglia, due to their inclusion in exhibitions at his gallery or contributions to his theater.\textsuperscript{14} Bragaglia provided a space for experimental avant-garde artists who were fringe members of Futurism, or sometimes called Independent futurists, who did not always align with Marinetti’s overarching claims for the movement.\textsuperscript{15} Although a diverse group of writers and artists, the future imagists

\textsuperscript{11} Carpi, \textit{Bolscevico immaginista}, 111-112.
\textsuperscript{12} Carpi, \textit{Bolscevico immaginista}, 112-114.
\textsuperscript{13} Carpi, \textit{Bolscevico immaginista}, 111. Within the text and Footnote 1, Carpi relays his communication with Fornari on May 9, 1980 about the exhibition and the launch of Imagism. He ascertained that 1924 was a correct date based on the exhibition date.
\textsuperscript{15} This is not to be confused with a group the Independent Futurists led by Antonio Marasco that formed in January 1933. For information about Marasco’s Independent Futurists, see Berghaus, \textit{Futurism and Politics}, 239-245.
were unified by a common background of communist and anarchist affiliations.\textsuperscript{16} For example, Paolo Flores, a poet, had founded \textit{Studi politici} in 1923, which was a leftist cultural journal.\textsuperscript{17}

Umberto Barbaro’s small press, La Bilancia, became another major point of contact for imagists prior to the official launch of the movement.\textsuperscript{18} It fostered creative collaborations between artists and writers that continued even after the press ceased operation and Imagism had collapsed. Barbaro was a Russophile and La Bilancia was named in deference to the Russian symbolist periodical, \textit{Vesy} (both translate as “balance” or “scales”).\textsuperscript{19} The press published a variety of short booklets on international avant-garde art and contemporary literature as well as his translations of Russian literature, such as Leonid Andreev’s \textit{Anatema} with a cover design by Paladini in 1923.

Paladini and Barbaro shared an interest in Russian and Soviet literature, film, and art, which became a driving force in the creation of Imagism and resulted in a multitude of projects together, including the publication of the former’s \textit{Arte nella Russia dei Soviets: Il Padiglione dell’U.R.S.S. a Venezia} by La Bilancia. Their friendship and working relationship extended into the second decade of the fascist regime; Paladini illustrated Barbaro’s translations of Vsevolod Pudovkin’s film theories, \textit{Film e fonofilm} (\textit{Film and Sound Film}, 1935), and was employed as a set designer for his film \textit{L’ultima nemica} (\textit{The Last Enemy}, 1937). Barbaro retained his interest in Soviet models of literature and film, while successfully gaining acclaim from the fascist

\textsuperscript{16} Salaris, \textit{Riviste}, 1107.
\textsuperscript{17} Carpi, \textit{Bolscevico immaginista}, 23.
\textsuperscript{18} Carpi, \textit{Bolscevico immaginista}, 21-34.
\textsuperscript{19} Carpi, \textit{Bolscevico immaginista}, 26; Masha Salazkina, “Moscow-Rome-Havana: A Film-Theory Road Map,” \textit{October} no. 139 (Winter 2011): 103-104; and Anna Elizabeth Balakian, ed., \textit{The Symbolist Movement in the Literature of European Languages} (Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1982), 384. Salazkina has stated that the press belonged to Paladini, but Carpi has indicated that it was run by Barbaro. Both agree on a Russian symbolist source for the name.
regime in part due to his patron, Luigi Chiarini, director of *Educazione fascista*.\(^{20}\) Barbaro was later appointed to a teaching position at the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografo in 1935, where he continued to promote Soviet film theory under the rubric of Italian Realism.\(^{21}\) After Mussolini was deposed, Barbaro became involved in the rising communist faction in Italy until he was forced into exile in 1947 due to a new wave of conservative leadership.\(^{22}\)

Paladini and Barbaro’s fascination with Russian and Soviet models was foundational to Imagism. Although several leftist movements influenced the Italian imagists, including Surrealism, the journal *Clarté*, Berlin Dadaism, and the verist wing of Neue Sachlichkeit, it ultimately took its name from a Russian source. Russian Imagism (alternately called Imaginism) was one of the avant-garde groups, like the constructivists, to emerge out of Russian Futurism.\(^{23}\) Two poets, Sergei Esenin and Vadim Shershenevich, were the primary proponents of Russian Imagism, but the group also included the writers Ryurik Ivnev and Anatoly Marienhof, as well as the artists Boris Erdman and Georgy Yakulov.\(^{24}\) Shershenevich, a former Russian futurist, was very familiar with Italian Futurism, as he had translated many of Marinetti’s manifestos into Russian in the 1910s.\(^{25}\) It was while translating Marinetti’s writings that he came upon the name for Imagism. According to Vladimir Markov, Shershenevich translated a phrase from the Italian


\(^{22}\) Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities*, 209.

\(^{23}\) Markov, *Russian Futurism*, 102. Although Markov uses the term Russian Imagism, he notes that the direct translation from Russian is Imaginism. The Russian word reflects the variance in the Italian term, as it was derived from a text by Marinetti and translated by Shershenevich. Imagism will be used here as it is more aligned with the intent of the group: a focus on images.

\(^{24}\) Markov, *Russian Imagism*, 4-5.

\(^{25}\) Lawton, *Main Lines*. Lawton provides a thorough discussion of Shershenevich’s translations of Marinetti’s manifestos as well as a line by line analysis of the Russian’s early futurist texts to show his indebtedness to the Italian movement. Lawton, however, does not extend her study to Imagism.
futurist, who described poetry as “an uninterrupted series of images” and thereafter called himself an imagist.\textsuperscript{26}

Although the group had loosely formed as early as 1916, Russian Imagism was officially launched when it declared its complete separation from and disdain for Futurism in its initial manifesto published in February 1919 in \textit{Sirena (Siren)}, a Voronezh-based journal, and reprinted shortly thereafter in the Moscow-based \textit{Sovetskaya Strana (Soviet Land)}.\textsuperscript{27} The manifesto launched an unrelenting assault on what the imagists considered the academicism of Futurism that lasted until the movement officially disbanded in 1927. The imagists were also affiliated with the extreme left: Shershenevich considered himself an anarchist, Esenin participated in the Russian Revolution, and Ivnev served as secretary to the Minister of Culture, Anatoly Lunacharsky.\textsuperscript{28} They even traveled on agitational-propaganda trains to the remote Soviet provinces to educate the masses about Communism and contemporary poetry.

Despite their enthusiasm for the Revolution, Lunacharsky held the Russian imagists at a distance and found their extreme antics and incendiary poetry distasteful.\textsuperscript{29} In many ways they continued the pre-war and pre-Revolution futurist tactics of extreme antagonism in public performances. In addition, their poetry tended to tread the line between celebrating the Revolution and drawing attention to the horrors of the experience; their radical textual and visual imagery relied on shocking juxtapositions of the frenzied excitement of the social uprisings with mass starvation, trampling horses, grimy cities, and brutal deaths brought about by the emergence of the new communist government. The Russian imagists also criticized art groups, who were striving to make proletarian and revolutionary art (such as the \textit{LEF} constructivists),

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{26} Markov, \textit{Russian Imagism}, 2.
\item \textsuperscript{27} Markov, \textit{Russian Imagism}, 4-7.
\item \textsuperscript{28} Markov, \textit{Russian Imagism}, 4-6 and 26-27.
\item \textsuperscript{29} Markov, \textit{Russian Imagism}, 12-13, 45 and 49-50.
\end{itemize}
since, in their eyes, the Soviet Union had already progressed to a classless society. Instead, the focus of imagist poetry and art was to revolutionize the mind. As Markov notes, they fell out of favor in Russia because they strove only to be revolutionary and not Soviet, that is, not devote their efforts to the state apparatus.30

Russian Imagism became known in Western Europe primarily through the fame of Esenin, who traveled on tour with Isadora Duncan from May 1922 to April 1923 during their short-lived marriage.31 Italian communist journals, such as *Pagina Rosse*, were running series on post-Revolution Russian poetry and Marinetti even claimed an Italian futurist lineage for Esenin’s writings.32 The avant-garde community, therefore, would have understood the meaning and relevance of Paladini’s declaration that Fornari’s work was “imagist” in 1924 and the selection of “Imagism” as the name of his art movement in 1927. Imagism, however, was more than a convenient moniker; it suggested a link between the Italian and Soviet groups. Both emphasized the importance of using jarring and conflicting imagery to alter the mind for revolutionary purposes.33 Furthermore, each wanted to distance themselves from their respective Futurisms, yet retain the anarchic, leftist politics and tactics.

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30 Markov, *Russian Imagism*, 84.
32 Aube, “La nuova poesia russa,” *Pagine Rosse* 2, no. 5 (March 15, 1924): 14-16. The series ran throughout the year, but this is the first article in the series that outlines the major themes and the focus on the October Revolution found in contemporary Russian poetry. See also Claudia Salaris, “Caffeína e vodka Itali e Russia: futurismi a confronto,” *Museum dell’Ara Pacis*, www.arapacis.it/.../5.+Caffeína+e+vodka+e+Italia+e+Russia_+futurismi+a+confronto+Claudia+Salaris.pdf (accessed March 5, 2014). Salaris notes that Marinetti includes Esenin in his lineage of Italian Futurism in F.T. Marinetti, “Le futurisme mondial,” *Le Futurisme* 2, no. 9 (January 11, 1924).
33 Carpi, *Bolscevico immaginista*, 123. Carpi has asserted that the influence of Russian Imagism was not entirely present in the literature produced by the Italian imagists and that using the same name was merely a way of acknowledging the esteem with which the Italians held their Russian contemporaries. I, however, find that the Russian imagists were more influential on the Italian
The ability of images to affect the subconscious was essential to Surrealism, another avant-garde group that was extremely important for the development of Imagism in Italy.\textsuperscript{34} Fornari’s interest in and information about Surrealism bolstered the theoretical underpinnings of the Italian group. Initially involved with Parisian Dadaism, André Breton launched his movement in 1924 when he published the “First Manifesto of Surrealism.” The manifesto outlined the surrealists’ employment of Freudian psychoanalysis and of the waking dream to create imagery capable of provoking the subconscious of the viewer.\textsuperscript{35} Marxism also influenced them; the surrealists, however, approached materialism through fantasy and dream-states as a way to disrupt the alienation produced by modern objects and consumption.\textsuperscript{36} As Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen has noted, the surrealists considered the embrace of the mechanical and industrial, which was promoted by Marxist writers like Antonio Gramsci as a way for the proletariat to wrest the means of production for themselves, counter to their concept of freeing the materials and minds of the workers from their daily drudgery.\textsuperscript{37} Their tactics for promoting Marxism and the tenets of Communism often conflicted with party officials in France and the rise of Stalinism. Ultimately, Breton’s surrealists were excommunicated from the Communist Party in the 1930s.\textsuperscript{38}

\textsuperscript{34} Carpi, \textit{Bolscevico immaginista} and Lista, \textit{Dal Futurismo}. Surrealism’s influence on the Italian imagists has been well reviewed by Umberto Carpi and Giovanni Lista. Both have discussed other influences, but I focus on the Russian imagists in order to emphasize Paladini’s engagement with Soviet art throughout the 1920s.


\textsuperscript{37} Rasmussen, “The Situationist,” 372.

\textsuperscript{38} For additional information on the relationship between Surrealism and Communism, please see Janine Mileaf, “Body to Politics: Surrealist Exhibition of the Tribal and the Modern at the Anti-Imperialist Exhibition and the Galerie Charles Ratton,” \textit{Res} 40 (Autumn 2001): 239-254;
Although the combination of Freudian psychoanalysis and Marxist theory intrigued Paladini and his fellow imagists, they did not consider the methods of the surrealists to be sufficient in the face of the rise of an authoritarian regime in Italy. Furthermore, Surrealism countered Paladini’s own alliance with Gramscian Marxism and his interest in the mechanical and industrial, which had been foundational to his hybrid man-machine concept. Unlike the Russian constructors admired by Paladini, Surrealism also lacked a direct engagement with the proletariat. As a result, Paladini determined the French movement and Freud’s theories were better suited to easel painting and not entirely applicable for productive and utilitarian art and architecture for the worker. Yet Surrealism’s reliance on the provocative power of images became integral to Imagism and foundational to Paladini’s later understanding of the relationship between spectatorship and agitational-propaganda.

Creating a nexus between Russian Imagism, Surrealism, and communist politics was Clarté. Founded in 1919 by Henri Barbusse, who joined the Bolshevik party while living in Moscow and sought to develop proletarian culture, the French journal promoted internationalism, supported a leftist agenda, and advocated for bridging the gap between intellectuals and workers. Clarté provided a perfect link between Russian Imagism and French Surrealism, as it was a main source for introducing post-Revolution Russian literature, including


39 Vinicio Paladini, “Estetica del Sogno,” *L’Interplanetario* 1, no. 5 (April 1, 1928): 2. In this article Paladini reflects on how dreams are most relevant to the visual arts. He also begins to look at art that uses not just dream imagery, but harsh realism to explore the contemporary world. The timing of the article coincides with his move away from a dream aesthetic to a focus on objective realism best served by film and photomontage.

poems by Aleksandr Blok and Esenin, to Western Europe. The French surrealists began contributing to *Clarté* in 1925 and their collaboration culminated in a joint manifesto “La Révolution d’abord et toujours” (“Revolution: First and Always”) in *La Révolution Surréaliste* in 1925, which reflected the increasingly politicized and left-wing orientation of each group.

Several members of Italian Imagism, including Barbaro, Terra, and Flores, were also affiliated with the Roman branch of *Clarté*. Revealing his familiarity with the movement, an auction of Paladini’s personal effects lists several texts by Barbusse and issues of the leftist, French journal. Linking Surrealism, Russian Imagism, *Clarté*, and Italian Imagism was a strong belief that leftist art and politics could be successfully combined to promote a cultural and social revolution. The Italian imagists, most of whom were dissatisfied with their experience with Marinetti’s Futurism and politics, discovered an underlying commonality between their own beliefs in revolutionary art and those of other international avant-garde groups, like Surrealism and Russian Imagism. Drawing inspiration from both, the Italian imagists focused on jarring images designed to agitate the viewer to revolt and to shape through perception a new

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44 Pablo Echaurren, ed. *Vinicio Paladini futurista immaginista. Un percorso tra le culture dell’avanguardia: metafisica dada costruttivismo surrealismo astrattismo. Catalogo di una mostra “virtuale”* (Gusago: L’Arengario Studio Bibliografico, 1997), 81-82. The auction catalogue lists several writings by Henri Barbusse and issues of *Clarté* in Paladini’s personal collections. Tracking down these auctioned items, which sold to both private individuals and public institutions, has also added to the difficulty in studying Paladini’s oeuvre.
consciousness. Paladini began to vaunt the underlying theoretical and political groundwork of Imagism in his writings and in his artistic experiments as early as 1925.\textsuperscript{45}

\textbf{From Communist-Futurist to Bolshevik-Imagist}

Confirmation of Paladini’s ongoing political interest in art in the service of the revolution could be found in the articles he published in the Roman anarchist journals, \textit{Fede} and \textit{Vita! Libertaria}, in 1925 and 1926. Although he was not an anarchist, Paladini used them as a platform to discuss the relevance of an artistic revolution that would destroy the bourgeois past and facilitate a communist future. At the same time, his writings revealed the emergence of Imagism, specifically his interest in affecting the mind of the viewer. Among the essays he contributed, “Proletari ed intellettuali” (“Proletariats and Intellectuals”) and “Necessità spirituali” (“Spiritual Necessity”), were the most significant. They combined Paladini’s Gramscian foundations, including the need for proletarian cultural education and to form an alliance between intellectuals and workers, with his interest in the concept of a spiritual renovation that could induce a revolutionary mentality. He also echoed Gramsci’s assertion that cultural knowledge was innate to all individuals and that guidance through learning would move the workers “towards self-knowledge, self-mastery, and thus liberation.”\textsuperscript{46}

In “Proletari ed intellettuali,” which was published in \textit{Fede} in February 1925, Paladini addressed the divide between the proletariat and intellectuals and warned that it was imperative for the two groups to unite.\textsuperscript{47} He claimed that both must experience a spiritual revolution in

\textsuperscript{45} Carpi also has addressed that Italian Imagism began prior to its official launch date of 1927.
\textsuperscript{46} Forgacs, \textit{A Gramsci Reader}, 54. See also Forgacs and Nowell-Smith, \textit{Antonio Gramsci: Selections}, 25.
order to counteract the bourgeois educational and cultural divide between the classes. Working
together, Paladini opined, the proletariat and intellectuals were a powerful force that would be
strong enough to realize a successful economic and social revolution. He asserted that the merger
of class interests must be accompanied by a “transformation of the spiritual order,” noting that
“the importance of this [spiritual transformation] was recognized internally with great interest for
the culture of the people, for the subversion of the old and mediocre proletariat education, as has
been demonstrated by the USSR.”

Paladini declared that all men have an innate artistic faculty, but intellectuals, who are
interested in creating art only for themselves, have consistently impeded its cultivation among
the working classes. These intellectuals, he averred, had not only denied the educational
potential of art, but also had reinforced elitist academicism and class separation. They had
disregarded the powerful connection between art and life:

The attitude of isolation from the social fight is particularly dear to the Italian
intellectuals, spiritually bankrupt, perpetuating the aristocratic tradition of the
Renaissance. This attitude could be nothing more than a source of regret for all those
feeling the intimate community that must exist between artistic creation and the people,
the impressionable union of art and life in all of its manifestations, and the profound
humanity of the creative gesture.

He admonished those who created “political” art that “demonstrat[ed] profound ignorance, or
absolute incomprehension of the facts (like Pirandello and Marinetti),” a pointed denunciation of
their allegiance to Fascism that pre-dated the Congress of Fascist Culture and their role as

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48 Paladini, “Proletari,” 238-239. “…trasformazione dell’ordinamento spirituale” … “In pratica,
l’importanza di questa idea è stata riconosciuta interamente con il grande interesse per la cultura
del popolo, per il sovvertimento della vecchia e media educazione proletaria, [che] lo stato
dell’URSS ha dimostrato.”
caro agli intellettuali italiani, spiriti beffardi, perpetuatori della aristocratica tradizione della
Rinascenza, e non può essere che fonte di rammarico per tutti quanti sentano la intima comunità
che dovrebbe esistere tra creazione artistica e popolo, la imprescindibile unione dell’arte con la
vita, in tutte le sue manifestazioni, la profonda umanità del gesto creativo.”
signatories on the “Manifesto of Fascist Culture.” For Paladini, the goal for artists and intellectuals should be to make art that created a “democratization of the conscience.” This statement seemed to be referring to Russian imagists, who declared the need for “the abolition of the serfdom of consciousness and emotions.”

“Necessità spirituali” was published in *Vita! Libertaria*, a cultural offshoot of *Fede*, in March 1925. It attempted to answer a problem posed by Paladini at the conclusion of “Proletari ed intellettuali.” He pondered how intellectuals could coordinate the educational development of the proletariat without reinforcing or returning to the “old forms of mental and social organization” instituted by the bourgeoisie. In other words, how could artists democratize the mind of someone through vision alone? Paladini suggested that this could only be accomplished when spiritual, economic, and social revolutions occurred in tandem with each other. Without a spiritual revolution, bourgeois intellectualism would undermine the proletariat and the “renovation and radical transformation churning in the other branches of economic and social organization.” Paladini asserted that one way to accomplish this “renovation” was through “spiritual necessity” triggered by artistic visual stimuli. The call for a spiritual renewal was a frequently invoked in the Italian press during this period and was driven by the recent debates on establishing an official fascist culture. Paladini’s position was unique and subversive – he instead promoted an underlying spiritual necessity that would drive a communist revolution and that had its foundations in Gramscian Marxism and Russian Imagism.

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50 Paladini, “Proletari,” 239. “…dimonstrando profonda ignoranza, o incomprensione assoluta dei fatti, (casi, Pirandello, Marinetti) ed è stato ancora peggio!”
51 Paladini, “Proletari,” 238. “democratizzazione della conoscenza”
52 Markov, *Russian Imagism*, 69.
Rather than selecting one form of artistic production as the best for a leftist agenda, Paladini instead advocated for a democratization of all knowledge, including artistic production. He stated, “Artistic truths are intuitive truths, which any worker could arrive at when he is well guided with the smallest of dedication.”

The underlying emphasis on the mind, intuition, and inner spirit was somewhat similar to his communist-futurist belief in “mind-spirit constructivity;” by creating new environs for the proletariat, an artist could facilitate the constructing of a new mentality that could envision revolution.

Nascent Imagism, however, focused on provoking the mind directly through “artistic truths” to create a spiritual renovation. Spiritual necessity soon became Paladini’s imagist code for reconfiguring the mindset of bourgeois intellectual elites and the proletariat so that a total revolution would be possible, or as Carpi has termed it: Bolshevik Imagism.

Paladini concluded by responding to contemporary debates about which art form best served the proletariat. Here, he attempted to defend the artistic production of the avant-garde against those who denied its ability to aid the proletariat in developing their own art and culture due to its bourgeois foundations. Paladini’s essay criticized “trite symbolism and banal realism” featured prominently in revolutionary journals. This sentiment operated on two levels. First, it resounded with the Russian imagists, who also asserted that art should be provocative and not merely show scenes from the Revolution. They claimed that the proletariat inherently understood avant-garde art that operated on an intuitive level of images and noted that proletariat

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57 Carpi, Bolscevico immaginista, 144. Carpi has researched in depth Italian Imagism and Paladini’s fundamental role in its development.
59 Markov, Russian Imagism, 67-69. Markov includes portions of an imagist manifesto in the third issue of their journal, The Inn, which was published in February/March 1924.
writers organically utilized imagist techniques. Second, Paladini’s assessment drew attention to what he considered problematic – Symbolism and Realism. For him, both were boring and lacked originality because they were steeped in intellectualism and academicism. Paladini, however, would continue to explore the nature of Realism in his writings and artwork in the next few years while developing his concept of Imagism. He would eventually resolve to reinvigorate Realism in a manner similar to the Russian imagists; he would use identifiable images, but retain an activating, avant-garde aesthetic.

At the end of “Necessità spirituali,” Paladini stated that he would “explore informative and critical work in the next issue of this magazine.” Indeed, the next two issues of Vita! Libertaria provided an overview of the emergence of the avant-garde. Paladini published “Edouard Manet e l’Impressionismo” (“Edouard Manet and Impressionism”) in April 1925 and “Jean Baptiste Corot” in June-July 1925. His turn to nineteenth century French examples appears regressive, but Paladini clearly intended the articles to run as a series. In each the political tone was limited, yet the key element that unified both essays was his interest in modernity and the modern spirit. Paladini focused on how each artist was indicative of the revolutionary spirit of his time. Unfortunately, the series was cut short when Vita! Libertaria ceased publication and Paladini never fully developed his case for the trajectory of the avant-garde. Yet his belief that Manet and Corot exemplified their time and were shaped by modernity was soon reflected in his imagist collages.

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60 Markov, Russian Imagism, 83. Markov notes that two prominent proletariat poets, M. Gerasimov and Sadofyev, were using imaginist technique in their work. In addition, Esenin and Iynev were also considered proletariat and peasant poets.


Paladini ostensibly continued his meditations on modern art, altering the mind, the bourgeoisie, and educating the masses in “L’Aspetto della classe dominante (George Grosz)” (“The Face of the Ruling Class by George Grosz”) published in Fede in October 1925. Paladini lauded George Grosz for his ability to combine art with social purpose in his caricatures. Grosz’s 1921 book, The Face of the Ruling Class, was a harsh critique of the political, social, and military environment that resulted in World War I and in the disturbing post-war state of Germany. Paladini dissected the satirical drawings by Grosz to understand how they could convey the harshest of realities via disturbing figures and nightmarish scenes. Humor, and specifically satire, became a weapon in his sketches. Although Grosz’s drawings could trigger laughter, the horror depicted caused the viewer to feel “rebellion coursing through [his or her] veins… A great social idea emanates irresistibly from those drawings….”

To understand every nuance of Grosz’s drawings, Paladini noted, it was helpful to recall the mindset of the post-war period, but the sketches also “partly transcend every particular historic contingency to become a vast indictment against that set of ideas that constitute the essence of militarism, or against the immorality of bourgeois society….” For Paladini, Grosz’s jumble of horrific and violent images shocked the senses with their “masterful value of signification” and were of the utmost social importance due to their ability to exert influence on the mind and spirit.


65 Paladini, “L’Aspetto,” 23. “il suo valore imperioso di significazione” See also Carpi, Bolscevico immaginista, 104.
Paladini’s articles for *Fede* and *Vita! Libertaria* should be considered his response to the open debates about establishing a fascist culture. As an intellectual and avant-garde artist, his writings from 1925-1926 endeavored to guide workers to the intuitive truths of art, which would then provide the requisite foundation for the proletariat to develop their own means of expression without being weighed down by bourgeois intellectualism and academicism. Paladini very clearly asserted that there was no one school that should define the new art; rather, he maintained an openness to what forms would naturally evolve to meet the needs of the workers. Paladini’s overarching theme was clearly based on Gramsci – all art was a product of its time and its mentality; therefore, art by the proletariat would automatically reflect a communist revolutionary period. The failure to develop such an art, however, was indicative of the failure of the proletarian revolution in the face of Fascism. Yet some artists, like Grosz, were able to transcend the specifics of the time in which their artwork was produced. They affected the senses of the viewer through carefully selected images and biting satire that rallied a response to the contemporary political milieu. Paladini would blend the lessons of Grosz with those of the Russian imagists and French surrealists to develop Italian Imagism as a powerful tool for social and political critique.

**From Easel Painting to Imagist Collages**

Given that Paladini did not advocate for a specific visual idiom, his artistic production during this period revealed his uncertainty in how to pursue a revolutionary aesthetic: Imagism, by default, became a stylistic catchall between 1924 and 1927. His works from this period display a combination of various left-wing influences, including Russian Imagism, Surrealism, Dadaism, and Neue Sachlichkeit. One common theme, however, remained – Paladini
repetitively used factories and modern life in his art. He also retained his engagement with Gramscian Marxism. By 1927 Paladini had established photocollage as the visual medium of Imagism, because it could activate the mind of the spectator, create spiritual necessity, and transform consciousness.

*La Partenza (The Departure, 1925-1926)* is one of the few extant paintings Paladini completed during this period and it is an important starting point for his development as an imagist (Fig. 4.2). Borrowing directly from Giorgio de Chirico’s visual language, the painting features a Roman copy of a Greek statue standing in the center of a modern interior. Paladini clearly copied the Hermes figure in de Chirico’s *Hermetic Melancholy* from 1919 (Fig. 4.3). The statue faces a window with a view of the Mediterranean landscape complete with a temple ruin, train, and boat, which all recall de Chirico’s *pittura metafisica*. The statue is placed in such a way as to suggest tension and indecision between the past and the present. Although it looks at a classical past, his body leans toward the opposite window. This window opens onto a view of a bustling city filled with skyscrapers topped with American flags and streets filled with trams and automobiles. The two opposing windows represent a choice for the viewer: a direct embrace of modernity versus an Italian-identified historical past. A collection of luggage sits at the feet of a sculpture indicating his intent to flee from one era to the next.

The various styles used in the painting coincide with overarching changes in Paladini’s artistic production that were triggered by his travels throughout Europe, the relocation of his friend Antonio Fornari to France, and his exposure to Surrealism in 1924. Paladini’s overt references to de Chirico, the chief source for Surrealism, reveal the disparate influences informing this work, yet also the continuity with his proletariat series of 1922.  

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allusions to de Chirico were perhaps due to his friend Fornari’s attempts to secure him an apprenticeship with the prominent painter in 1926. Yet Paladini’s *pittura metafisica* elements in *La Partenza* were very different from his mechanical proletariats: he abandoned the mechanized automaton body and focused primarily on the depiction of a situation of choice. *La Partenza* should be considered as emblematic of his evolving style and an attempt to develop his proletariat man-machine hybrids into a new incarnation devoid of the taint of the futurist machine aesthetic. Here, he is creating an allegory of the new position of the intellectual in the age of the masses.

The depicted dilemma was at the forefront of Paladini’s mind in his articles for *Fede* and *Vita! Libertaria* as well as the international avant-garde during the mid-1920s. It signaled the divide between retaining the informative elements of the past, yet responding to the new “democratization of the conscience.” Similar to the problem posed in his essays, how was an avant-garde artist to assist the proletariat without reiterating bourgeois intellectualism? Paladini was attempting to design a pictorial format that would effectively activate the viewer into experiencing the dilemma. By presenting a decision-making situation without a predetermined solution, he coerced his viewer into actively considering the outcomes of both scenarios. He would continue to use this tactic of a central figure confronted by two scenarios, sometimes complementary and occasionally oppositional, for the next decade.

Paladini’s collage experiments were far more indicative of his interest in utilizing images to affect the viewer than his easel paintings and therefore served as the foundation for his imagist technique. The majority of these were created between 1920 and 1927. Each utilized tempera paint backgrounds overlaid with snippets from newspapers and journals as well as cutouts of

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reproductions of art. The combination of painterly and mechanically reproduced elements caused them to straddle collage and photocollage. Although many of these works have been dated as approximately 1920, this date must be reevaluated, especially since few are accessible to the public, they have never been written about, and they have only recently become available through galleries and auction houses. Evidence that a new date range, 1924-1927, should be assigned can be found on one of the collages, which is clearly labeled 1927 next to Paladini’s signature (Fig. 4.4). It appears to be part of a series in which all of the works share a common color palette and have similar content (Fig. 4.5, Fig. 4.6, and Fig. 4.7).

Paladini’s collages from this period feature split backgrounds that pose a dilemma for the viewer, which suggests that they were made contemporaneously with La Partenza. Each displays perplexing spatial configurations reminiscent of de Chirico’s metaphysical paintings (Fig. 4.8). Unlike de Chirico’s long arcades and specific architectural references, Paladini’s scenes only occasionally contain hallmarks of his signature architectural structures, like endless arcades, medieval towers, or Florentine palazzos. In addition, some of the collages include “walls” that were merely suspended planes, but they did not imitate de Chirico’s maze of vanishing points.

One work from Paladini’s collage series is particularly relevant as it shows the direct lineage from his 1922 proletariat series to his contemporary artistic experiments. As such, it could also be considered a transitional piece signaling his imminent turn to photomontage. This

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69 Dionisio Gavagnin, Le Stanze dell’Arte (Verona: Palazzo Taidelli, 2012), 6, 23 and 35. The catalogue lists “circa 1920” as the date of his early photocollages.
70 One photocollage has two rounded windows, but it is the only imagist work by Paladini that I found with traditional Romanesque architectural elements. For Giorgio de Chirico’s architectural references see Paolo Baldacci, De Chirico: The Metaphysical Period 1888-1919 (Boston, MA: Bullfinch Press, 1997), 86-106 and Willard Bohn, “Giorgio de Chirico among the Mannequins,” in Apollinaire and the Faceless Man: The Creation and Evolution of a Modern Motif (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Press, 1991), 153-165.
untitled collage (hereafter referred to as *Untitled*; Fig. 4.9) was likely made between 1925 and 1927 and reflected his recent writings in *Fede* and *Vita! Libertaria*. Rather than featuring a proletarian hybrid man-machine, *Untitled* depicts a painted urban landscape that has been reduced to simplified geometric shapes. Similar to his own *La Partenza*, Paladini split the scene between cutout pictures of a car on the left and a train on the right. Directly below the factory and echoing the spatial divide, is a photograph of a young man in clothing that typified the bourgeoisie. He leans on a sculptural bust with a contemplative expression on his face. Cleverly positioned, the young man’s gaze appears to be on the factory smokestack rather than the sculpture, the train, or even the approaching car. Surrounding the man are giant flowers that are dissonant with the modern setting, due to both their size and bright colors in an otherwise muted landscape.

In contrast to de Chirico’s jutting medieval towers that obscure the vanishing point, Paladini placed a factory smokestack with painterly, noxious fumes billowing out of the vent in the center of the background. His focus on an urban landscape occupied by the passive bourgeoisie thematically recalled Grosz’s *Republican Automatons* (1920; Fig. 4.10). Although inspired by *pittura metafisica*, Grosz specifically focused on the discord between the modern, urban landscape and the destructive, bourgeois mentality. His combination of maimed and disfigured bodies dressed in suits and formal wear are dislocated within the sterile city. Paladini’s suited gentleman is similarly displaced within the urban environment, but he is instead meditative and reflective of his role within the space.

The similarity of the format to *La Partenza* is undeniable and reiterates Paladini’s technique of dividing the pictorial space and confronting the viewer with disjointed images designed to activate the spectator. Here, the factory smokestack functions as a key element and
recalls Paladini’s 1922 paintings and drawings. In each of his prior works, the factory was the focal point, as it was the potential site of revolution. The young man in the foreground corresponds with the viewer – both are actively engaged with looking at the scene unfold. The view of the factory ostensibly encourages the spectator to speculate on the impact of industry on modern life, and consequently, on modern social structures. Within *Untitled* Paladini’s burgeoning imagist aesthetic combined Grosz’s left-wing verist social critique with de Chirico and the surrealists’ marvelous beauty of displacement. The latter was enhanced by Paladini’s use of the collage aesthetic; the introduction of photographic reality clashed with the painterly, causing the viewer to be disoriented and unsettled.

*La Ruota Dentata* and the Official Launch of Imagism

“Futurists, suprematists, cubists, expressionists, surrealists, constructivists, realists, avant-gardists – all with the Imagist movement!” proclaimed the front cover of the imagist journal, *La Ruota Dentata* (Fig. 4.11).71 Published in February 1927 by Barbaro and Paladini with funding provided by Dino Terra, *La Ruota Dentata* officially launched the imagist movement. Despite the claim that it was the “first revelation of Imagism,” the journal was actually one of the last productions by the group.72 Immediately announcing their alignment with every avant-garde and thereby asserting their internationalism, the imagists freely pilfered from a variety of sources.

71 Vinicio Paladini and Umberto Barbaro, “Prima rivelazione dell’immaginismo,” *La Ruota Dentata* 1, no. 1 (February 1927): 1. Although the first page is unsigned, it has since been attributed to Vinicio Paladini collaborating with Umberto Barbaro by Giovanni Lista and Umberto Carpi. “Futuristi, suprematisti, cubisti, espressionisti, surrealisti, costruttivisti, realisti, avanguardisti, tutti con il MOVIMENTO IMMAGINISTA!”

72 Paladini and Barbaro, “Prima rivelazione, 1. The first bold-face line on the front page of the journal, “Prima rivelazione dell’immaginismo,” is used here as the title of the imaginist manifesto.
The cover page of *La Ruota Dentata* was dominated by a large photomontage by Paladini and incendiary statements in alternating directions and fonts. Borrowing from the tactics and techniques of the Russian imagists and German dadaists, the provocative declarations and chaotically jumbled phrases were intended to incite the reader. Disjointed references to modern culture, such as jazz, Josephine Baker, and dancing the Black Bottom, were countered with the destruction of cultural icons, like Montmartre. Likely written by Paladini with the assistance of Barbaro, the text also served as the manifesto of the Italian imagists.

The imagists clearly did not want their theories to be entirely conflated with those of other art movements, despite their call for unification. In particular, they proclaimed their interest in reality in contrast to the fantastical nature of Surrealism: “Do not confuse Imagism and fantasy. The image is something more of reality; fantasy is an idiot obsession with nothing.”

Integral to this assertion was that the imagists, and Paladini in particular, had embraced reality and sought to define its fundamental role in their literature and in his art. Similar to *Arte nella Russia dei Soviets: Il Padiglione dell’U.R.S.S. a Venezia*, the manifesto also critiqued artists, like the suprematists, who focused on the principles of spatial experiments, but not the transformative aspects of art. Avant-garde artists who were only engaged in researching new, creative means to “analyze spatial and temporal reality” were problematic, because they were “like stubborn individuals who want to exit the maze at Luna Park through the images of the exit, which are created by cleverly placed mirrors.”

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73 Paladini and Barabaro, “Prima rivelazione,” 1. “Non confodiamo immaginismo e fantasismo; l’immagine è qualche cosa più della realtà.”

74 Paladini and Barabaro, “Prima rivelazione,” 1. “… di analisi spaziale temporale della realtà, ci sembrano individui ostinati a voler uscire da un labirinto di Luna Park attraverso le immagini della uscita che gli specchi sapientemente disposti riflettono.”
utilizing mere reflections of reality in their artwork. The imagists, on the other hand, intended to use reality itself in their creations, as exemplified by the photomontage on the cover.

Paladini’s fascination with the almost unreal nature of modernity eventually evolved into his concept of *irrealità*. The imagists had been discussing the term since Fornari’s exhibition and attendant conference at the Casa d’arte Bragaglia in 1924. According to Carpi, *irrealismo* was a significant choice, because it inferred a historically and politically radical aesthetic that was oppositional and antagonistic to the bourgeoisie and traditional art. Although similar in some respects, the imagists were setting themselves against Massimo Bontempelli’s Magic Realism, which combined elements of the real with the fantastical, and his journal, *Novecento*, which was founded in 1926. Both had strong attachments to the international avant-garde and were often featured contributors to the same cultural reviews. Paladini would later work for Bontempelli, who was a good ally during his reaction against the militant nationalism of the 1930s. Yet in the mid-1920s, Bontempelli was also an ardent supporter of the regime. Ruth Ben-Ghiat’s elaboration of the nuanced differences between his Magic Realism and the imagist-derived realism of Barbaro has provided a fascinating study of how the two art forms differed over the concept of realism and how they propelled modernist literature in Italy.

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75 Carpi, *Bolscevico immaginista*, 113-122. Paladini would not use the term in his writings until 1928 when he transformed the concept based on Soviet film theory, which will be discussed in Chapter 5. His descriptions about the power of the image in *La Ruota Dentata* are nearly identical to those found in his 1928 writings in *L’Interplanetario* and *Cinematografo*. Carpi has made the connection between *irrealismo* in 1924 and Paladini’s use of the term later. Here, it must be discussed in order to set the groundwork for the next chapter.

76 Carpi, *Bolscevico immaginista*, 112-118. Carpi has noted that Paladini wrote an article on the topic “Irrealismo romantico in arte,” *L’Impero* (May 24, 1924), which I was unable to access.


78 Cannistraro, *Historical Dictionary*, 82-83.

originally derived from different political affiliations, yet both ended up serving the modernist underpinnings of the fascist regime.

Paladini explored how artists and writers used disjunction to create tension between the real and unreal, what was then the basis of his concept of irrealità, in two articles in *La Ruota Dentata*, “Emanuele Glicestein” [sic] and “Paesaggi interiori” (“Interior Landscapes”). The former focused on Glicenstein, an artist who had a distinct style of stripping away extraneous elements to reveal the full, unfettered reality of his subjects (Fig. 4.12). Paladini praised this facet of his artworks, especially when it resulted in a jarring and horrific sensation. He asserted that Glicenstein’s technique not only exposed that which was normally unseen, but it also affected the senses, causing a visceral reaction. He likened his paintings to a chord, which “vibrate[s] with frenetic violence.”

“Paesaggi interiori” discussed Dino Terra’s writings in a similar manner, but Paladini was drawn to how the author utilized disconcerting phrases and conflicting imagery to upend the reader’s sense of the normal. His assessment of Terra’s *L’amico dell’Angelo* (*The Friend of the Angel*, 1927) and *Riflessi* (*Reflections*, 1927) departed from a traditional book review. Instead, he simulated Terra’s texts and technique, describing the sensation of walking through a darkened jungle and encountering animals hidden in the brush. He noted how quickly the line between fantasy and reality blurred when confronted with such overwhelming stimulation. Paladini was fascinated by how the shocking impact of Terra’s words and his multitude of juxtaposed images could “render even the value of reality incomprehensible.”

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83 Paladini, “Paesaggi,” 3. “sino a farci renders inseparable del valore della realtà”
The second and third page of *La Ruota Dentata* featured Umberto Barbaro’s “Una nuova estetica per un’arte nuova” (“A New Aesthetic for a New Art”), which outlined the overarching objectives of various artists and critics in Italy, such as de Chirico, Umberto Boccioni, and Roberto Longhi. It also affirmed the social role of art and concluded with a succinct proclamation of the imagist agenda: “Imagism wants an art that is the very spirit of our working life.” Barbaro’s declaration underscored the leftist political underpinnings of Imagism, which was already pronounced by the title, *La Ruota Dentata*, which translates as “cogwheel”. For Paladini, the cogwheel was symbolic of the proletariat becoming revolutionized and had clear Bolshevik connotations. He based the design for the journal’s masthead on his 1922 hybrid machine-men, who had cogwheels protruding from their bellies (Fig. 4.13).

A drawing by Paladini, titled *Il giocatore di tennis* (*The Tennis Player*; Fig. 4.14), was included on the second page in the middle of Barbaro’s “Una nuova estetica per un’arte nuova.” Paladini’s illustration appeared out of place, considering it was unrelated to the surrounding text and it seemed to contradict his call for reality on the cover. Rather than illustrating various concepts of art as discussed in Barbaro’s essay, the drawing is of a man wearing a metallic mask similar in appearance to the welder’s mask-heads of Paladini’s proletariats (Fig. 4.15). The man lunges forward, thrusting a tennis racket. He stands beneath a vaulted dome and two archways, which splits the space in two. Through the arch on the left is the same factory background seen in all of Paladini’s works from 1922. The right arch opens onto a view of a modern building that retained the arcades of traditional Roman architecture.

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This drawing is often overlooked or only mentioned briefly in the literature on Paladini, which is surprising considering it provides a visualization of his imagist and political theories rendered in the figurative style. Furthermore, it exemplified how his proletariat machine-men and the dilemma of choice addressed in his writings and artwork culminated into the ideological basis for his imagist photomontages. Il giocatore di tennis should be considered an advancement of the ideas presented in La Partenza, especially since the two pieces have the same basic structure and thematic content. The tennis player now occupies the place of the philosopher statue in La Partenza. In La Partenza and Il giocatore di tennis, Paladini usurped de Chirico’s dépassement, not in the nihilistic gesture of the metaphysical artists, but rather as a proactive technique to make the viewer aware of his or her role caught between two worlds, forced to decide between ancient and modern.

Paladini also borrowed from his own iconography of the mechanical man and the factory occupations (now without the red and black flags). The masked man evolved into a new hybrid, representative of Paladini’s concept of spiritual necessity and his declaration that “the proletariat and the intellectual community [must] come together more into a unified organism, from a common ideal of rebellion to the old forms of mental and social organization....” The formerly mechanical figure is now dressed in middle class sportswear playing a game of tennis, straddling the space between the factory and contemporary Italian architecture. Paladini’s selection of tennis, a traditionally bourgeois leisure activity, was seemingly odd, but it was soon adopted as a

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85 My discussion of the dilemma of choice in Paladini’s imagist photomontages should not be confused with Lista’s suggestion that the key to understanding Paladini’s Imagism is “The dilemma of collective life in the metropolis” (see Lista, Dal Futurismo, 52). Lista considers Paladini’s work a response to sensory overload rather than an intentional technique used to activate the spectator.
86 Paladini, “Necessità,” 241. “…necessità di stringere vieppiù il proletario e l’intellettualeità in un unico organismo che, da una commune idealità di ribellione alle vecchie forme di organizzazione mentale e sociale” and “le idealità delle sinistre politiche.”
sporting event at the Soviet Spartakiad. Here, the proletariat machine-man is coded and also satirical. The mask is welded to a figure playing tennis – neither the worker nor the wealthy gentleman can escape from their responsibility to each other. This figure is an advanced hybrid, in which the intellectual, the proletariat, and the bourgeoisie have been permanently fused together.

The background also hints at Paladini’s invocation against merely analyzing spatial and temporal forms. Crossing the ground are perspective lines and an arbitrary selection of numbers and letters that draw attention to the planar sections of the canvas. Simulating the axonometric drawings of International constructivists, like Pannaggi (Fig. 4.16), the alphanumeric additions to the drawing appear dissonant against the backdrop of a factory and modern building. It served to admonish avant-garde intellectuals who focused solely on artistic creation rather than the social function of their work. These artists no longer saw the social needs and spiritual necessity of the world around them; instead, they only saw mirrored images rather than reality itself.

Invoking his own desire to create new environments for the worker to free him from the past weighed down by bourgeois mentality, Paladini created a visual link in *Il giocatore di tennis* between the factory and modern architecture via his trope of a spilt background. The factory occupations and Communism failed in Italy; therefore, Paladini developed new iconography to match his belief that modernity itself could alter the mind and create the requisite spiritual necessity to trigger an economic and social revolution. By placing the factory beside modern architecture, Paladini was attempting to stimulate the viewer’s understanding that the two were united and to suggest “the intimate community that must exist between artistic creation and the

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87 The Spartakiad will be discussed at length in Chapter 8. It was founded in 1928 as a workers’ sporting competition that was designed to rival the Olympics. For more information about the history of the Spartakiad, see John Nauright and Charles Parrish, ed. *Sports around the World: History, Culture and Practice* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2012).
people, the impressionable union of art with life, in all of its manifestations…” Mirroring the factory in the modern building draws a line of association between the means of modernity (the factory and the worker) and the requisite collaboration that will advance society (the built environment conceived by intellectuals for the workers’ advancement). Just as the philosopher must choose between the ancient and the modern world, the tennis player must also make the same decision. The body language of the tennis player shows that he is divided by the split background, yet he physically points to the future modern environment. For Paladini, the modern world was not merely subject matter, but indicative of a new mindset, which could conceive of a revolution.

Paladini’s first published photomontage, which was featured on the cover of *La Ruota Dentata*, evolved the political and aesthetic theories seen in *Il giocatore di tennis* (hereafter referred to as *La Ruota Dentata Untitled*; Fig. 4.17). Here, Paladini introduced the new art form that would come to epitomize the imagist movement, and by the end of the 1920s, he would be considered a photomontage specialist in Italy. Similar to Hannah Höch’s *Cut with the Kitchen Knife through the Last Weimar Beer-Belly Cultural Epoch in Germany* (1919; Fig. 4.18), Paladini’s montage is packed full of snippets of modernity. Clearly aware of Höch’s work, Paladini considered her one of the foundational creators of photomontage in Germany. Like Höch, he placed an identifiable figure at the center to act as the fulcrum around which the

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88 Paladini, “Proletari,” 239. “L’atteggiamento di isolamento dalla lotta sociale è particolarmente caro agli intelletuali italiani…non può essere che fonte di rammarico per tutti quanti sentano la intima comunità che dovrebbe esistere tra creazione artistica e popolo, la imprescindibile unione dell’arte con la vita, in tutte le sue manifestazioni.…”


90 Paladini, “Fotomontage,” 4. Paladini only mentions her name, but never addressed how he became familiar with her work. Pannaggi was likely the medium through which German Dadaism entered Italy based on his location in Berlin and his own Dadaist inspired collages.
multitude of conflicting cutouts churned. He similarly used this photomontage to comment on mass media and on the pivotal role of women in the development of modernity.

*La Ruota Dentata Untitled* was Paladini’s first attempt to activate the mind of the viewer and to cultivate spiritual necessity through only photo-based images culled from newspapers and magazines. Unlike his earlier imagist collages, no painterly elements remained and it was no longer a singular, unique art object. He divided the work into roughly three registers with cutouts of beer bottles, toothpaste tubes, and sculptures spilling in between to create visual transitions. Each section addressed a different theme from his recent writings for *Fede* and *Vita! Libertaria*.

The top register consisted of a modern architectural interior inhabited by various actors, including Charlie Chaplin, Heinrich George, Mary Pickford, and Ivan Mosjoukine. A zeppelin with a man lying on top, as if in a casket, floats across the bottom. The inclusion of actors in this register is significant for two reasons. First, each was obviously carefully selected, considering Chaplin and George were known for their leftist political affiliations and Mosjoukine was an incredibly famous contemporary Russian actor. Pickford, on the other hand, served as the embodiment of the New Woman. Second, it established a connection between how film and Imagism both utilized images to engage the viewer. Paladini, however, would not fully understand this complex connection until he visited Moscow at the end of 1927.

The viewer’s eye is guided from the top to the middle register of *La Ruota Dentata Untitled* by a ship’s cowl vent on its side. The spiral of the vent terminates in a female nude torso. In this section of the photomontage, there are no actors or film stills; rather, two real

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92 Schiaffini, “I fotomontaggi,” 56.
people and buildings dominate the space. On the left hand side, different forms of architecture vie for prominence, including neoclassic structures and modern skyscrapers, but the center is fully occupied by a factory that sprawls across two-thirds of the register. An Allied warplane delineates the bottom, which mirrors the zeppelin from the top register.

This section clearly establishes the visual and ideological links between La Partenza, Il giocatore di tennis, and La Ruota Dentata Untitled. Within all three pieces, a central figure is torn between two architectural backgrounds. In the middle of the register, and therefore in the center of the entire montage, Paladini placed a sculpture of Hermes with the infant Dionysus on his shoulder – a direct reference to the sculpture in La Partenza. The choice of the messenger god hiding Zeus’ child was particularly well chosen. Paladini was heralding the birth of Imagism, yet he was also conveying its “hidden in plain sight” leftist agenda. Furthermore, a photograph of Dino Terra was superimposed on the face of Hermes. The choice of Terra was quite apt; he was metaphorically the movement’s messenger, because he provided the financial backing for the publication of La Ruota Dentata, contributed articles to the journal, and wrote two books for the short-lived imagist publishing imprint.93 Similar to Il giocatore di tennis, the central Hermes figure straddles the middle ground between a factory and modern architecture. His body moves toward the factory, but his head turns to look at the skyscrapers. As Hermes, Terra occupies the same position as the bourgeois intellectual in Paladini’s Il giocatore di tennis and La Partenza, suggesting his, and by extension all imagists’, dilemma in effectively aiding workers through cultural production. Directly in Hermes’ or Terra’s line of sight is a cutout

93 Booker, Bru, Thacker, and Weikop, Oxford Critical, 579. The anthology denotes Terra provided the financial support for La Ruota Dentata. The two books published by him under the imagist publishing imprint were Dino Terra, L’Amico dell’Angelo. Rome: Edizioni de “La Ruota Dentata,” 1927 and Dino Terra, Riflessi. Rome: Edizioni de “La Ruota Dentata,” 1927.
photograph of Umberto Barbaro.\textsuperscript{94} Barbaro was equally significant due to his essay, “Una nuova estetica per un’arte nuova,” which detailed Imagism’s aesthetic ideals and social obligations. His location in Terra’s line of sight implicates Barbaro’s greater position in the movement and the dilemma. In addition, Barabro leans against a backdrop of constructivist buildings, drawing attention to the importance of modern architecture.\textsuperscript{95} On the opposite side of the montage, his stance is mimicked by an abstract sculpture throwing a deformed shadow on the wall. The juxtaposition of functional architecture and an impractical sculpture visually reinforced Barbaro’s essay and his invocation that art must fulfill a social purpose.

The bottom register of \textit{La Ruota Dentata Untitled} focuses on the activating and invigorating nature of modernity. It is the most chaotic of the three registers and utilizes the most cutout images, including pictures of an arcade, a man tinkering with a light bulb and switch system, an aerial view of a construction hole, a towering skyscraper, and a tightrope walker. In this section the irrational and violent is contrasted with the rational and modern. A bullfighter in the midst of being gored and a soon to be cuckolded Pierrot embracing Columbina abut the inventor, who is fixated on his switch system. The invention rests on the back of a female diver, whose clean lines echo the forms of the Allied warplane and zeppelin. Yet the grace of the athletic body is disrupted by the suggested violence of the aircraft. The entrance to the arcade strategically divides the warplane and the diver, which implies that they are linked by imagist \textit{irrealismo}. On the other side of the arcade, modernity dominates and a building rises out of a construction site.

\textsuperscript{94} Carpi, \textit{Bolscevico immaginista}, 131. Carpi notes that Umberto Barbaro and Dino Terra are identifiable, but does not discuss the significance of their placement within the photomontage. \textsuperscript{95} The building with balconies looks strikingly similar to Mosei Ginzburg’s Gosstrakh apartments, which were completed in 1926. The angle of the balconies, however, would have required Paladini to slice the building in half. This building is repeatedly referenced by Paladini in his architectural writings and photomontages and will be discussed in Chapter 6.
The base of the photomontage juxtaposes key images: a group looking up, an all-girl jazz band, and bathing suit clad women riding a burro. The flapper women are the foundation on which the entire montage arises, which conveys the significant role Paladini attributed to the modern, New Woman. At the bottom left hand corner of the montage, a large crowd, with their eyes raised as if sitting in a movie theater, watches intently as the entire photomontage unfolds above them. Their intense gaze suggests the importance of engaged spectators to Imagism; the photomontage has no relevance without their reception. One audience member, whose head is surmounted by a giant telescope, further confirms the importance of the analytic gaze of the masses. Paladini’s photomontage ultimately suggests the important role of mass media in reaching a large audience and the criticality of vision.\footnote{Walter Benjamin will draw a similar connection ten years later in his seminal essay, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.”}

The newspaper and magazine cutouts were intended to jolt the viewer with their chaotic arrangement and variety, simulating the quotidian experience of encountering modernity – new architecture and construction, modern women, and the latest innovations. Like the entrance to the arcade near the center of the bottom register, Paladini wanted the viewer to enter the photomontage in order to alter his visual and mental perception. Continuing with the theme of his political writings, La Partenza, and Il giocatore di tennis, this photomontage should be considered the visual accompaniment to the text on the cover of La Ruota Dentata. As Carpi has discussed, the ability to alter the mind through images is what was intended by the manifesto statement, “Every imagist is a latent danger.”\footnote{Carpi, Bolscevico immaginista, 126. See also Paladini and Barbaro, 1. “Ogni Immaginista è un pericolo latente.”} The imagists warned that their method was intended to affect the viewer: “we do not use valves; (rather) the imagist short-circuit sets fire to
the valves of humanity, provoking the most desperate fires."\textsuperscript{98} Paladini’s fascination with the almost unreal nature of modernity, or irrealismo, was well served by photomontage. With his photo-based cutouts, he could extract pieces of reality and insert them directly into his artistic production.

Imagism reached its zenith in 1927 with the publication of \textit{La Ruota Dentata} and three imagist novels, \textit{Riflessi} and \textit{L’Amico dell’Angelo} by Dino Terra and \textit{Inferno} by Umberto Barbaro and Bonaventura Grassi (Fig. 4.19, Fig. 4.20, and Fig. 4.21).\textsuperscript{99} Paladini designed the cover of each book, but only one was a photomontage. \textit{Riflessi} featured Paladini’s cogwheel design and \textit{Inferno} included a two-tone drawing. Although not as complex as \textit{La Ruota Dentata Untitled}, his cover design for \textit{L’Amico dell’Angelo} was entirely photo-based and emphasized everyday elements of contemporary life. Terra’s story was a reversal of a traditional morality tale; the protagonist is torn between the temptations of the devil and an angel.\textsuperscript{100} Ultimately, the devil is the more honest of the two and the angel leads the hero astray. Paladini similarly reversed traditional depictions of Italy as being the source of heroic inspiration; instead, he focused on American modernity in the form of dancing girls and the Woolworth Building. He subversively elevated the American lifestyle, which was disdained by the fascist regime and was particularly anathema to in regards to the role of women in society.\textsuperscript{101} The montage directly quoted his \textit{La Partenza}, which asserted that contemporary America was a viable alternative to Italy’s historical

\textsuperscript{98} Paladini and Barbaro, “Prima rivelazione,” 1. “Noi non usiamo valvole; il corto circuito immaginista brucia le valvole dell’umanità provocando i più disperati incendi.”
\textsuperscript{99} Carpi, \textit{Bolscevico immaginista}, 139.
past. *L’Amico dell’Angelo*, however, lacked the split background creating a moment of choice and a central Hermes figure. Instead, Paladini strictly juxtaposed unusual elements, such as a funeral and clergymen, to narrate the story. At first glance, the book cover seemingly lacked overt political content, save for two fundamental elements used by Paladini to shock the mind out of stasis and into action – modernity and the photomontage technique. Yet upon closer examination, Terra’s story combined with Paladini’s montage created a powerful statement against anti-American fascist cultural politics.

The Dissolution of Italian Imagism

Italian Imagism, like its Russian counterpart, was primarily a literary movement. In addition to being engaged with the visual component, Paladini himself produced imagist literature and experimental poetry. He wrote a novella, *Le strane operazioni del dottore Wien tragico istrione* (*The Strange Actions of the Tragic Histrionic Dr. Wien*, 1926); an unrealized film, *Luna Park traumatico* (*Luna Park trauma*, 1927); and a play, *Labirinto* (*Labyrinth*, 1929). Similar to the technique utilized by both the surrealists and the Russian imagists, Paladini and his cohorts used a stream of consciousness narrative form that focused on the visual nature of language and how it could conjure emotional responses in the reader. Paladini’s

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102 Carpi, *Bolscevico immaginista*, 144-148. *Labirinto* was never published, but the play was performed at Bragaglia’s theater in December 1929. See also Lista, *Dal Futurismo*, 115. *Le strane operazioni del dott. Wien tragico istrione* was published in three parts in *Spirito Nuovo* between February and April of 1926, but only the first part seems to be accessible due to the limited availability of *Spirito Nuovo*. See also Vinicio Paladini, *Le strane operazioni del dott. Wien tragico istrione*, Finimondo, http://finimondo.org/print/105 (accessed February 27, 2013). [Orig. pub. 1926]

103 Carpi, *Bolscevico immaginista*, 116-148. Carpi has provided a discussion of the significance of Luna Park to the avant-garde and has demonstrated how closely aligned Paladini’s imaginist writings were with the principles of Surrealism and international Bolshevism. See also Markov, *Russian Imagism*. Markov has detailed the disparate imagery used by each of the Russian
novella, film, and play all had the same basic structure – a bourgeois intellectual’s shocking encounter with modernity. All three incorporate dance halls, fun houses, and amusement parks and the ways in which they alter visual and mental perception.

A discussion of Paladini’s 1927 Luna park traumatico is critical as it combined his imagist photomontage technique with his interest in literature and film. This nexus reveals that he remained indebted to narrative and to the traditional role of the artist during his imagist period. Although Luna park traumatico is not extant, Libero Solaroli wrote a review of it and reproduced two photomontages that depict studies for scenes. These two works were published in Cinematografo in July 1927 and are all that remain of the film. The review is significant, as it outlined the basic plot and provided the only known images of Paladini’s intended content and meaning. The storyline, summarized by Solaroli, was quite similar to Labirinto and Le strane operazioni del dottore Wien tragico istrione. According to Solaroli the film focused on a bourgeois young man who opts to go to Luna Park after work instead of heading home to have dinner with his family. The man is initially unaffected by the experience, but then he sees his reflection in a concave funhouse mirror and his vision suddenly changes. He rides on a rollercoaster train through a maze, where he encounters people from his dreams and passes by paintings from the Louvre. The adventure renews the young man’s spirit, which was rife with “mediocrity.” Solaroli concluded by praising Paladini for creating a new art through “a representation of reality transformed through artistic vision that becomes closely linked to the

imagists. Although the Russian imagists lacked uniformity of imagery in their writings, their emphasis on the urban environment and modern objects does coalesce with aspects of Paladini’s work


deepest spiritual needs. It is destined (judging by the success of films full of modern realism that typifies the twentieth century) to affect the masses profoundly.\textsuperscript{106} Solaroli clearly understood Paladini’s intention to use depictions of modernity to transform the mind and spirit of the spectator. He also realized that the imagist technique had greater applications for mass consumption.

Paladini’s two photomontages for \textit{Luna Park traumatico} had content similar to \textit{La Partenza, Il giocatore di tennis,} and \textit{La Ruota Dentata Untitled}. In both photomontages, elements typical of Italy’s past (rounded archways and religion) were juxtaposed with the modern world (trams and machine parts) in an effort to jolt the spectator out of his stupor and invigorate him with a modern mentality. They also utilized women as central elements from which the imagery unfolds. The first montage was comprised of various unusual characters and modes of transit in an Islamic-style courtyard that is strikingly similar to the Court of Lions at the Alhambra (Fig. 4.22). In the second Paladini reworked the Renaissance painting \textit{St. Nicholas Resuscitates the Three Children Thrown into Brine Tubs} by Gentile da Fabriano (1425; Fig. 4.23).\textsuperscript{107}

In Paladini’s photomontage of the mosque, the clash between tradition and modernity is designed to perplex and provoke the spectator. The architectural references of the courtyard are difficult to discern and are only identifiable due to the Arabic script and the muqarnas that line the horseshoe arches. In the background, a truck drives out from under the portico, while a tram is heading in from the left. The two rushing vehicles create anxiety in anticipation of their

\textsuperscript{106} Solaroli, “Il ‘luna park’,” 5. “..nuova arte in una rappresentazione della realtà trasformata attraverso la visione artistica di un divenire strettamente legato alle più profonde necessità spirituali, destinate quindi, a giudicare dal successo che già hanno i films pieni d’un realismo moderno che per intenderci chiameremo novecentesco, a commuovere profondamente le folle.”

\textsuperscript{107} Schiaffini, “I fotomontaggi,” 62.
eventual crash. Three people, including one wearing the vestments of a nun, heighten the tension; they are engaged in an argument. A nude woman riding in the back of a lorry looks down at the group in amusement, contrasting starkly with the serious nun. Pre-dating Bruno Munari’s *And Thus We Would Set about Seeking an Aeroplane Woman* (c. 1936; Fig. 4.24) by a decade, Paladini’s photomontage features two women emerging from machine parts in the center foreground. One woman rises like Venus from the sea, but pipes and valves have replaced her legs and feet. The other lies on her side posing like Ariadne, but she is a car engine from the waist down. This woman is redolent of Marinetti’s original metaphor of being reborn as a modern man after crashing his car into a ditch. Indeed, Paladini is combining the feminine and the mechanical to signify modernity, but unlike Marinetti, the woman is not supplanted in the rebirth, rather she is an integral part of the modern era. The engine-woman’s pose recalls de Chirico’s Ariadne, who is perpetually on the cusp between waking and dreaming, action and inaction, reality and fantasy.

The second photomontage has distinctly religious overtones, as it features cutout images from *St. Nicholas Resuscitates the Three Children Thrown into Brine Tubs*. St. Nicholas, wearing a mitre and carrying a ceremonial crosier, stands on the right. Behind the saint are cropped photographs of a priest, a kneeling nun, and a man in full military regalia. The latter is a film still of the actor Heinrich George. High above George and St. Nicholas is man in a modern suit who looks strikingly like Ivan Mosjoukine. This dapper gentleman leans out from a window mimicking the triangular pose of Jesus in Leonardo da Vinci’s *Last Supper*. In the far background, another man watches the scene unfold from a small window surrounded by cryptic

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markings. The foreground contains the central action. St. Nicholas bestows a blessing on, what appears at first glance, a shepherd, but upon closer observation, one can ascertain that it is an androgynous young flapper complete with a short dress, bobbed hair, and high heels. Behind the young woman, the three children in the brine tubs entreat her to turn to them. The montage creates an abstract background pattern that both compresses and visually divides the space.

Giovanni Lista has suggested that Paladini’s play, Labirinto, could be interpreted as a response to the new conditions of life under Fascism and the empty revolutionary rhetoric of the regime.\textsuperscript{110} Luna Park traumatico, with its gathering of religious figures next to a military man, drives home the same point. Paladini clearly outlined the dilemma of choice for the young woman in this photomontage, but she has few options. She is thoroughly modern and contrasts with the traditional world around her. She is torn between children on one side and the military and church on the other. When compared to the other Luna Park traumatico photomontage, this one speaks less to a dilemma of choice; rather, Paladini seems to be drawing attention to her forced conversion. Tradition is the only alternative in this scene. Heightening this effect is the play between traditional art in the form of the da Fabriano frescos and modern art with the use of photomontage. Paladini was perhaps foretelling the dissolution of Imagism and its leftist aesthetics and politics in the wake of the 1926 Exceptional Decrees and the arrest of Antonio Gramsci.

The imagist movement essentially disbanded after the lone issue of La Ruota Dentata; Paladini, however, continued to work on book designs for many of the imagist writers into the 1930s. Carpi alludes to the fact that the imagist group was under investigation for their political

\textsuperscript{110} Lista, Dal Futurismo, 52. Lista also acknowledges the complexity of the period, including regime politics and the state of modernism, and that it is not so easy to draw this conclusion about Paladini’s work.
beliefs and it may have caused the group to part ways.\textsuperscript{111} Paladini, in fact, came under the direct scrutiny of the police, although it has not been previously documented. While applying for a visa to visit Moscow with his mother, Paladini was flagged for review.\textsuperscript{112} His file was batched with politically suspect persons, which suggests that the police were interested in more than a routine visa check.\textsuperscript{113} According to his file, this was not the first time he had been observed, as can be discerned from a scratched out note dated 1925. Although the details are now illegible, it suggests that Paladini was being watched as early as 1925, which was a period marked by his affiliation with anarchist and communist journals. The 1927 investigation warranted Paladini being followed and a personal visit from a government agent. Although the file shows that he presented appropriate documents and he was granted a travel visa, the timing reveals that his activities did not go unnoticed by Mussolini’s regime.

Paladini’s self-censorship in the form of fewer overtly revolutionary statements in tandem with an increased emphasis on the rather general concept of “spiritual renovation” (stripped of specific communist connotations and not incompatible with the fascist claim to spiritual revolution) coincided with the investigation.\textsuperscript{114} The imagist movement was also in the process of dissolving, even though the members continued to collaborate on projects for another

\textsuperscript{111} Carpi, \textit{Bolscevico immaginista}, 149.
\textsuperscript{112} Ministero del’Interno, Direzione Generale di Pubblica Sicurezza, Divisione Polizia Politica, Fascicoli Personali 1927-1944, busta 940, Vinicio Paladini, Archivio centrale dello stato, Rome, Italy.
\textsuperscript{113} When reviewing Paladini’s file, it was bundled with politically suspect persons, most being communists and anarchists. His file was minimal in comparison to others within the batch. One note indicated that the information was extremely confidential in his file. I suspect some of the contents were removed, especially when compared to his later visa checks that were standard forms.
\textsuperscript{114} Carpi, \textit{Bolscevico immaginista}, 166. Carpi also notes a decrease in Paladini’s use of revolutionary and Bolshevik sentiments in late 1927.
Surprisingly, rather than deterring him from pursuing the developments of Russian avant-garde artists, the investigation led Paladini seek out information about their advances in cinema and propaganda. He was the first of the imagists to visit the Soviet Union. Upon his direct contact with the Russian avant-garde in late 1927, Paladini entered a new phase in his career that resulted in his subsequent promotion of Soviet film theory in Italy and transformed his concept of the imagist photomontage.

\[115\] Carpi, *Bolscevico immaginista*, 149.
Chapter 5

From the Machine Aesthetic to the Mechanical Eye: Encountering Russian Film

Paladini’s visit to Russia at the end of 1927 reinvigorated his interest for the Russian avant-garde and propelled his writing in two directions: architecture and film. The articles written by Paladini while abroad suggest that he stayed in Moscow from November 1927 to March 1928.¹ Struggling with yet another flailing artistic movement and the intensifying fascist political environment in Italy, Paladini encountered Russian films at a critical moment in his career. It was also a period of transition for the Italian film industry. His writings on the advances made by the Russian avant-garde contributed to a growing discussion in Italian cinema journals about the potential of agitational propaganda and how to persuade the government to support the creation of experimental films. In addition, realism and its definition suddenly became central to Paladini’s writings during the second half of the 1920s.

Increasingly aware of the ineffectiveness of easel painting, Paladini had already begun experimenting with film as a useful tool for communicating with the masses. His immersion in the new doctrines of the Russian avant-garde in 1927 resulted in his mechanical man yielding to the mechanical eye of the camera, thus imbuing his work with a documentary realism and removing what he perceived to be the vagaries and bourgeois individualism of artistic interpretation. Significantly, Marinetti did not embrace film in the 1920s and Paladini’s explorations further removed him from the futurist fold.

¹ Vinicio Paladini, “Un allegro stabilimento cinematografico,” Cinematografo 1, no. 19 (November 13, 1927) and Vinicio Paladini, “Lettere dalla Russia Cinematografi – Teatri e propaganda nella Russia sovietica,” Cinemalia 2, no. 8 (April 15, 1928): 23-24. Paladini’s first article on Russian film in November 1927 discusses a tour of a film Soviet studio and his later articles are signed off as being sent from Moscow in March 1928. It is likely that he arrived in Moscow as early as October 1927 and did not return to Rome until the end of March 1928 in time for La prima esposizione italiana di architettura razionale.
The Russian Avant-Garde and the Rise of Realism

Before focusing on Paladini’s articles about Soviet film theory, it is first necessary to examine the artistic milieu that he encountered when he visited Moscow at the end of 1927. Beginning earlier that year, artists were heatedly discussing the need for realism and how best to utilize it for agitational propaganda. Spurred by the recent changes within the Soviet Union after Lenin’s death in 1924, Stalin’s assumption of power and launch of the First Five-Year Plan in 1928, and the expulsion of Trotsky from the Communist Party in 1927 followed by his deportation from the Soviet Union in 1929, various artist unions divided over which art movement was best suited to carry out the goals of the communist revolution.² Many artists believed that art should adhere to the dialectical materialism promoted by Lenin with a focus on external, objective reality in order to avoid the heavily critiqued formalism of the post-Revolution avant-garde.³ Ultimately, the debates prompted a transition from faktura, the focus on material analysis, to factography, an engagement with strict documentary realism as a reflection of material reality.⁴ The constant infighting resulted in Stalin’s abolition of all art unions and the establishment of Socialist Realism as the basis of all art in 1932.⁵

Paladini’s visit to Russia occurred at an intense moment of change in the Soviet Union and it was reflected in the diversity of artistic organizations during this period. Many of the ideas about formalism, documentary realism, and dialectical materialism that were being discussed within Moscow art unions during this period were reflected in Paladini’s writings that

² Lodder, Russian Constructivism, 184-186.
⁴ Benjamin Buchloh, "From Faktura to Factography," October 30 (Fall 1984): 83-118.
⁵ Lodder, Russian Constructivism, 186.
he submitted from abroad and became ingrained in his film theories upon his return. There was a flurry of artistic activity during this period as several new artist groups were formed and journals began to be published to meet the post-Lenin and post-NEP demands of the Soviet Union. *LEF* was re-launched as *Novyi LEF* (*New LEF*) in January 1927 with an emphasis on the factographic, meaning a reliance on the documentary. The change was reflected in a shift in artistic content within the journal; the new focus was on photography and film stills to complement the group’s new dictum of documentary realism and “literature of fact.” The new direction of the group was heralded by the debates between *LEF* and AKhRR of 1922, when initial “bourgeois” allegations were launched at *LEF* for its futurist basis. The political climate in Russia and Italy had shifted by 1927, which caused *LEF* artists and writers to now suffer from accusations of being fascist due to their futurist backgrounds. Several of the constructivist members of *LEF* began to form additional organizations to promote their role as artists engaged in construction, production, architecture, and film, distancing themselves from their futurist pasts.

One such group was *October*, which formed early in 1928 and included the filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein, the architects Mosei Ginsburg and the Vesnin brothers, the constructivist theorist Aleksei Gan, as well as the artists Aleksandr Rodchenko, El Lissitzky, and Gustav

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The October group formed as an extension of futurists and suprematists who had embraced Constructivism and Productivism in 1922 and responded to the increasing formalist critique of their artistic production. Published in *Sovremennya arkitektura* (*Contemporary Architecture*, the journal of the OSA) in March 1928, the “October – Association of Artistic Labor Declaration” statement promoted art for the proletariat:

…the spatial arts must serve the proletariat and the working masses in two interconnected fields: in the field of ideological propaganda (by means of pictures, frescoes, printing, sculpture, photography, cinematography, etc); in the field of production and direct organization of the collective way of life (by means of architecture, the industrial arts, the designing of mass festivals, etc.).

The theories of the architecture and film participants of October and *Sovremennya arkitektura* were mirrored in many of Paladini’s writings of the late 1920s and provided a direct theoretical link between his interest in the Russian avant-garde in the first half of the 1920s and into the 1930s. Specifically, Paladini traced the trajectory of the October group and its desire to facilitate the spread of Communism through propaganda films and the needs of the collective through housing and communal building architectural plans.

The October group also believed it could organize the mind of the proletariat for the permanent revolution. To accomplish this task, the “Declaration” outlined a five-point process. The first point asserted that artists fighting on behalf of the proletarian revolution must “organize(ing) mass psychology.” The artist’s next task was to “penetrate the creation of dialectical and materialist methodology,” as it would provide “material for the development of

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11 “October,” 276.
proletarian art.” The third point in the “Declaration” was the most significant as it explained the importance of dialectical materialism. Artists needed to:

… propagate the world view of dialectical materialism by the maximum means of expression within the spatial arts…. We recognize and will build proletarian realism that expresses the will of the active revolutionary class; dynamic realism that reveals life in movement and in action and that discloses systematically the potentials of life…. For art to affect life creatively, we emphasize that all means of expression and design must be utilized in order to organize the consciousness, will and emotions of the proletariat and of the working masses with maximum force.

The remaining two points address how the October group could aid the creation of new communist life, including designing residential accommodations, objects for mass consumption, and centers for collective life as well as participating in art education. The October “Declaration” introduced the concept of proletarian realism, which was essentially the new reality generated by the rise of proletariat and a natural byproduct by a revolutionary society. It was “dynamic” because it reflected modernity and revolutionary life, which was always in motion and constantly progressing. The concept of dynamic realism linked dialectical materialism to the sense of becoming that was seen as inherent in the communist revolution. Only by interjecting themselves into the process and utilizing dynamic realism could artists shape the minds of the proletariat, working classes, and peasantry into understanding their revolutionary moment, making them active participants in the communist revolution.

Key terms and theories introduced in the October “Declaration” were echoed in Paladini’s writings. It was not always clear, however, if he was merely regurgitating the terms without fully understanding their exact meanings or if he was attempting to coerce a merger between them and his own ideas for a revolutionary art. For example, the October group’s

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12 “October,” 276.
13 “October,” 276-277.
14 “October,” 277.
emphasis on dynamic realism closely complemented Paladini’s belief that modernity produced a sense of *irrealismo*, or a heightened sense of reality. The October “Declaration” asserted the importance of dynamic and proletarian realism as important facets of dialectical materialism. Similarly, Paladini began to advocate for the importance of utilizing documentary realism in his art and writings beginning in 1928.

A second source of Russian influence on Paladini’s film theories can also be gleaned from his writings of the late 1920s and 1930s: the films and theories of Dziga Vertov. Vertov worked with the film production company, Sovkino, in the mid-1920s, and Paladini’s later correspondence with the filmmaker suggests that he met Vertov during his visit to Russia in 1927, when he toured the same studios. Vertov began working in film shortly after the Russian Revolution as part of the Film Committee of the People’s Commissariat. He produced newsreels and traveled on propaganda trains filming documentary footage of the continuing fighting between the revolutionaries and counterrevolutionaries. Vertov, like Paladini, eventually became a political pariah for his continued dedication to marrying modernist art with communist politics, a stance that caused him to fall out of favor with Stalin’s regime in the 1930s.

Vertov developed the concept of *Kino-Pravda* (Film-Truth), which became the basis of a series of films made between 1923 and 1925. *Kino-Pravda* applied montage techniques to film. In his first film essays “WE: Variant of a Manifesto” published in *Kinofot* in 1922 and “Kinoks: A Revolution” published in *LEF* in June 1923, Vertov outlined his concept of the Kino-

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16 Dziga Vertov Papers, Russian State Archive of Literature and Art, Moscow, Russia.
Eye.\textsuperscript{19} The mechanical eye, a camera, was the means to perfect the vision of man and fostered the workers’ “kinship with machines.”\textsuperscript{20} Within his essays from the 1920s, he also encouraged standardization and the study of animation in order to appreciate the foundations of montage technique. Vertov considered animation and stop action filming extremely informative for understanding how the Kino-Eye functioned because both deconstructed the filmic process.\textsuperscript{21} Not only was Vertov an important proponent for documentary films, he also believed a filmmaker should understand the underlying structure of a film, or what he termed the “dynamic geometry.”\textsuperscript{22} Animated films exposed the structure of filmmaking due to their reliance on systematic and sequential filming and also revealed the power of displacing the celebrity of an actor onto an animated cartoon character.

Ultimately, Vertov considered film montaged entirely from documentary newsreel footage to be the most effective means for conveying the tenets of Communism. For Vertov, pieces of reality drawn from modern life could be effectively utilized to effect a transformation in the mind of the working classes and make them aware of the proletarian revolution and its implications in their own time.\textsuperscript{23} The power of the documentary material resided in its indexical nature, hence his term \textit{film-truth}. The constructivist theorist, Aleksei Gan extended his theories


\textsuperscript{20} Vertov, “WE,” 8.


\textsuperscript{22} Vertov, “From the History,” 92-93.

\textsuperscript{23} Michelson, “Introduction,” xxvi-xxx.
of material analysis from Constructivism to cinema and supported Vertov as a forerunner in the field of film due to his utilization of strictly documentary material.\(^{24}\) Gan was an incredibly prolific writer who contributed to the journals *LEF, Novyi LEF, Kino-Fot*, and *Sovremennaya arkhitektura*. Paladini had likely encountered his writings as early as 1922 and directly referred to Gan’s discussions of Vertov’s work in 1928.

Two additional filmmakers were tangentially significant for Paladini’s exploration of Soviet film theory: Vsevolod Pudovkin and Sergei Eisenstein. Interestingly, Paladini only mentions the films of Eisenstein, but never dwells on his theories even though he was quite well known outside of the Soviet Union. In contrast, Paladini was very aware of Pudovkin’s writings and films. In fact, his friend and fellow imagist, Barbaro, would eventually translate Pudovkin’s major treatises on film into Italian, *Il soggetto cinematografico* (*The Subject of Cinematography*, 1932) and *Film e fonofilm* (*Film and Sound-Film*, 1935), and Paladini would illustrate the covers of both books (Fig. 5.1 and Fig. 5.2). Pre-dating these books, however, Paladini published essays that focused on Pudovkin’s films already in 1928.

Paladini’s cover design for *Film e fonofilm* is a fascinating graphic rendition of his understanding and appreciation of Pudovkin’s writings. Foremost, Paladini did not use photomontage to simulate a montage effect for Pudovkin’s films; instead, he opted for a Socialist Realism inspired drawing. The drawing is a complete departure from the photomontage designs Paladini was creating contemporaneously for novels by former imagists (Fig. 8.35). This drawing emphasized that Pudovkin was not relying on documentary material like Vertov’s film-truths; rather, he retained aesthetic realism. The perspective used in the drawing is a bird’s eye view looking down at the director, the camera, and the cameramen, which mimicked Pudovkin’s

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extreme camera angles (Fig. 5.3). The raked angle was similar to those seen in *Mother* and praised by Paladini in his 1928 review of the film. This particular point of view also suggested Pudovkin’s emphasis on the artistic control of the director in his writings.

Pudovkin, like Vertov, was interested in filming from unusual angles, montage sequences, and occasionally using non-traditional actors, but he also emphasized the role of the director as the coordinator in the filming process, the importance of the shooting script, and the immersion of actors into roles. Significantly, he was not interested in utilizing documentary material for his films and distanced himself from the theories of Eisenstein and Vertov. Although Pudovkin asserted the firm division between film and theater, he maintained that film did not need to use reportage to convey realism, but that both professional and non-professional actors were able to convey it by immersing themselves in the reality of their roles. Vertov, on the other hand, believed that reportage best expressed objective realism and that professional actors were unnecessary. Throughout Paladini’s writings on film, it becomes clear that his interest and promotion of Soviet film techniques ultimately drew from Vertov’s theories while dismissing Pudovkin for his lack of documentary realism.

### Paladini’s Exploration of Soviet Film Theory

Paladini had already begun to work in experimental film prior to his travels to Russia and his interest in the effects of film were initially informed by his integral role in the development of Imagism in Italy. His first venture into experimental film, *Luna Park traumatico*, resulted in his inclusion in the *Deutsche Theater-Ausstellung* (*German Theater Exhibition*) in Magdeburg.

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Germany from May 14, 1927 to October 2, 1927. The exhibition not only included a sweeping survey of international theater but also focused on more recent avant-garde experiments in theater and film by Bauhaus and Russian artists. Libero Solaroli featured both Paladini and his former collaborator, Pannaggi, in articles in Cinematografo, due to their inclusion in the Magdeburg exhibition. From Solaroli’s articles we can glean that the Deutsche Theater-Austellungen included the two scene study photomontages that Paladini created for Luna Park traumatico (Fig. 4.22 and Fig. 4.23). The exhibition supposedly also included two photomontage scene studies by Pannaggi for an unnamed experimental film (Fig. 5.4 and Fig. 5.5). Unfortunately, it is difficult to determine the exact nature of either artist’s contributions to the Magdeburg exhibition as the attendant catalogue lacks a list of works sent by the Italians. There is, however, a blurry documentary photograph that is captioned as contribution from the Teatro Bragaglia. Furthermore, very little documentary information about the exhibition remains as the exhibition hall and archives were destroyed during World War II bombings. Nonetheless, through the exhibition Paladini and Pannaggi became known internationally for their experimental set designs and were believed to be the rising authorities on film theory in Italy. Pannaggi’s participation in the exhibition seems to have yielded positive feedback in Germany as his artwork, including his photomontage scene studies, were reproduced in the international journal, Gebrauchsgraphik, in 1928 (Fig. 5.6) and perhaps encouraged his

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28 Die Deutsche Theater-Ausstellung Magdeburg.
permanent relocation to Germany. Pannaggi, however, was not publishing articles on cinema theory, whereas Paladini was and had a lasting influence as the main vehicle for the dissemination of Soviet film theory in Italy.

Although *Luna Park traumatico* was Paladini’s initial foray into experimental film, it was indicative of Imagism and provides a point of comparison for the transformation of his film theories after his visit to Moscow. Paladini began sharing information about the latest developments in avant-garde film and contributing pieces to several new Italian cinema journals at the end of 1927 about his visits to Russian film studios. His knowledge of contemporary Soviet film theory was comprehensive and it is within Paladini’s film essays that it becomes clear that he was merging his political beliefs, as well as his interest in Surrealism and Imagism, with the montage techniques of Russian directors like Vertov. Paladini’s first coverage of Russian cinema, “Un allegro stabilimento cinematografico” (“A Cheerful Film Studio”), was published in *Cinematografo* in November 1927. *Cinematografo* was a new Rome-based journal founded by Alessandro Blasetti and featured articles by Bragaglia and Barbaro; it focused on issues arising in the newly formed Italian movie industry and on international developments, including new film techniques coming from the United States and Russia. In addition, it often addressed (mostly steered by Bragaglia) how Italian experimental theater could contribute to Italian films.

“Un allegro stabilimento cinematografico” reviewed Paladini’s visit to a Soviet film production studio that had been reorganized based on Stalin’s First Five-Year Plan (Fig. 5.7).

The introductory paragraph began with an imagist technique that perfectly coincided with the

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31 Carpi, *Bolscevico immaginista*, 98. Bragaglia helped obtain commissions for Paladini and Pannaggi to write articles by promoting them as international contributors with an anarchist and communist spirit.
montage film effects being utilized by Vertov and Eisenstein. Paladini described the flashes of images he encountered upon entering the studio for the first time: “wires that sprinkle the pavement, piles of firewood, broken bits, furniture, bold gestures of directors, strange characters roaming about dressed in bizarre clothes.”32 The collage of images served to evoke in the reader the visual and emotional experience of Paladini’s first encounter with a revolutionary film studio. Similar to entering the funhouse in Luna Park traumatico, Paladini’s article recalled his initial entry though a long dark hallway and evoked his sense of fright at the monstrous machines lining his path. He was transformed by the experience and eventually arrived at a strange, and surprisingly cheerful, new world. At the end of the hall, Paladini found himself entering a studio called Multiplicator, which actually existed and was a division of Sovkino (formerly Goskino, the state operated film studio that Eisenstein, Vertov, and Pudovkin were affiliated with in the 1920s).33

The title of the studio, Multiplicator, was significant as it asserted the importance of the multiple in creating film; not only did it embody the multiple parts of the production process, it also suggested its conceptual role as a multiplier in disseminating the tenets of Communism to the people. The studio’s name also seemingly provided a perfect extension of Marinetti’s “Extended Man and the Kingdom of the Machine” (published 1915; in Italian it is “L’uomo moltiplicato”), but countered the violent, inhuman cyborg envisioned in the manifesto. Rather than using actors, Multiplicator relied on humanistic puppets and marionettes to create propaganda films.

32 Paladini, “Un allegro.” “Fili che cosparango il pavimento, le cataste di legna, spezzati, e mobili, i gesti folli di regisseurs, l’aggrirarsi di strani personaggi vestiti nelle più bizarre foggie”
33 Vlada Petrić, Constructivism in Film – A Cinematic Analysis: The Man with the Movie Camera (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987). Petrić tracks Dziga Vertov’s career and provides an excellent overview of the development of the Soviet film industry during the 1920s.
Paladini’s well-researched article provided not only exact facts and figures for the new studio (such as film production schedules and rubles allocated by the Soviet government), but he also gave a historic overview of the development of Sovkino noting “Since its birth it has done nothing but produce political films and was also one of the first to initiate such a genre in the Soviet Republic. The production artists reflect on every moment of political and social life, to draw inspiration for their creations.”

By producing films quickly, Multiplicator served to document current events and the rapid advances of the communist state. In the article Paladini contended that standardization was the key to Multiplicator’s rapid film production, because it allowed the studio to convey “political subjects in a more rapid and comfortable manner.”

The main character in the films, Bratiuschkin (bratiška, a nickname that means “little brother”), also facilitated standardization, because he was readily recognizable by the Russian public. Paladini went on to reiterate how the use of standardization, rapid production, recognizable types, and popular culture made the Multiplicator films more accessible to the public by maintaining characters that the workers could easily relate to and by providing content that was current.

In addition, Bratiuschkin was a universal “type.” Paladini related him to humorous and feisty street urchins that appeared in French and Italian literature; in Russia, however, he became a worker “adapted and transformed by the theories of Marx.” Filméd in stop action sequences, the marionette Bratiuschkin combined traditional folk art with new cinema technology. By using the popular folk art of puppetry, these films were intended to be less alienating than the more

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34 Paladini, “Un allegro.” “…dalla sua nascita non ha fatto che fabbricare pellicole politiche, per primo iniziando tale genere di lavoro nella Repubblica Soviетtista. Nel loro lavoro, gli artisti moltiplicatori, sono obbligati a riflettere su ogni momento della vita politica e sociale, cercando di trarne ispirazione per le loro creazioni.”

35 Paladini, “Un allegro.” “…dei soggetti politici in films nella maniera più rapida e più comoda…”

36 Paladini, “Un allegro.” “… adattati e trasformati dalle teorie Marxiste.”
abstract avant-garde art forms, thus better suited for the political requirements of agitational propaganda directed at the workers. Hence, within the Bratiuschkin films, Paladini discovered an extremely successful artistic medium for serving an educational function for the worker, the original aim of the Russian and Italian Komfut groups. The films maintained a basis in Marxist doctrine that was requisite for avant-garde art produced in a communist country, thereby satisfying the political requirements of the new government. Clearly, Paladini’s emphasis on the standardization and systematized sequencing techniques utilized by Multiplicator were informed by Vertov’s essays, which asserted that animation and stop action films were integral to understanding the Kino-Eye and filmic montage. Paladini also focused on how these films engaged with contemporaneous, real political events, which give the films a “dynamic” quality, and reiterated Vertov’s and the October’s demand for presenting factual material as agitational propaganda.

Paladini’s second article, “Estetica Cinematografica” (“Cinematographic Aesthetic”), appeared in L’Interplanetario on March 1, 1928. Founded by Luigi Diemoz and Libero De Libero, the Roman journal was predominantly geared toward creating a new culture to meet the needs of the fascist revolution. Yet L’Interplanetario had an international approach to cultural matters and had several contributors who were anti-fascist. Paladini was involved with the journal as a graphic designer and feature writer, including creating its masthead and contributing several articles during the course of its short, one year run (Fig. 5.8). Because of the range of topics and writers as well as the journal’s focus on the international avant-garde, his articles were a welcome addition due to his knowledge of Russian theories on modern art, film, and architecture.

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37 Salaris, Artecrazia, 99-100.
38 Carpi, Bolscevico immaginista, 140-141.
“Estetica Cinematografica” argues that the true nature of film had yet to be determined. It needed to be interrogated and experimented with in order to arrive at its most powerful form. The desire to investigate the structure and nature of film was at the forefront of debates within the Russian avant-garde as well as elsewhere in Europe.³⁹ Paladini traced how others had categorized film, yet argued how these previous inquiries had not yet seized upon what differentiated it as an art form. Therefore, he proposed his own two definitions. The first was film’s ability to capture movement and the second was its “unrestrained irrealtà,” which recalled his imagist writings. Here, his imagist concept of irrealtà began to take on a filmic meaning, “unrestrained irrealtà …render[s] optical a world in which laws that we are accustomed to accepting as true and standard could be abolished and overturned.”⁴⁰ In language quite similar to Vertov’s discussion of the Kino-Eye versus the human eye, Paladini claimed that film had the ability to reveal more truth about the surrounding world.⁴¹

The article also signaled the advancement of his imagist concepts of irrealismo and the utilization of images to trigger a revolutionary spirit. The innate ability of the camera to reveal the unseen world and a heightened reality, or irrealtà, coincided with Paladini’s earlier imagist concept of utilizing photomontage. In particular, spectators’ encounters with images of modernity could not only expand their visual perception, but also their mental construct thereby facilitating a spiritual renovation. Similarly, the October group and Vertov were seeking ways “to organize the consciousness, will and emotions of the proletariat and of the working masses

⁴⁰ Paladini, “Estetica Cinematografica,” 4. “…più sfrenata irrealità, dandoci il mezzo di rendere visivo un mondo nel quale le leggi che noi siamo abituati ad ammettere come vere e regolanti il nostro sistema fossero abolite e capovolte.”
with maximum force” for Communism.\textsuperscript{42} Vertov claimed the importance of using reality for this purpose; otherwise, film resulted in “the human race stupefied by the opium of bourgeois film-dramas.”\textsuperscript{43} The primary goal of his Kino-Eye films was “To see and show the world in the name of the worldwide proletarian revolution.”\textsuperscript{44}

Paladini acknowledged that \textit{irrealtà} as well as movement were tools used in other art forms, including poetry, painting, and music. He argued, however, that, “film needs to make itself independent from those means that are common to the nature of other arts, abolishing the literary, scenographic, and pictorial, and serve only to document,” thus noting the superior use of realism in Russia in this regard.\textsuperscript{45} Vertov was one of the greatest proponents of stripping film of its reliance on other art forms and focusing on its inherently documentary nature. He promoted the removal of trained actors and scripts, thus releasing film from the theatrical and literary tradition and revealing its true nature as film-truth.\textsuperscript{46} Vertov also emphasized that film should rely only on carefully edited montage sequences, using purely documentary material to maximize the efficacy of the medium as agitational propaganda. The reliance on the indexical, mechanical nature of photography and film rendered it “true” as it had captured what was really

\textsuperscript{42} “October,” 276-277.
\textsuperscript{44} Vertov, “Kinoglaz,” 39-40.
\textsuperscript{45} Paladini, “Estetica Cinematografica,” 4. “[Film] farlo indipendemente da quei mezzi che son comuni alle alter arti, abolendo cioè il letterario, lo scenografico, ed il pittorico, e servendosi unicamente del documentario.”
there as it was. Vertov recognized that the basis of film was movement itself, but he maintained that it was the mechanical camera eye documenting movement that was significant.⁴⁷

“Estetica Cinematografica” not only established Paladini’s preference for realism in films, but it also signaled his turn away from Surrealism. In the article Paladini praised the superiority of the Soviet documentary film compared to “the fatuity of the experience of the French surrealists.”⁴⁸ In other articles from the same year, he commended Surrealism and its Freudian use of dreams only for the medium of easel paintings.⁴⁹ Coincidentally, the French surrealist movement also began dividing as early as 1928 over the issue of realism and Trotsky’s expulsion from the Communist Party. Ultimately, members who supported Stalin’s decree for realism, such as Louis Aragon, left the group, but the majority led by André Breton chose to maintain the aesthetic of Surrealism and were also eventually expelled from the Communist Party.⁵⁰ The push for Socialist Realism in Russia seems to have influenced Paladini’s opinion that surrealist films lacked efficacy and the ability to relate to the worker, thus creating fatuous viewing experiences. Echoing the transition to factography announced by Novyi LEF and October and found in Vertov’s films, Paladini concluded the article by stating “Cinematography must be fact without artistic interpretations,” and declared that only then will film realize its full potential as an art form.⁵¹

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⁴⁸ Paladini, “Estetica Cinematografica,” 4. “…la fatuità delle esperienze surrealiste dei francesi….”
⁵⁰ Mileaf, “Body to Politics,” 239-254. Mileaf uses two exhibitions in Paris to reveal the uneasy relationship between Surrealism in France and the official decree of Socialist Realism in Russia.
Paladini continued his analysis of Soviet cinema with a series of essays written for Armando Pomi’s Milanese journal, *Cinemalia*. Each article was presented like an entry from a travelogue with Paladini signing off with his location and the date. All were written from Moscow in 1928 (where he stayed for approximately six months) and revealed his extensive contacts in Russia as well as his growing knowledge of its film industry. “Lettere dalla Russia Cinematografi – Teatri e propaganda nella Russia sovietica” (“Letter from Russia: Cinema, Theater, and Propaganda in Soviet Russia”) published on April 15, 1928 (but signed March 1928) described the government’s reorganization of the film industry, including how theatrical productions were completely overseen, monitored, and funded by the state. He noted that the Soviet government reviewed films to insure that their content was neither pornographic nor anti-revolutionary, while emphasizing that an artists’ union existed to mediate and resolve any problems that might arise from this review process. Paladini asserted that “all Russian films are important to the spirit of promoting communist ideas either because the studios are in the hands of the government or because directors and artists in film are profoundly inspired by the Revolution,” but he added, “while instruments of the state, [they] enjoy great freedom of artistic action.” Despite the many changes in Russia due to the instituting of Stalin’s First Five-Year Plan and the resulting infringement upon creativity with the realignment of artistic unions that

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52 Carol Belanger Grafton, ed. *60 Great Travel Posters*, (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2010), 62. The only information I have been able to find on Armando Pomi is that he illustrated and directed *Cinemalia* and worked in advertising.

53 See footnote 1 at the beginning of the chapter.

54 Paladini, “Lettere dalla Russia,” 23-24. “…tutte i films russi sono improntati ad uno spirito di propaganda delle idee comuniste, sia perché lo spirito dei regisseurs, degli artisti che lavorano al cinematografo è tutto preso dal lato profondemente lirico e tragico della rivoluzione” e “strumenti dello Stato per quanto godano di una grande libertà di azione artistica.”
began in 1928, Paladini was still convinced that Russia was a promised land of artistic freedom and found confirmation of this belief in interviews with artists and film producers.  

“Lettere dalla Russia Cinematografì – Teatri e propaganda nella Russia sovietica” provided interesting insights into the state of the Russian avant-garde in comparison to Alfred Barr’s contemporaneous journey to Russia, which was documented in his private travel diary.  

Barr began his trip with a great deal of hope for the developments of the avant-garde, but by the end of his journey, he was completely confused and distressed by the lack of experimental artists in the Soviet Union. Similar to Paladini, Barr noted that the greatest developments were in the fields of theater, film, photography, and photomontage as they were most apt for proletarian and propaganda art.  

The primary difference between the two writers was that Paladini understood the significance of focusing on documentary realism as well as on government involvement in the arts, but Barr found it unnerving. For example, Barr asked Vsevolod Meyerhold how he felt about the government regulation of art, to which Meyerhold replied, “that his theater was an expression of the time-spirit and dealt with the revolutionary material naturally and inevitably.” Barr found Meyerhold’s response “not entirely satisfactory,” but Paladini’s article aligned with Meyehold’s sentiments in that it also asserted that a proletarian art would be a natural reflection of its time and revolutionary spirit.  

Paladini found the artistic atmosphere in Moscow nothing less than invigorating.

55  Paladini begins the article by telling the reader that the article is the result of an interview with Kotzen, director of the journal for RABIS (The Art Workers’ Union). Throughout his articles on Russian cinema in 1928, he also discusses the various people he interviewed at Sovkino and Multiplicator.


57  Barr, “Russian Diary,” 37 and 46.

58  Barr, “Russian Diary,” 21.

Unlike Barr who questioned the Soviet government’s role in the arts, Paladini applauded it for providing financial and technical support for the film industry. Rather than being dismayed at the lack of painting as Barr had been, Paladini understood the underlying cause for the transition. His visit to Moscow caused him to realize that film provided a better solution for advancing a politically leftist stance than painting due to its popular appeal for the mass audience:

The figurative arts have undergone a profound crisis. The masses require something more comprehensive and immediately emotional, which is not found in painting. Film, with its movement, obviousness, and life, responds better than any other art to the needs of the great mass. These needs are the most compelling and they are the needs to which the government is directing all its attention. The realist tendency is the predominant one in film as it is more effective for propaganda for the worker. 

Resounding with Vertov and October’s “Declaration,” Paladini celebrated film for its ability to use elements of life to create art that was inspirational for the worker.

Paladini also considered how films were being used for propaganda and their effectiveness in reaching and persuading a broad audience, thus educating the masses of Soviet workers. He believed that the government organization of film studios was an ideal way of promoting collectivism, applauding it for:

serv[ing] as one of the most energetic and potent forces of conviction, with great intelligence, giving rather ample freedom to the artists by adopting the most advanced and modern technical means, when they want them, even encouraging them in these efforts, but requiring in return from the creators an energetic, constant and tireless effort to reinforce and propagandize the new ideas in the country, an effort that artists make with the greatest enthusiasm. At the same time the government democratizes the theater [and film], seeking to render it accessible to all….

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60 Paladini, “Lettere dalla Russia,” 23. “Le arti figurative subiscono una profonda crisi. Le masse richiedono qualche cosa di più comprensivo, con il suo movimento, la sua evidenza, la sua vita, risponde meglio di ogni altra arte alle necessità della grande massa, che sono le necessità le più imperiose ed alle quali sono rivolte tutte le cure attuali del governo. La tendenze realista è quella che predomina nel film, come più efficace per un’opera di propaganda….”

61 Paladini, “Lettere dalla Russia,” 24. “…ne serve come di una delle più energiche e potenti forze di convinzione, con una grande intelligenza, dando cioè ampia libertà agli artisti, di
Rather than looking at Soviet propaganda films as problematic for their biased content, Paladini saw how essential they were for transmitting the ideas of the Revolution to the remote provinces and making art available to all. Efficacy of propaganda, in short, rather than aesthetic quality, for him, was the most important criteria of an art form. His assessment of Soviet propaganda resonated with his early call for the democratization of art, the inherent intuitive understanding of art by all, and the development of revolutionary spirit promoted in his articles “Proletari ed intellettuali” and “Necessità spirituali” from 1925. He relayed an analogy that propaganda films were successful because they worked like a sugar cube in a cup of tea – they delicately infused the communist spirit uniformly throughout the Soviet people.\(^6^2\)

In his next column, “La Russia all’Avanguardia: Madre” (“The Russian Avant-Garde: Mother”), Paladini discussed the impact of filmic montage sequences mixed with a sense of documentary realism in Pudovkin’s film, Mother (1926). The film was based on Maxim Gorky’s 1906 book of the same name that focused on a 1905 factory occupation and how the desire for revolution initially divided a family.\(^6^3\) The premise of the story is a mother torn between her husband and son, who support opposing sides during a factory occupation. The film depicts the tragedy of the desperate situation as her husband dies during the strike defending the scab workers and her son is then imprisoned for his revolutionary beliefs. The mother’s encounter with the reality of her son’s suffering in prison and his revolutionary convictions provide the


impetus for her spiritual and political transformation. Eventually, she too becomes a revolutionary, leads an uprising against the prison, and tries to free her son, but the attempt fails resulting in the death of the mother and her son.

The article began with Paladini emerging from the film onto the street and he described the sensation of “reentering life after being absent a long time… [the film] invades all the senses, the spirit, and the brain. It seems to reawaken, to liberate…”

Here he claimed that images based on real situations could engage the mind of the viewer and transform him. Although Pudovkin did not use documentary newsreels in his film, the movie was based on revolutionary events in Russia and, therefore, it maintained a sense of realism. At this point in his understanding of Soviet film theory, Paladini’s concept of documentary realism extended to include simulations of real experiences. He also saw disturbingly “real” moments within the film that imbued it with a sense of what he had defined in earlier texts as irrealità. The camera captured moments and created sensations that could act directly upon the mind, evoking a heightened sense of reality through visual stimuli that the eye did not normally capture on its own. Two scenes in particular captivated him: the first was in the prison of a cockroach falling into a cup, unable to escape. This incident being a Kafka-like metaphor of imprisonment was one that most humans could relate to or at least have witnessed at some point in their lives. By having landed within the cup, the flailing cockroach was meant to evoke in the viewer a sense of the son’s desperation in his captivity.

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64 Vinicio Paladini, “La Russia all’Avanguardia: Madre,” Cinemalia 2, no. 10 (May 15, 1928): 18. “…di rientrare nella vita dopo un lungo periodo trascorso in qualche cella oscura…invade tutti sensi, l’anima, il cervello, che sembra di rinascere, di essere liberati…”
The second scene was of the workers’ strike. Although not documentary footage, the workers’ strike reenacted events that really occurred in Russia. According to Paladini this reliance on events that were real to the Russian people made the film successful:

…the most minute details of this film, all is studied in a style to bring forth from real vision the dramatic climate in which this figure of the mother comes to assume an important position. This film, in its intimacy of affects and sentiments, becomes a powerful song of the Russian Revolution, because the workers of the USSR relive in it their own lives, in that which was and that which will become, not through careful approach to social problems… but in those very elements which they have been in intimate contact, made from their surrounding reality, and that have a powerful suggestive value of all that which means life to them.  

Resonating with the declarations of October and Vertov, Paladini reiterated key points of the significance of the filmic materialism of reality. Utilizing the reality of the revolutionary period, the film illuminated that which had already transpired and suggested that which would continue to occur as the revolution progressed. Beyond the creation of a classless society, these films evoked life itself for the workers and would continue to progress the cause of the revolution. Furthermore, realism in film could actually cause physical action: “impressions turn into a suggestion to the senses such that it causes a physical spasm.”

Paladini’s appreciation of Pudovkin’s film aligned with Vertov’s theories of the mechanical eye, new angles of vision, and montage usage. He analyzed how, by shifting the camera angle of vision, a director could heighten the viewer’s awareness and thereby increase

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65 Paladini, “La Russia all’Avanguardia,” 20. “… i più minuti particolari di questo film, tutto è studiato in modo da far scaturire dalla realtà visiva il clima drammatico nel quale questa figura di madre viene ad assumere un’impressionante rilievo. Questa pellicola, nella sua intimità di affetti e di sentimenti, finisce col divenire il potente canto della rivoluzione russa, perché gli operai dell’U.R.S.S. vivono in esso la loro stessa vita, in quello che è stata ed in quello che deve divinire, non attraverso una sapiente impostazione di problemi sociali… ma proprio in quegli elementi con i quali hanno vissuto in intimo contatto, fatti dalla realtà circostante, e che hanno perciò il potente valore suggestivo di tutto ciò che per loro vuol dire vita.”

66 Paladini, “La Russia all’Avanguardia,” 20. “…le impressioni si tramutino in una suggestione dei sensi tale da divenire spasimo fisico.”
the impact of reality, which correlated directly to his concept of *irrealtà*. In addition, he asserted that *Mother* succeeded at utilizing only those aspects, which defined film as a separate and independent art form per Vertov’s definition. Paladini contended that it stripped bare the literary and scenographic, focusing solely on the “purely visual elements” and that this was the path that “cinematography must follow to become a new art, absolutely independent from the others…”.

Paladini’s most succinct essay on documentary film theory was published in the Roman journal, *Cinema-Teatro*, in September 1928. Titled “Cinematografo dal vero,” the analysis clearly acknowledged the influence and impact of Vertov’s *Kino-Pravda* films (the Italian article’s title, like the Russian film series, translates as “film-truth”). Paladini began by declaring that film-truth had been one of the most important developments in modern film in recent years. By relying solely on reportage, film-truth had a “purely mechanical and technical form” and was of great value for the “modern spirit.” He identified that the modern spirit was typified by objectivism and rationalism and those qualities were best expressed in film and architecture. This was the first time Paladini articulated the correlation between the two fields and he would reiterate the concept in future essays. Drawing a lineage from Suprematism and Constructivism, Paladini believed that film and architecture would only reach full fruition when a strict adherence to the nature of their respective, innate materials was enforced. Within the article he clarified that “film-truth” should be oriented toward reportage and utilize purely documentary means,

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67 Paladini, “La Russia all’Avanguardia,” 19. “l’uso di elementi puramente visivi...che il cinematografo deve seguire per divenire un’arte nuova, indipendente assolutamente dalla altre...”

68 Vinicio Paladini, “Cinematografo dal vero,” *Cinema-Teatro* 2, no. 6 (September 15, 1928): 20. “puramente meccanico e tecnicistico” and “il significato dello spirito moderno”. Paladini actually uses the term reportage and he italicizes it, drawing attention to the term. Later in the article he uses the phrase “photographic reportage.”

because the inherent nature of film was material realism, that of the camera’s mechanical and hence truth telling eye.

Once again Paladini pointed to the Russian avant-garde cinema as the ultimate expression of the medium and specifically identified the writings of Aleksei Gan for promoting documentary film. Paladini applauded him and the contributors to the field of Soviet film for effectively reaching the workers and the peasants and avoiding the trap of intellectual elitism.\textsuperscript{70}

New values have been revealed by modern aesthetics. Film now has the great task of popularizing these aesthetics in such a way so that the avant-garde art can get out of the false “elitist” position to become vital and wide spread, crucial for the formation of that characteristic spirit of new civilization.\textsuperscript{71}

Paladini’s praise of Soviet filmmakers reaffirmed his own desire to end the divide between an elitist avant-garde informed by bourgeois intellectualism and the working masses discussed at length in his 1925 essay, “Proletari ed intellettuali.” By examining his development over the decade, it becomes apparent that Paladini’s communist-Futurism and Bolshevik Imagism were interrelated and that film provided a natural progression of his theories.

Within “Cinematografo dal vero” Paladini noted that documentary and film-truth techniques were now being used in Italy thanks to the establishment of Istituto LUCE. Founded in 1923-1924 as an extension of the fascist press office, Istituto LUCE was assigned the task of creating and distributing newsreels and documentary films.\textsuperscript{72} Paladini acknowledged that the public did not initially support the program and had only recently become interested in film-

\textsuperscript{70} He no longer uses the term proletariat, but specifically acknowledges the peasants and workers.
\textsuperscript{71} Paladini, “Cinematografo dal vero,” 20. “Nuovi valori sono stati rivelati dalle estetiche moderne, ed al cinematografo è riservato il grande compito della loro popolarizzazione in modo che l'arte d'avanguardia possa ben presto uscire dalla sua falsa posizione di fenomeno di elite per diventare vitale e vasto fatto, decisivo nella formazione di quello spirito caratteristico della nuova civilità.”
\textsuperscript{72} Ben-Ghiat, Fascist Modernities, 21.
truths, due to the inevitable triumph of the modern spirit. His praise for the development of LUCE, a program bound to fascist propaganda, might seem anathema to his leftist political commitment. Yet state funding and film-truths were integral components of the Soviet model, which he hoped to institute within Italy. For Paladini, LUCE likely signified the successful implementation of programs that might lead to a true revolution of the spirit and the mind of the masses.\textsuperscript{73} His discourse, however, was deliberately vague in his discussion of LUCE for two reasons: it avoided outright praise of the fascists for instituting a state-run film industry and it veiled the communist ideology foundational to film-truth. Within the article he upheld the significance of the Soviet model and maintained its precedence. Rather than assigning a lineage that focused on Mussolini and Fascism, Paladini instead highlighted the importance and development of modern film in the Soviet Union: “… in the U.S.S.R. the youths defend with ardor the theories of film-truth. In their country they are also motivated by the state character and propaganda role that film must serve among the working and peasant masses.”\textsuperscript{74}

**Paladini and the Development of Fascist Film**

The use of documentary techniques and the organization of the film industry had become a main topic of discussion among Italian artistic circles and featured prominently in the writings of Paladini, Bragaglia, and Barbaro in the late 1920s.\textsuperscript{75} As part of a growing conversation in Italy about how to promote the film industry, artists, directors, and writers began discussing the

\textsuperscript{73} Paladini, “Cinematografo dal vero,” 20. Paladini uses the phrase “grande sviluppo preso dallo stabilimento ‘LUCE,’” which can be translated as “great development” or “rapid development.” Within the context of the article, however, it becomes clear that he is more concerned with the Russian developments as he concludes with praise for Gan and the Soviet paradigm of film-truth.

\textsuperscript{74} Paladini, “Cinematografo dal vero,” 20. “…e nell’U.R.S.S. i giovani difendono con ardore la tesi del cinematografo, spinti anche in questa loro campagna, dal carattere statale e di propaganda che il film deve svolgere tra le grandi masse operaie e contadine.”

need for government funding for film production. Many of the journals that Paladini wrote for during the late 1920s suggested that the Russian model could be altered to suit Italian needs.\textsuperscript{76} His contacts in Russia and detailed articles about the industry’s reorganization under Stalin helped inform the establishment of the state sponsored film industry in Italy. Although Paladini’s interest in the Soviet Union’s agitational propaganda was derived from his interest in Communism and encouraging a social and economic revolution, it found practical applications in Mussolini’s regime. Paladini’s enthusiasm for the state involvement in the film industry would eventually haunt him in the 1930s with a system that increasingly promoted fascist propaganda and when the Ministry of Popular Culture wrested control over film and radio in 1934.\textsuperscript{77}

The fascist regime borrowed directly from the propaganda paradigm established in the Soviet Union. In the 1930s the Italian government funded newsreels and films for mass distribution, established a school for filmmaking, and built Cinecittà, a massive studio complex comparable to Sovkino. Mussolini’s dictum, “cinema is the strongest weapon” for the masses, was even redolent of Lenin’s proclamation on the importance of film.\textsuperscript{78} Luigi Freddi was selected as the first director of cinematography for the Ministry of Popular Culture in September 1934.\textsuperscript{79} His appointment and the new position was one of the first maneuvers by the fascist regime to regulate Italian movie production. The film industry, however, was not fully under the regime’s control until 1937, when thematic content began to be dictated. Until then, several sources influenced its development, including Hollywood and the international movies shown at

\textsuperscript{76} Salazkina’s article provides an in depth discussion of Umberto Barbaro’s role in disseminating Russian film theory and models in Italy with only a brief mention of Paladini.
\textsuperscript{77} Ben-Ghiat, \textit{Fascist Modernities}, 88-92 and 131-140. See also, Cannistraro, \textit{Historical Dictionary}, 339. The Ministry of Popular Culture was originally part of Mussolini’s Press Office.
\textsuperscript{78} Cannistraro, \textit{Historical Dictionary}, 123-125.
the Venice Biennale’s film festival inaugurated in 1932.\textsuperscript{80} Yet as Ruth Ben-Ghiat has observed, realism became the preferred style of fascist films due to the influence of Luigi Chiarini, Umberto Barbaro, and Alessandro Blasetti.\textsuperscript{81}

Paladini’s articles about Soviet film touched on three topics that were important in the development of the Italian film industry: the use of film for propaganda, the introduction of documentary realism, and the establishment of state funding for the film industry. As Ben-Ghiat has established, leftist intellectuals were encouraged to introduce foreign trends into Italian culture until the mid-1930s, yet often these same intellectuals continued to work within the fascist system despite the increasing governmental controls and censorship. Leftist intellectuals often pursued paths similar to Barbaro, who worked with the state-sponsored Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia, which was established in Rome in 1935.\textsuperscript{82} Although he introduced a younger generation of filmmakers to foreign avant-garde film theories that became foundational for the Neo-realist movement and wrote about Marxist film theory after the war, Barbaro also towed the party line and promoted a nationalist film culture embedded with fascist propaganda.\textsuperscript{83}

Paladini is not exempt from this murky area of leftist intellectuals operating within the regime. He was never granted a high level teaching position and struggled to find a place within the fascist intellectual community, yet he worked for Alessandro Blasetti and Barbaro on films

\textsuperscript{80} Stone, \textit{The Patron State}, 101-110.
\textsuperscript{81} Ben-Ghiat, \textit{Fascist Modernities}, 74-80.
\textsuperscript{82} Ben-Ghiat, \textit{Fascist Modernities}, 90.
\textsuperscript{83} Ben-Ghiat, \textit{Fascist Modernities}, 77 and 90-92. Ben-Ghiat does not mention Paladini in relation to these post-war writings and filmmakers. She, however, does note his role in promoting Russian film.
that typified regime propaganda cinema. What distinguished Paladini from other intellectuals who worked within the system was his disdain for the usurping of Soviet film techniques for willfully nationalistic purposes. His interest in the educational and social value of film, particularly when pursued with documentary realism, would be adopted in the 1940s by Italian filmmakers, who utilized the power of a strict adherence to realism to protest and resist Fascism. Interestingly, one of the most provocative journals about the new realism in film that included several communist writers among its contributors was titled, *La Ruota*, which was perhaps a nod to *La Ruota Dentata*.

Blasetti, who was knowledgeable about Russian avant-garde cinema, was at the forefront of appropriating Russian experiments for fascist propaganda. His *18 BL* was similar to Natan Altman’s demonstrations for the October Revolution that Paladini had mentioned in his 1925 pamphlet on the state of the Russian avant-garde. Both utilized mass spectacle and theater of the masses to reenact elements of their respective revolutions. Although a critical failure, Blasetti seized upon film for propaganda purposes, veiling overtly pro-fascist themes by making movies that were more commercially appealing and entertaining. Despite contributing to Blasetti’s film journal and providing set designs for his film *Terra Madre* (1931), Paladini blasted

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84 Paladini created set designs for Barbaro’s *L’Ultima Nemica* and Blasetti’s *Terra Madre*. The latter will be discussed within the chapter. The former is not available for viewing according to the archive at the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia and Cinecittà.


86 Ben-Ghiat lists Mario Alicata, Antonello Trombadori and Carlo Muscetta as antifascist, pro-communist contributors for *La Ruota*, which began publication in April 1940. She lists *Cinema* as another journal that promoted new realism in film with a communist agenda.


filmmakers who produced merely entertainment instead of utilizing film’s inherent nature to create works with social purpose. The January 1931 issue of *Cinematografo* featured a “Referendum” on film in which Paladini expressed his dismay with this tendency in the current film industry. Being unable to use the words proletariat and Communism due to the political climate of Italy, Paladini’s article instead advocated for films that served (thinly veiled Gramscian) social and educational purposes. He was disturbed that many directors “are of the opinion that the public is stupid and that we need idiot productions to save the industry.” As proof, Paladini stated that *Battleship Potemkin*, *Mother*, and *All Quiet on the Western Front* were well received by the public and asserted that people were interested in films that addressed important social issues.

Although all three films featured anti-war and pro-communist sentiments, only *All Quiet on the Western Front* was a provocative inclusion in Paladini’s text as it had been banned in Italy. Russian film was still held in high regard for its aesthetic value by pro-fascist filmmakers despite its communist taint and had an elevated status among leftist circles in the early 1930s. Because Soviet films were still somewhat acceptable during this period, Paladini utilized the article to reiterate his belief that film only fulfilled its potential if it was based on realism. He charged young filmmakers to focus on current social life in order for cinema to become a true art form. His desire for realism, however, had a subversive impetus, as he believed that film-truth and the use of documentary realism could trigger a true class revolution.

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89 Vinicio Paladini, “Referendum: Arte pubblicitaria cinematografica sulla ‘sostanza del cinema’,” *Cinematografo* 5, no. 1 (January 30, 1931), 23. “… questa opinione la loro mentalità, che cioè il pubblico sia stupido, e che occorra una produzione idiota per salvare l’industria.”
91 Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities*, 78-79.
Conversely, film that relied on mere entertainment distorted reality and created constructed truths.

Perhaps Paladini’s most succinct statements on the current state of art and film during this period were his actual set designs, specifically those made for Blasetti’s *Terra Madre* in 1931.\(^92\) Ben-Ghiat has discussed the film as a fulfillment of *bonifica*, or the reclamation of the land and Italian spirit, drawing attention to its conclusion in which a farming sequence showcases the modernization of farm practices under the fascist regime.\(^93\) The main character, a modern man who returns to the land, functions “as an emblem of fascist modernity.”\(^94\) Paradoxically, Blasetti’s final montage sequence of modern farm life borrowed heavily from Soviet models, in particular Sergei Eisenstein’s *The General Line* (filmed in 1927, released in 1929), which featured the collectivization and modernization of farming under Stalin’s First Five-Year Plan.\(^95\)

*Terra Madre* showcased the divide between the city and the country, decadent behavior and familial responsibility. The movie featured a young man named Marco, who lived a privileged life in the city. Marco had no desire to become the padrone of his family estate in the country and would have preferred to maintain his lifestyle of wild parties and reckless behavior in the city. Two women in the film served to highlight Marco’s internal divide. His fiancé, Daisy, symbolized his carefree, debauched city life. She was a spoiled young woman who wanted nothing more than to drink, throw parties, and have fun with her friends. Her character was contrasted with Emilia, a strong peasant on the estate who encouraged Marco to assume his

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\(^92\) *Terra Madre*, DVD, directed by Alessandro Blasetti (Italy: Ripley’s Home Video, 2011). [Orig. release 1931]
\(^93\) Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities*, 80-84.
\(^94\) Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities*, 81.
\(^95\) *The General Line*, DVD, directed by Sergei Eisenstein (Chicago, IL: International Historic Films, 2006). [Orig. release 1929]
responsibilities for not only the family, but also for all of the people who worked for him. By the end of the film, Marco had taken control of the estate and demonstrated his commitment to Emilia, symbolizing his devotion to the development of Italy.

Paladini’s set designs for *Terra Madre* were highly subversive and critical of *romanità* as well as of International Constructivism (not to be confused with the Russian Constructors who he praised). Although it is difficult to determine the exact nature of Paladini’s work on the film, it is abundantly clear that he organized the set for the city apartment and the main hall of the country estate. The city apartment was a sleek, modern home complete with Bauhaus and De Stijl influenced furniture (Fig. 5.9). The country estate’s main hall instead appeared to be a Romanesque structure from the late medieval period, complete with rounded archways, groin vaults, and tapestry-lined walls (Fig. 5.10).

Within the set design for Marco’s home in the city, Paladini critiqued the bourgeoisie for their fashionable interiors. The furniture and lamps were for a bourgeois home and mentality and did not serve any social purpose, even though they derived from a leftist, constructivist vocabulary. (Fig. 5.11). Walter Benjamin nearly contemporaneously noted how the bourgeoisie could “assimilate astonishing quantities of revolutionary themes, indeed, can propagate them without calling its own existence, and the existence of the class that owns it, seriously into question.”

Once production became divorced from serving the proletariat, the end product, despite its foundations in revolutionary ideas, had lost its relevance in the class struggle. Paladini’s set design drove a similar point. Based on International constructivist examples, like Gerrit Rietveld’s chairs and Bauhaus lamp designs, the furniture and fixtures betrayed their

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reliance on style rather than the politically committed production of Soviet Constructivism (Fig. 5.12 and Fig. 5.13). Hanging in the background was Paladini’s own *Equilibrismi* (1926), a painting he considered a concession both for its inclusion in the 1926 Futurist Pavilion at the Venice Biennale and for its constructivist, rather than Constructor, style (Fig. 5.14). His insertion of the painting into the background signaled his tacit acknowledgment of his earlier accommodations to Marinetti’s Futurism and the International constructivist style. Also featured in the same set design was a distorted drawing, likely by Paladini, of a classic sculpture beneath a trompe l’oeil rounded arch (Fig. 5.15). Rather than a perfected, classical body, his drawn sculpture was a caricature. It was strikingly similar to the late 1920s works of de Chirico (Fig. 5.16) and clearly included as a parody of the cult of classicism promoted by Mussolini’s regime. By equating the sculpture with the other bourgeois aspects of the interior, Paladini simultaneously mocked the regime’s promotion of romanità and the appropriation of Constructivism as a style in Western Europe, now so far removed from its foundations in Russia. Paladini masterfully positioned his Roman “sculpture” next to a contemporary figurative sculpture to demonstrate that romanità and the fine arts, even if avant-garde, are neither functional nor do they respond to modern social needs.

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97 Lista, *Dal Futurismo*, 67-8 and Diego Arich de Finetti, “Venezia 1926: Pannaggi e compagni nel padiglione ‘soviettista’,” in *Pannaggi e l’arte meccanica futurista*, ed. Enrico Crispolti (Milan: Edizioni Gabriele Mazzotta, 1995), 70. Lista reproduces a letter from Paladini to Antonio Fornari dated June 9, 1926 in which he says it is an “attempt to give life to the abstract forms of the constructivists.” He defines this constructivist style as featuring abstract forms, architectonic structures, and play of equilibriums. This is the same definition he gives to Dutch and Russian Constructivism that he considers derived from Suprematism and is completely at odds with how he defines Russian constructors (i.e., *faktura*, construction, serviceableness). De Finetti’s article draws attention to the nuance of Paladini’s definitions in relation to the Fornari letter and a review of the exhibition.

Within the sets for Marco’s ancestral home, Paladini recalled the decorative elements featured in the city apartment. For example, the metaphysical sculpture drawing is mirrored by a reproduction of the *Venus de Medici* under a Roman arch (Fig. 5.17). The Renaissance and medieval furniture pieces, with their rigid straight backs, seemed equally uncomfortable as the Bauhaus and De Stijl variants. The cohesion between the furniture in both the city apartment and the ancestral home formed a subtle critique of bourgeois Italian art and design that spared neither the historic nor the contemporary. His sets subversively critiqued the flaw in countering the city with the country when both were dominated by the upper classes. Considering the film was intended to support *bonifica*, it is not surprising that Paladini did not work on any other films by Blasetti, even though *Terra Madre* was a success. In addition, Paladini did not contribute to *Cinematografo* after his scathing “Referendum” article.

Paladini’s next article on film did not appear until the January-March 1933 issue of *Occidente*, a new journal published by Armando Gherlardino in Rome between 1932 and 1935 that deliberately aimed at an international perspective to counter the nationalism of fascist culture.⁹⁹ Many former imagists were frequently featured contributors to *Occidente* and Paladini provided graphic design, photomontages, and articles (Fig. 5.18 and Fig. 5.19). The last section of most issues of *Occidente* included reviews of art exhibitions, literature, and journals from around the world.

Paladini’s “Cinema” was an assessment of another journal, the *Rivista del cinematografo educativo*, the official magazine of L’Istituto Internazionale per la Cinematografia Educativa (International Institute for Educational Cinema, which was affiliated with Istituto LUCE).¹⁰⁰ The

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¹⁰⁰ *Rivista del cinematografo educativo* seems to be a typo and he was likely referring to *La rivista internazionale del cinema educatore*. 
magazine was established in 1929 and directed by Luciano de Feo with the purpose of promoting the culture of Italian Fascism beyond the country’s borders.101 “Cinema” exemplified Paladini’s difficulty in straddling Fascism and his continued belief in Communism in the early 1930s. He addressed what was being called the “civilizing function” of cinema and asserted that there was a divide between two factions in Italy: one representing an international perspective and the other was tied to a nationalist tendency.

…a fight between enthusiasts of modern mechanical civilization and those that see in this very type of civilization the evils that torment us; between those who have hopes for a new art based in social principles and those that want to return to humanist principles; between the destroyers of Western European-ism and those enthusiasts of the old, Hellenistic tradition; between the advocates for a strict egoistic nationalism and proponents of a vast internationalism, rich in exchanges and assistance…102

Similar to his article “Arte, Comunismo e Nazionalismo” from 1923 and his contemporaneous articles on architecture, Paladini aligned himself with the modern and international, with a new art based on social principles. Nationalism was the bête noire. Paladini subtly countered the rhetoric being promoted by fascist cultural harbingers in La rivista internazionale del cinema educatore, by asserting “political currents as opposite as Communism and Fascism have demonstrated interest in culture and spiritual education” and insisted that a

101 Daniela Manetti, Un’arma poderosissima. Industria cinematografica e Stato durante il fascismo 1922-1943 (Milan: Franco Angeli s.r.l., 2012), 58-59. The journal was published in English, German, Spanish, and French in addition to Italian.
102 Vinicio Paladini, “Cinema,” in Occidente 2, no. 2 (January-March 1933): 173. “…le lotte tra gli entusiasti della civiltà maccanica moderna, e quelli che vedono proprio in questa civiltà il principio di tutti i mali che ci tormentano, tra coloro che ripongono tutte le speranze in una nuova arte nei principi sociali, e coloro che le ripongono in un ritorno ai principi umanistici, tra distruttori ad oltranza dell’Europeismo occidentale, e gli entusiasti della vecchia tradizione ellenistica, tra assertori di stretti nazionalismi egoistici, ed i fautori di un vasto internazionalismo, ricco di scambi e di aiuti….”
He bolstered his argument by giving a list of international films that highlighted social problems, such as *City Lights* with Charlie Chaplin (1931), René Clair’s *À nous la liberté* (1931), Soviet films, and Walter Ruttmann’s *Melodie der Welt* (1929). His selection was quite telling as each reflected a left-wing position at the beginning of the 1930s. Paladini concluded, “documentary film will become vital for a greater diffusion of knowledge among the masses… to establish parallelisms of race and customs, and to affirm the idea of a brotherhood of peoples.”

**Paladini’s Re-enchantment with Russia**

In the last months of 1934, Paladini again visited Moscow and returned with a renewed interest in Soviet film theory, which resulted in his final article on film, “Tre canzoni su Lenin” (“Three Songs about Lenin”), published in *Quadrivio* in October 1934. The journal was a surprising venue for a review of a film that celebrated the rise of Communism. It was directed by Telesio Interlandi, who championed Fascism and later founded the infamous *La difesa della razza* (*Defense of the Race*) in 1938. *Quadrivio* originally published many notable intellectuals, including leftist writers like Umberto Barbaro, but the content markedly changed in 1935 when pro-fascist, anti-Semitic, anti-Bolshevik rhetoric increased as Italy escalated its plan to invade

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103 Paladini, “Cinema,” 173. “e la pratica di correnti politiche così opposte come comunismo e fascismo hanno dimostrato l’interesse commune annesso a problemi di cultura e di educazione spirituale” and “…da individuale e soggettivo ad universale e sociale.”

104 Paladini does not identify one Soviet film, rather suggests all Soviet films engage with social problems.

105 Paladini, “Cinema,” 173-174. “…il documentario sarà quello che si imporrà per una maggiore diffusione della conoscenza nelle masse..stabilire parallelismi di razze e di costumi, e quindi a sostenere l’idea di un affratellamento di popoli….”
Ethiopia. Paladini, who was employed intermittently by Interlandi, wrote and published the article just prior to the major transition in the content and structure of *Quadrivio*.

Dedicated entirely to Dziga Vertov’s film of the same name, “Tre canzoni su Lenin” was one of the few instances in the 1930s in which Paladini returned to his unrestrained praise of the Russian Revolution. His celebration of Vertov was quite poignant as both artists were marginalized due to the authoritarianism of their respective countries. *Three Songs about Lenin* (1934) was a rare moment of success for Vertov, as he had not fared well after the debates on formalism and realism in 1928. The film was divided into three parts that celebrated the life of Lenin: the liberation and education of women, the death and funeral of Lenin, and the industrial achievements of Stalin’s First Five-Year Plan. The film was also a visual testament to Vertov’s assertion that the Soviet film industry began with Lenin. Based on letters in the Russian State Archive of Literature and Art, it is also clear that Paladini met Vertov and established a relationship with him, making Paladini’s position a unique one among Italian intellectuals.

In the first sentence of “Tre canzoni su Lenin,” Paladini declared Vertov “one of the most intelligent and noteworthy modern filmmakers,” praising his *Kino-Pravda* series for its influence on the development of modern film techniques. The review confirmed Paladini’s extensive

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106 This information was determined by looking through available issues of the journal. By mid-1935 the journal became increasingly political with a decrease in arts and literature. I could not locate any artwork by Paladini for *Quadrivio* after April 1935.
107 Petrić, *Constructivism in Film*, 23-25
knowledge about Vertov, the October Group, and the development of Soviet film theory that was prevalent during his visit in 1928. He asserted that, “All [Vertov’s] effort is directed at the new conscience of the world through the possibility of objectivity, understood as the mechanical eye…” Vertov had not changed his technique of *kino-pravda*; therefore, *Three Songs about Lenin* retained elements of Soviet film theory that Paladini had been advocating for in Italian film journals since his last visit to the Soviet Union. Lauing Vertov’s brilliant manipulation of the montage technique as well the historic and social value of the documentary footage, Paladini provided a brief overview of the film.

Writing with jarring pauses, fragmentary sentences, and repetitive phrases, Paladini simulated Vertov’s montage sequences. His descriptions of the three sections (or songs) of the film were significant because he did not denigrate the topics portrayed. What was of utmost importance to Paladini, and should be read carefully in the article, was his praise of the material used to make it. He declared the film “a document of a revolution, of the power of men, of the formation of a nation, which is of utmost importance from an artistic as well as from a historic point of view” and he considered Vertov fortunate to have had access to “material so vast, important, and essential.”

Paladini’s fascination with the material component of film harkens back to the concepts of *faktura*, documentary realism, and dialectical materialism found in his earlier writings on Soviet film and the Russian avant-garde. Vertov had created the film entirely from documentary newsreels, including original footage of Lenin prior to his death. Paladini

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111 Paladini, “Tre canzoni,” 2. “Tutta la sua battaglia è indirizzata verso le nuove conoscenze del mondo attraverso le possibilità dell’obiettivo, inteso come occhio meccanico, tema altamente suggestivo per ogni studioso di problemi cinematografici.”

112 Paladini, “Tre canzoni,” 2. “Queste Tre canzoni su Lenin sono infine un documento di una rivoluzione, della potenza di un uomo, della formazione di una nazione di capitale importanza sia da un punto di vista artistico che storico… trattare una materia così vasta, importante, essenziale….”
proclaimed that Vertov’s film technique “dealt a mortal blow to all studio films and has newly demonstrated how something artistic can be made from documentary material in the hands of a director who knows his craft.”

Vertov’s ability to work with documentary material, opined Paladini, resulted in a film that appealed to the “new conscience of the world.”

Despite current scholarly assumptions that Paladini was disenchanted with Russia after his visit in 1934, he retained his faith in the importance of the Russian Revolution and the contributions it had made to the arts both in the form of spiritual inspiration as well as actual material for creation. Although he had never reviewed films by Vertov in his prior essays, Paladini’s fascination with the Russian director’s methods was apparently established during his trip to Russia at the end of 1927 and early 1928 as reflected in his earlier writings, as we have seen. His 1934 trip to Moscow seems to have reinvigorated his belief in the accomplishments of the Russian avant-garde as he concluded his review of Three Songs about Lenin by extolling both the Russian Revolution and the famous director of documentary cinema: “Vertov has demonstrated above all how to feel and experience the given theme and have it include great symbolic value to express one of the greatest social phenomena registered in history.”

No similar sentiment about the fascist revolution can be found in his writings reaffirming his anti-fascist stance (his silence speaks volumes). Vertov accomplished what Paladini desired with

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113 Paladini, “Tre canzoni,” 2. “Sono altresì un colpo mortale inferto a tutta la cinematografia da studio ed nuova dimostrazione di come possa il documentario divenire materiale di arte nelle mani di un regista che sappia il fatto suo.”
114 Paladini, “Tre canzoni,” 2.
115 Lista, Dal Futurismo, 60. Lista has suggested that Paladini was disturbed by the general state of the Soviet population during his 1934 trip. Paladini did note this in his articles about Soviet life for Il Tevere, but Lista does not take into account the fact that Paladini tried to establish contacts with Vertov during this period.
Imagism – the ability to move people to action through images alone and through the most modern means based in filmic materialism.

Upon his return from Moscow, Paladini attempted to establish a working relationship with Vertov.\(^{118}\) He sent at least three letters to Vertov written in a combination of French and Italian, which are in the Dziga Vertov files at the Russian State Archive of Literature and Art. Although not dated, the letters clearly originated right after his 1934 trip as they discuss his upcoming article on *Three Songs about Lenin*. No evidence exists of any return correspondence from the Russian director and within the letters Paladini stated he was awaiting Vertov’s response to his earlier correspondence.\(^{119}\) Whether Vertov ever replied is impossible to determine since Paladini left no archive. Considering the letters were in Vertov’s possession, it is also possible that censors intercepted any responses that he may have sent to Paladini.

Closer examination of these letters is particularly important as it reveals just how interested Paladini still was in Soviet theories about film and montage that he had first discussed in 1928, particularly how these techniques could be used to motivate the spectator. In the first letter to Vertov, Paladini elaborated on how significant *Three Songs about Lenin* was for its ability to affect the spectator through the eye of the machine rather than the eye of man, noting that this was especially significant when accomplished in the hands of the left.\(^{120}\) Trying to make his ideas concrete for the article, Paladini even included a section of what he wanted to

\(^{118}\) Salazkina, “Moscow-Rome-Havana,” 8. Salazkina draws attention to Paladini’s letters at the RGALI. As Paladini is not the focus of her essay, she does not delve into the significance of his contact with Vertov as it relates to his career but rather to segue into how Barbaro was able to promote Russian film theories in Italy.

\(^{119}\) Vinicio Paladini, Letter to Dziga Vertov, c.1934 (no.2), Dziga Vertov Papers, Russian State Archive of Literature and Art, Moscow, Russia. “Je n’ais pas encore reçu une reponse à ma dernière letter.”

\(^{120}\) Vinicio Paladini, Letter to Dziga Vertov, c.1934 (no.3-4), Dziga Vertov Papers, Russian State Archive of Literature and Art, Moscow, Russia.
publish in *Quadrivio* for Vertov to review beforehand. In his next undated letter to Vertov on *Occidente* stationery sent from Rome, Paladini began the letter “Dear Comrade,” returning to a form of address that would have been more common during his Bolshevik-futurist and imagist period. The letter was specifically attempting to gather information and photographs for an article Paladini was preparing for the film journal, *Scenario*.\(^\text{121}\) Unfortunately, there is no evidence that this article was completed or published. Paladini also tried to convince Vertov to grant him permission to publish a book of his writings on film in Italy. Paladini likely intended to work with Barbaro on the project, as he mentioned that the group interested in publishing the book were adept at translating Russian and Barbaro had recently completed a translation of Pudovkin’s film theories (which Paladini had illustrated). The final letter was likely sent just prior to Paladini’s first departure for America in May 1935. It requested additional clarification on the Russian filmmaker’s technique for affecting the public.\(^\text{122}\) In each of Paladini’s letters to Vertov, he affirmed the significance and efficacy of combining film montage with the kino-eye due to the impact on the spectator, emphasizing both techniques as important tools in the hands of the left.\(^\text{123}\)

\(^{121}\) Paladini, Letter to Vertov (no. 2).

\(^{122}\) Vinicio Paladini, Letter to Dziga Vertov, c.1934-1935 (no. 1), Dziga Vertov Papers, Russian State Archive of Literature and Art, Moscow, Russia. Spectator (*gros public*) can also be translated from French to English as the masses.

\(^{123}\) Paladini, Letter to Vertov (no.3-4). Within the letter he included notes on what he wanted to include in his forthcoming essay for Vertov’s review: “Visioni da tutti i vari punti di vista attraverso l’occhio meccanico e non attraverso il poco sensibile occhio umano. La trauma è condotta dal [illegible word] che ha queste “Tre canzoni su Lenin” la [illegible word] del [illegible word] della mano sinistra nel piano.” Paladini’s letter is interesting as it reveals a thorough understanding of Vertov’s technique and sections of it were cut from the final version printed in *Quadrivio*. 
The Pudovkin-Vertov Divide

Italian filmmakers ultimately integrated Vsevolod Pudovkin’s theories and practice, not Vertov’s, into the new fascist-run film industry due to Paladini’s friend and former imagist, Umberto Barbaro. Once Barbaro began working for Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia in 1935, he promoted the use of Pudovkin’s techniques, which became foundational for the development of the Italian neo-realist film aesthetic.\(^{124}\) As Masha Salazkina has demonstrated, Pudovkin’s realism was more “compatible with the Italian literary legacy that Barbaro and others at the Centro were tracing (such as verismo and other ‘indigenous’ literary forms of realism…”\(^{125}\) It also allowed Barbaro to continue his engagement with Soviet film theory while maintaining a presence within the fascist cultural elite.\(^{126}\) Paladini’s role in disseminating Russian film theories is usually considered minimal in comparison to Barbaro, even though Paladini had direct contact with Soviet cinema in its critical periods of transformation in 1927-1928 and again in 1934.\(^{127}\) The lasting impact of Barbaro on Italian film theory stemmed from his ability to implement Pudovkin’s style of realism at a fascist-run institution. Paladini, despite his familiarity with Pudovkin’s theories and their grounding in communist principles of realism, shied away from invoking his name after the literary realist tradition became identified as


\(^{125}\) Salazkina, “Moscow-Rome-Havana,” 102 and 107. She also references Ben-Ghiat’s argument that the Italians asserted that literary realism was part of an Italian national cultural tradition. See Ben-Ghiat, Fascist Modernities, 46-69.

\(^{126}\) Salazkina, “Moscow-Rome-Havana,” 108. Salazkina asserts that Pudovkin’s film theories allowed Barbaro to maintain a Soviet rhetoric that mimicked the fascist regime. She suggests that the Soviet Union and Fascist Italy shared similar “vernacular” in film, drawing attention to how both worked with the concept of realism. She counters that Barbaro’s use of realism, which was derived from Pudovkin, “was in fact an attack on Giovanni Gentile and the Fascist cultural Establishment.”

\(^{127}\) Salazkina mentions, but does not focus on, the integral role Paladini played in facilitating the relationship between the Russians and Italians.
nationalist in Italy. Instead, he focused on utilizing documentary realism in his photomontages.

Perhaps Paladini understood the potential problem with utilizing Pudovkin’s theories in fascist Italy. Pudovkin’s aesthetic realism was malleable, as it was not strictly documentary and could therefore be adjusted to allow for artistic interpretation due to auteur scripts, professional actors, and the director’s overarching guidance of the film’s final product. Paladini preferred Vertov’s realism with its documentary montage sequences and reliance on the camera eye, as it could reveal greater truths of the modern spirit. The jarring confrontation with documentary reality was intended to inspire a true revolution as it had the capacity to effect change within the subconscious of the viewer. For example, Vertov’s images of the Revolution served to inform remote provinces about Communism and to inspire the masses to assume their rightful place within the proletarian government. Conversely, Pudovkin’s realism was more aesthetic and naturalizing. It allowed for dramatic film representations under the rubric of narrative realism that presented fascist life and the fascist revolution as the ultimate truth. Paladini did work as a set designer for Barbaro’s film, *L’ultima nemica* (*The Last Enemy*) in 1938 during his brief return from America. Unfortunately, no functional version of the film is available for viewing to see how Paladini addressed the dilemma inherent in Barbaro’s emulation of Pudovkin.

Undoubtedly, Paladini’s interest in Vertov’s theories derived from his early engagement in Soviet Constructivism with its emphasis on materialist analysis via faktura. Yet Paladini, who was such a prolific writer, must be understood not only for what he included, but also what he excluded from his assessment of the arts. In all of his writings on film and propaganda, Paladini never wrote about the Fascist Revolution and he never heaped praise on how it was represented.

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128 Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities*, 46-85. Ben-Ghiat discusses the growth of the realist tradition, but does not discuss Paladini in this context.
in the arts. His contributions to regime-sponsored journals helped to inform directly the use of propaganda by the film industry, yet Paladini never actively promoted Fascism. Most significantly, Paladini avoided at all costs any discussions about films that were made to promote the fascist regime, even those for which he was hired as set designer. By omitting references to the regime and the use of propaganda in Italy, Paladini took the path of least resistance. Similarly, by not promoting Pudovkin’s film theories after they had been embraced by a fascist-run film industry, Paladini tacitly understood that the Russian filmmaker’s theory had been commandeered and adapted for fascist, Italian nationalist purposes. Paladini’s ability to operate on the fringes of Fascism is what makes him a key example of how leftist intellectuals became foundational to building fascist cultural policy.
Chapter 6

Italian Rationalism and the Rise of a Fascist Architecture

Paladini and Pannaggi’s early and well-known collaboration on “L’arte meccanica. Manifesto futurista” has colored interpretations of their subsequent, artistic itineraries. In particular, scholars have neglected Paladini’s deep understanding of developments within the Russian avant-garde in favor of analyzing Pannaggi’s connections with El Lissitzky, the Bauhaus, and De Stijl.¹ As a result, the influences – both formal and ideological – on Paladini’s turn to architecture have been misunderstood.² What Carpi, Berghaus, and Lista have interpreted as Paladini’s disenchantment with Communism was quite the opposite: Paladini closely followed the evolution of Constructivism within the Russian avant-garde.³ His promotion of Russian Constructivism, or more specifically Soviet Constructivism, was spurred on by his encounter with the Russian Pavilion at the 1924 Venice Biennale and subsequent visits to Moscow at the end of 1927, in 1930, and again in 1934.⁴ By the end of the 1920s, he aligned himself with Ob’edinenie sovremennykh arkhitекторov (Association of Contemporary Architects, OSA), which promoted constructivist architecture designed to improve the lives of the proletariat as

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² Lista, Dal Futurismo, 30-31, 56 and 58.
³ Each author either notes Paladini’s later trip to Moscow or the incompatibility of his ideals with Fascism as the cause of his disenchantment. According to Carpi, Lista, and Berghaus, the articles written about his trip to Moscow revealed the poverty and problems he witnessed within the USSR. I, however, note how Paladini provided a fair assessment of Soviet life and celebrated the recent accomplishments of the new government despite the problems that the nation had to overcome in the wake of the czars.
⁴ David Rifkind, The Battle for Modernism: Quadrante and the Politicization of Architectural Discourse in Fascist Italy (Vicenza: Marsilio Editori spa, 2012), 32. According to Rifkind Paladini was sending letters to Piero Bottoni from Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union in 1929 or 1930 (the letters are not dated). I have not been able to access these letters. See also Echaurren, Vinicio Paladini futurista, 110. The list of auction items includes a postcard from Moscow dated 1930.
well as to support the Soviet state. Until the mid-1930s Paladini continued to publish widely on the Russian avant-garde in Italian journals, applauding groups like the OSA for their ability to integrate communist ideology with architecture for the masses. Drawing on writings by Paladini from 1928 to 1935, this chapter demonstrates the importance of this renegade futurist in disseminating radical Soviet aesthetics as an Italian rationalist under the fascist regime.

Paladini’s participation in the Italian rationalist architecture movement, like his promotion of Soviet film theory, provides another complex intertwining of his leftist convictions and Fascism that is central to this study. By 1928 Paladini concentrated his creative energies on architecture and film in order to fulfill his own demand that artists should enter into production and begin designing a new world for the worker. In this next phase of his career, Paladini removed explicit statements about the proletariat and a communist revolution, self-censoring in the more oppressive fascist climate, in favor of generalized references to the renovation of the international, modern spirit. His essays on architecture alluded to the Soviet aesthetics and ideologies that bolstered Italian Rationalism. He continued to praise the Russian avant-garde as an exemplar of modern and progressive art and architecture. This contrasted with the predominant opinion put forth in Italian cultural reviews and travelogues that Russia’s communist regime had forced modernity at the expense of individuality, family, and religion.

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5 It is important to note that when I refer to Paladini’s relationship with Rationalism it is relation to the Italian architectural movement. There was also a Soviet rationalist architecture movement called ASNOVA (Assotsiatsiia novykh arkhitekturov, or Association of New Architects), which derived some of its basic ideology from the spatial constructions of Suprematism. Paladini referred to these architects as being from the suprematist tradition in contrast to the constructivist architects of the OSA. His tendency to refer to the former as “suprematist” was likely in order to reduce confusion as Italian Rationalism had more in common with the Soviet constructivists than the Soviet rationalists. For additional information on the basic ideology of the Soviet rationalists and constructivists, see Lodder, Russian Constructivism, 118.

Beyond helping cultivate the groundwork for an international style of architecture through his introduction of Soviet Constructivism into Italy, the question becomes how did Paladini specifically contribute to the discourse on Italian Rationalism and how did he become involved in its increasing politicization in the 1930s when the movement worked to establish itself as the official fascist architecture. Due to his international contacts, both real and perceived, Paladini was featured in newly founded architectural journals for his distinctly international perspective. By default, he provided fodder for the debates on defining fascist architecture that escalated in 1931 at *Il Esposizione di Architettura Razionale* (*Second Exhibition of Rational Architecture*) and reached a crisis point in 1938 after the passing of the Racial Laws in Italy. Paladini’s contributions to architectural reviews between 1928 and 1935 also offered insight into the complexity of the increasingly fascistized aesthetic of Italian Rationalism. His articles tracked the disintegration of the movement into the political milieu of the regime and warned against the nationalist implications of *mediterraneità*. Moreover, Paladini stood guard against modern architecture losing its social purpose merely in order to accommodate style.

**The Emergence of Italian Rationalism**

Paladini’s involvement in Italian Rationalism was an obvious alternative after the collapse of Imagism and his complete disavowal of Futurism. He had already been studying architecture at the Scuola superiore di architettura in Rome since 1925 and it was a natural progression of his interest in Constructivism. As discussed in Chapter 3, the divide between Paladini’s promotion of Soviet Constructivism and Pannaggi’s interest in International Constructivism echoed the split between OBMOKhU and UNOVIS. Although Kazimir Malevich’s Suprematism and El Lissitzky’s Constructivism had a lasting impact on International
Constructivism in Western Europe, OBMOKhU and its eventual architectural manifestations had a long tenure in the Soviet Union.\(^7\) The basic tenets of the Working Group of Constructivists became foundational for the VKhUTEMAS, *LEF*, and *Novyi LEF*. In addition, a faction of constructivist architects affiliated with *LEF* founded the OSA in 1925.

Led by the Vesnin brothers (Aleksandr, Leonid, and Viktor) and Mosei Ginzburg, the OSA was at the forefront of promoting functional, constructivist architecture to serve the Soviet regime.\(^8\) The group began publishing *Sovremennaia Arkhitektura* (*Contemporary Architecture*) in 1926, which was edited by the constructivist theorist Aleksei Gan, in order to keep the West and the Soviet Union up to date with modern architectural developments.\(^9\) The OSA also became central to the foundation of October in 1927 and printed the new group’s program declaration within the pages of *Sovremennaia Arkhitektura* in 1928.\(^10\) October’s ranks included Sergei Eisenstein, Gustav Klutsis, Aleksandr Rodchenko, Aleksandr Deineka, Ginzburg, the Vesnin brothers, Gan, and Lissitzky, among others.\(^11\) The group formed in order to defend themselves against the formalist charges lobbed at them by rival artistic organizations.\(^12\) The work of the OSA component of October became increasingly focused on promoting the needs of the proletariat in their designs and often countered their “rational construction” for the masses with the aestheticism of other architectural groups in Russia.\(^13\) The OSA, particularly projects by

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\(^7\) Strigalev, “Nonarchitects,” 673.
\(^8\) Cooke, “Mediating Creativity,” 688-697 and Lodder, *Russian Constructivism*, 118.
\(^9\) Lodder, *Russian Constructivism*, 183. The journal has captions for architectural projects in German, but the main texts are in Russian.
\(^10\) “October,” 275-276. The formation of the October Group is discussed at length in Chapter 5.
\(^12\) Lawton, “Introduction,” 45-47 and Bowlt, *Russian Art*, 273-274.
\(^13\) “October,” 277-279.
Ginzburg and the Vesnins, was readily identified with the principles of Soviet Constructivism in 1927 when Paladini traveled to Moscow.\(^{14}\)

Coalescing with Paladini’s introduction to the theories of the OSA was the emergence of Italian Rationalism, which began with the foundation of Gruppo 7.\(^{15}\) Gruppo 7, the brainchild of seven young Milanese architects (Ubaldo Castagnoli, Luigi Figini, Guido Frette, Sebastiano Larco, Gino Pollini, Carlo Enrico Rava, and Giuseppe Terragni), launched itself as a movement with the publication of their first manifesto in *Rassegna Italiana* in December 1926. This manifesto, and the three that followed, addressed the significance of international architectural theories on the development of a modern Italian architecture. Specifically, Walter Gropius, Le Corbusier, and the Vesnin brothers were singled out for their influential treatises on architecture and modern design.\(^{16}\) At the heart of Italian Rationalism was a social commitment to providing economical, utilitarian, and functional housing and urban planning that reflected the modern spirit.\(^{17}\)

Rationalism in Rome developed as an extension of the Milanese group. Architecture students at the Scuola superiore di architettura in Rome shared similar interests as Gruppo 7, were inspired by their manifestos, and exhibited with them at the 1928 *La prima esposizione italiana di architettura razionale* (*The First Exhibition of Rationalist Architecture*).\(^{18}\) The exhibition marked the beginning of the Movimento Italiano per l’Architettura Razionale (Italian Movement for Rational Architecture, MIAR). From its very foundations, Rationalism was bound to the confines of fascist cultural policy, including receiving permission to hold their first

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\(^{14}\) From this point forward, I will use the term Soviet Constructivism as it most accurately reflects the combined political and aesthetic theories of the OSA.


major exhibition. Although relatively unrestricted due to the pluralistic patronage of the regime in the 1920s, members of MIAR were required to join the fascist syndicate beginning in 1930 in order to participate in the international architectural event, Congrès Internationaux d’Architecture Moderne (International Congress of Modern Architecture, CIAM). By the mid-1930s, the increased scrutiny and new censorship policies of the regime combined with the self-fascistization of rationalist architects caused internal strife within the movement.

The social commitment claims of Italian Rationalism greatly resonated with the sentiments found in Paladini’s writings between 1922 and 1927, thus providing another viable option for him to enter into serviceable production for the worker after his departure from Futurism and the end of Imagism. According to his own articles, Paladini’s affiliation with Rationalism began while he was a student at the Scuola superiore di architettura. Young architects within the school began to exchange ideas and develop models for a new type of architecture, which culminated in their participation in La prima esposizione italiana di architettura razionale in 1928. Although he did not complete any constructed buildings during this period, his designs for economic and utilitarian housing were featured at the exhibition and in reviews promoting the new rationalist architecture.

Paladini initially leapt to the forefront of the Roman group as one of its main theoreticians, publishing extensively in the Roman journal L’Interplanetario, elaborating on what defined the new Italian architecture, and simultaneously being praised as a rising star.

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19 Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione, 11 Roma - Esposizione Italiana di Architettura, Antichità e Belle Arti, 1927-1929, busta III, Letter and telegram authorizing exhibition, Archivio centrale dello stato, Rome, Italy. The telegram notes that the exhibition is under the patronage of the fascist syndicate of architects (“sotto patronato sindacati nazionali fascisti architetti”).
20 Etlin, Modernism, 384.
within the group. As discussed in the preceding chapter, Paladini asserted that the modern spirit was defined by its objective and rational qualities, which were best expressed in film and architecture. Paladini’s Soviet film theory and Italian Rationalism articles paralleled each other: they were written at the same time and both reflected the stated goals of the October group and the OSA in the USSR.

Paladini’s first essay dedicated to architecture, “L’Architettura moderna in Italia” (“Modern Architecture in Italy”), was published in February 1928 in L’Interplanetario in anticipation of La prima esposizione italiana di architettura razionale, which opened March 29, 1928. This piece along with two subsequent ones in April and June, both titled “Architettura Razionale” (“Rational Architecture”), served to outline and to define the development of the rationalist movement in Italy. His inclusion in L’Interplanetario also signaled the beginning of his working relationship with one of the journal’s main contributors, Massimo Bontempelli. He began “L’Architettura moderna in Italia” by declaring that modern architecture was not as advanced in Italy as it was in Germany, France, the Netherlands, and the USSR. Paladini traced the first push for a new architecture in Italy to Antonio Sant’Elia, whose Futurism he divorced from “that empty language that it is now.”

His interest in Sant’Elia went beyond touting a nationalist agenda; rather, he was creating a lineage from what he still considered the original revolutionary aspects of Futurism. Virgilio Marchi, who Paladini had worked with in the early 1920s, received credit as being the only architect to follow in the footsteps of Sant’Elia. Paladini, however, immediately disrupted the lineage of futurist architecture by stating that

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26 Paladini, “L’Architettura moderna,” 2. “…allora che futurismo non era quella parola vuota che è addesso...”
Marchi’s “ideas blossomed early, as all the others dear to Futurism, in an empty rhetoric, sterile and deprived of resonance.”

Paladini’s assessment of the rise of Rationalism perfectly aligned with his 1923 pamphlet, *Arte d’avanguardia e futurismo*, which declared that the driving force of the international avant-garde was a supranational desire to construct. He related Rationalism to architectural movements and publications, such as *L’Esprit Nouveau* in France, the Bauhaus in Germany, *Stavba* in Czechoslovakia, De Stijl in Holland, and *Sovremennaia Arkhitektura* in the Soviet Union. He also asserted that a group of young architects, Gruppo 7, became informed about modern architecture through these journals and through the work of Walter Gropius, Erich Mendelsohn, Le Corbusier, Robert Mallet-Stevens, and the Vesnin brothers. Instead of deeming Rationalism a strictly Italian development, he considered it to be part of a spiritual revolution throughout the world and also throughout Italy, noting the existence of rationalist architects in Rome, Turin, and Milan.

Paladini then identified what distinguished modern architecture in Italy from other international movements. First and foremost, he stated, Gruppo 7’s style was marked by the rediscovery of the “tradition of balance, composition, and symmetry that has imprinted all Italian architecture.” His appraisal of the historic foundations of the group was strategic, as it appealed to national pride, and it also became the basis of his reproach for architects who merely recycled past architectural forms. Within the article he even addressed this tendency when discussing Adalberto Libera’s early work and its “interesting, but useless research of new forms

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27 Paladini, “L’Architettura moderna,” 2. “…Virgilio Marchi, ma, le sue idee sboccarono ben presto, come tutte le altre care al futurismo, in una vuota rettorica, sterile e priva di echi.”
inspired by Roman structures.” Paladini stressed that focusing only on traditional architectural elements, balance, and symmetry was problematic, because they were strictly aesthetic concerns. Interestingly, his assessment predicted later rationalist debates regarding a distinctly Italian lineage for modern architecture that he would set himself counter to in the 1930s. He also identified that the development of Italian modern architecture was missing important hallmarks found in other countries. He noted the lack of architectural journals comparable to Stavba, De Stijl, or Sovremennaia Arkhitektura and the absence of an aesthetic struggle to establish an alternative modern aesthetic in Italy. He also stated that the foundations of Italian Rationalism and Gruppo 7 were different as they were born instead out “of feeling Italian art was something shamefully retrograde compared to the rest of Europe,” rather than the social factors of the USSR or Le Corbusier’s concern with urbanization.

Paladini succinctly returned to his interest in Soviet Constructivism and its emphasis on socially driven construction rather than architecture that only mimics modern aestheticism. He exemplified this sentiment by commenting on the Turinese architect Alberto Sartoris, whose designs he criticized for “reflect[ing] a typical mentality of Dutch Constructivism and Russian Suprematism, a mentality very harmful and condemnable. Architecture conceived in this style is only a game of prisms arranged in space in a pleasant manner with no regard for practical considerations.” His criticism echoed his earlier constructivist writings in which he admonished overly theoretical and non-functional art, like Suprematism, for its lack of utilitarian

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31 Paladini, “L’Architettura moderna,” 2. “interessanti ma inutili ricerche di nuove forme inspirate a strutture romane”
33 Paladini, “L’Architettura moderna,” 2. “I progetti del Sartoris riflettono una mentalità tipica dei construttivisti olandesi e dei suprematisti russi, mentalità quanto mai dannosa e condannabile. L’architettura concepita in questo modo non è che giuoco di prismi disposti nello spazio nella più piacevole maniera, nulla sorga da determinate condizioni pratiche”
purpose and inability to serve the needs of the proletariat.\textsuperscript{34} It suffered from bourgeois intellectualism and therefore alienated the proletariat. Paladini opined that architectural projects like Sartoris’s had already reached their logical conclusions via Theo van Doesburg, the Bauhaus, Lissitzky, and Malevich and that any attempts to repeat the earlier discoveries represented stagnation.

Paladini concluded by praising Pannaggi as an innovator who learned from the Dutch, German, and Russian models as demonstrated in his Casa Zampini; yet he went on to say that his friend’s experiments had since been exceeded by the rationalist architects.\textsuperscript{35} Paladini’s qualified statement about his former colleague’s achievements was undoubtedly due to Pannaggi’s continued involvement with the futurists. In fact, photographs of his Casa Zampini were featured in the \textit{Prima mostra di architettura futurista} (\textit{The First Exhibition of Futurist Architecture}).\textsuperscript{36} Similarly, Paladini’s tempered praise of Sant’Elia and Marchi was in response to Marinetti’s Futurism and its recent claims on modern architecture in Italy. The futurists opened an architecture exhibition in Turin one month after the rationalists and they belittled the innovations of the new movement.\textsuperscript{37} Marinetti claimed that Futurism was the source for modern Italian architecture via Sant’Elia and Marchi; therefore, Rationalism was a byproduct of Futurism.\textsuperscript{38} Furthermore, the futurists asserted that their architecture was aligned with the needs of regime due to their alliance with Fascism and Mussolini’s patronage.\textsuperscript{39}

\textsuperscript{34} Paladini, \textit{Arte nella Russia}, 30-31.
\textsuperscript{35} Paladini, “L’Architettura moderna,” 2.
\textsuperscript{36} Crispolti, \textit{Nuovi archivi}. The catalogue includes an exhibition list for Pannaggi in 1928 and a reproduction of his biography printed in the \textit{Prima mostra di architettura futurista} catalogue on page 10.
\textsuperscript{37} Rifkind, \textit{Battle for Modernism}, 31 and Etlin, \textit{Modernism}, 325.
\textsuperscript{38} Etlin, \textit{Modernism}, 325.
\textsuperscript{39} Rifkind, \textit{Battle for Modernism}, 31-32.
Pannaggi, for his part, had claimed a futurist source of inspiration for the Casa Zampini project, which he detailed in one of his rare articles from the 1920s. Pannaggi’s “Casa futurista Zampini” (“Futurist Zampini House”) published in the Roman cultural journal, *La Fiera Letteraria* (later called *L’Italia Letteraria*), in 1927 provided an extensive analysis of his project for Erso Zampini. Pannaggi described each room at Casa Zampini and the technical considerations that guided the project. Although Pannaggi began by explaining that he was invited to discuss the Zampini house at the University of Rome by Marinetti, very little of substance was written about what defined the project as futurist. “Casa futurista Zampini” was illustrated by two poor quality images of Pannaggi’s interior design (Fig. 6.1) and a sketch of Balla’s *Dynamic of Boccioni’s Fist* (c. 1914; Fig. 6.2). For the most part, Pannaggi’s description of the project reiterated the ideology of International Constructivism as he addressed the importance of geometric rhythm, material usage, and architectonic plasticity as well as the use of “new lines and forms determined by practical necessity,” which almost perfectly reiterated Lissitzky’s 1922 description of UNOVIS. Pannaggi’s designs helped bolster the futurist claims of their precedence in Italian avant-garde architecture as Casa Zampini resonated with international developments and was completed in advance of the founding of Gruppo 7.

Paladini’s April 1928 “Architettura Razionale” in *L’Interplanetario* provided a general summation and predominantly positive assessment of the different architectural plans and models on view at *La prima esposizione italiana di architettura razionale*, which included over forty participating architects. The essay also attempted to define the basic tenets of the new movement. Heralding Rationalism as an exemplar of the modern Italian spirit, Paladini instead

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criticized those artists whose projects lapsed into “the much contested category of ‘aestheticism’ by Russian and German rationalists,” such as Ernesto Puppo’s designs for a Metro station.\textsuperscript{42} He also admonished Libera for his excessive play of color and mass, pejoratively calling the villas he designed “three prisms.”\textsuperscript{43} Paladini’s criticism was driven by concerns in common with the OSA: a desire for functionality, anti-aestheticism, and architecture that was not marred by suprematist volumetric studies. Paladini provided a review of his own works, which was a rare moment of self-appraisal in his writings. He discussed the villa designs he created for the seafront in Fregene, focusing on their economical nature, functionality, and how they responded to practical necessity. The description of his own project was somewhat ironic considering the designs were for holiday villas and not housing for workers; Paladini’s agenda, however, was informed by his desire for Rationalism to fulfill a socially committed objective. In an allusion to architects who unsuccessfully mimicked Le Corbusier’s style, Paladini warned that other villa designs had the appearance of ocean liners, but that it was imperative to keep in mind the fundamentals of a house in order to avoid the trap of the “arbitrarily decorative.”\textsuperscript{44}

Paladini exhibited his designs for four Fregene villas and one restaurant (1927; Fig. 6.3-6.7) at the \textit{La prima esposizione italiana di architettura razionale}.\textsuperscript{45} All of his projects were rampant with references to the international style. Despite his critique of other works on view, Paladini’s seafront houses were a clear homage to Le Corbusier’s villas of the mid-1920s (Fig.

\textsuperscript{42} Vinico Paladini, “Architettura razionale,” \textit{L’Interplanetario} 1, no. 5 (April 1, 1928): 2. “che può rientrare nella categoria del tanto combattuto (dai razionalisti russi e tedeschi) ‘estetismo’”

\textsuperscript{43} Paladini, “Architettura razionale” (April 1928), 2. “tre prismi”


\textsuperscript{45} See Cennamo, \textit{La Prima esposizione} for a reprint of the exhibition catalogue for \textit{La prima esposizione italiana di architettura razionale}. 
which culminated in his 1928-1931 Villa Savoye (Fig. 6.9). Paladini’s first design for Fregene used ribbon windows and the villa was lofted on piers. His second and third designs were more functional in their layout. They utilized elements similar to the L’Esprit Nouveau Pavilion at the 1925 Exposition internationale des arts décoratifs et industriels modernes in Paris (Fig. 6.10). For example, the rounded endcap and placement of the large window resonated with Le Corbusier’s design. Paladini’s restaurant similarly recycled elements common to the international style of Erich Mendelsohn, who advocated for the supranational nature of modern architecture (Fig. 6.11).46 Several of Mendelsohn’s buildings from the early 1920s featured a rounded wall of curtain windows as an endcap to the structure and a similar design was included in Paladini’s café rendering. Significantly, Paladini’s designs omitted both traditional Italian architectural elements, such as rounded archways or barrel vaults, and avant-garde futuristic designs redolent of Sant’Elia (Fig. 6.12). Absent from Paladini’s projects were any clear indications of his awareness of the architectural developments in the Soviet Union, which suggests that they were completed prior to his trip to Moscow at the end of 1927.

Paladini concluded with a pointed commentary on Futurism and its claim on rationalist architecture. Likely in retaliation against Marinetti and Prampolini’s predatory commandeering of his machine aesthetic and now Rationalism, Paladini reclaimed his original intention for the machine as a constructive element and celebrated the birth of the rationalist movement. It was also a direct affront to the Prima mostra di architettura futurista:

The first exhibition of Rationalist architecture has clearly demonstrated that even in Italy there is a modern aesthetic climate, distinct from other Europeans, and as the new spirit begins taking form and consistency every day, it will free us from the dead burden of tradition and ridiculousness, and bring death to Prampolini’s

46 Etlin, Modernism, 249.
empty and bizarre Futurism. A new sensibility, precise, clear and luminous as a machine gear, is forming….

His concluding words served to sever any remaining ties to Marinetti’s Futurism and at the same time praised the emergence of new architecture in Italy. Although his criticism did not directly hail the proletariat, the cogwheel belly of Paladini’s hybrid man-machines loomed “luminous as a machine gear” behind the statement. Yet his commentary was problematic – his championing of Rationalism as an Italian enterprise ostensibly overturned his earlier calls for internationalism. Paladini addressed and corrected this facet of his text in his next installment on Rationalism.

Paladini’s third article in L’Interplanetario was also entitled “Architettura Razionale,” but the Italian movement was only minimally discussed. Instead, he asserted that the lineage for the new modern architecture was not strictly Italian, but rather resulted from a “spiritual necessity.” Recalling his earlier “Necessità spirituali” published in 1925, Paladini focused on how the new architecture was naturally a reflection of the age in which it was created. Unlike the earlier essay, which clearly argued for a simultaneous social, economic, and mental revolution, Paladini obliquely inferred the source of the new spiritual necessity. Significantly, it was not attributed to Fascism, nor was there any mention of the new regime. On the contrary, Paladini suggested that the first signs of rationalist architecture could be found in the Eiffel Tower in Paris and the Crystal Palace in London. All arose due to new materials, fabrication methods, and scientific discoveries that allowed for the development of not only new

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47 Paladini, “Architettura razionale” (April 1928), 2. “Questa Mostra di Architettura Razionalista, ha dimostrato chiaramente come anche in Italia vi sia un clima estetico moderno, nettamente distinto dagli altri europei, e come l’anima nuova vada prendendo forma e consistenza ogni giorno di più, libera dal peso morto della così detta tradizionale e dalle ridicole, vuote e morte, bizzarie del Futurismo Prampoliniano. Una nuova sensibilità, precisa, chiara, luminosa come una ingranaggio di macchina, si sta formando…”

construction techniques, but also the modern spirit.\footnote{Vinicio Paladini, “Architettura razionale,” in Materiali per l’analisi dell’architettura moderna: La prima esposizione italiana di architettura razionale, ed. Michele Cennamo (Napoli: Fausto Fiorentino Editore, 1973), 183-184. [Orig. pub. June 1, 1928]}

He therefore specifically linked modernity with functionalism.

Paladini’s written contributions in \textit{L’Interplanetario} raise the question of whether he had already given up his ideals for architecture in service of the masses or if he was concerned about the ties slowly binding Rationalism to Fascism. His collaboration with the leftist Czech journal \textit{Stavba} beginning in 1928 and his sweeping survey of Soviet architecture in 1929 suggest the latter.\footnote{Vinicio Paladini, “Architettura razionale,” in Materiali per l’analisi dell’architettura moderna: La prima esposizione italiana di architettura razionale, ed. Michele Cennamo (Napoli: Fausto Fiorentino Editore, 1973), 183-184. [Orig. pub. June 1, 1928]}

“Moderní Italská Architektura” (“Modern Italian Architecture”) was published in the 1928-1929 issue of \textit{Stavba}; it was essentially a reprint of his similarly titled article in \textit{L’Interplanetario}.\footnote{Vinicio Paladini, “Moderní Italská Architektura,” \textit{Stavba} 7 (1928-1929): 1-5.}

\textit{Stavba}’s chief editor was Karel Teige, a Czech Marxist and avant-garde artist who was well informed about Soviet architecture and Constructivism due to contacts in Moscow, such as Vladimir Majakovsky, Ilya Ehrenberg, and Sergei Eisenstein.\footnote{Karel Teige, \textit{The Minimum Dwelling}, (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2002), xi-xxviii.}

Teige was particularly interested in the creation of utilitarian housing for the proletariat.\footnote{Karel Teige, \textit{The Minimum Dwelling}, (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2002), xi-xxviii.}

“Moderní Italská Architektura” was featured as the first essay in the issue Teige dedicated to defining Constructivism.\footnote{Vinicio Paladini, “Architettura razionale,” in Materiali per l’analisi dell’architettura moderna: La prima esposizione italiana di architettura razionale, ed. Michele Cennamo (Napoli: Fausto Fiorentino Editore, 1973), 183-184. [Orig. pub. June 1, 1928]}

The reason for Paladini’s inclusion in this edition was made clear in his post-script biography – he was identified as a constructivist and rationalist architect, as well as “one of the first to introduce the principles of Russian Constructivism to Italy.”\footnote{“Nouvelle Architecture italienne,” \textit{Stavba} 7 (1928-1929): 6. “fut l’un des premiers à introduire les principes du constructivisme de la Russie en Italie.”}
Paladini then published “Note sull’architettura Cecoslovaca” (“Note on Czech Architecture”) in the Milanese journal *Rassegna di Architettura* in September 1929. Giovanni Rocco, who directed *Rassegna di Architettura*, had taken an interest in Rationalism early on, and had been promoting the need for a modern Italian architecture since the founding of the Associazione degli Architetti Lombardi (Association of Lombardi Architects) in 1914. Paladini’s article celebrated Czech architects for their development of severe anti-aestheticism, stating that they were free from the “futurist crisis, suprematist anxiety, and the political push toward realism” that hindered other architectural movements. Yet again, he positioned modern architecture against Futurism and Suprematism.

Paladini praised Czech architects for creating constructivist architecture with a social purpose rather than devolving into aestheticism. He quoted Teige extensively throughout the text, which allowed him to inject a Marxist and Soviet constructivist perspective without the same ramifications as if he had stated it himself: “Constructivism is the negation of aesthetics… Constructivists are convinced that architecture is not an isolated work, closed off and special. On the contrary it is an attempt to evaluate social and economic problems....” Paladini followed with a quote from a program declaration by Teige’s Architect Club in Prague, “It is a crime to want to create something aesthetic at the expense of social values. Architecture created

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56 Rifkind, *Battle for Modernism*, 32. Rifkind has asserted that Paladini mailed his articles on Czech and Russian architecture to *Rassegna di architettura*.
58 Vinicio Paladini, “Note sull’architettura Cecoslovacca,” *Rassegna di Architettura* 1, no. 9 (September 15, 1929): 338. “non hanno avuto crisi futuriste, nè sono passati per l’inquietudine suprematista, nè la politica li ha spinti verso il realismo.”
59 Paladini, “Note sull’architettura,” 338. This is a direct quote from Teige included in Paladini’s article: “Il costruttivismo è la negazione dell’estetica … i costruttivisti sono persuasi che l’architettura non è un’opera isolata, stretta e speciale, al contrario è un tentativo di valutazione di problemi sociali ed economici…”
essentially to procure aesthetic pleasure impoverishes a class of society.”

The quotations from Teige made clear that the class struggle and economic conditions were the primary impetus for constructivist architectural designs. Paladini concluded by stating that this new style of architecture heralded a “new civilization and new social organizations.”

One of Paladini’s last essays on architecture in the 1920s suggested the specter of ideological compromise that was looming over the Italian rationalist movement. “Lo spirito moderno e la nuova architettura nell’U.R.S.S.” (“The Modern Spirit in the New Architecture in the USSR”) published in Rassegna di Architettura in March 1929 drew heavily on his 1927 to 1928 visit to Moscow. The article foreshadowed the events that transpired in the early 1930s and resulted in an increased focus on nationalism and the concept of mediterraneità on the part of the rationalists to justify modern architecture under Fascism.

Rather than beginning immediately with a discussion of Soviet architecture, Paladini meditated on the current criticisms of modernism. He identified each of the disparaging observations directed at Rationalism by unnamed contemporary critics. First, he took the naysayers to task for their “push against a concept of the world that could be called ‘formal

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60 Paladini, “Note sull’architettura,” 338-339. This is a direct quote from the Architect Club included in Paladini’s article: “È un delitto sociale il volere creare dei valori estetici alle spese di quelli sociali. Ogni architettura creata essenzialmente per procurare un piacere estetico impoverisce una classe della società.”

61 Paladini, “Note sull’architettura,” 338-341. “a nuove civiltà ed a nuovi organismi sociali”

62 Paladini, “Lo spirito moderno,” 100-112. Paladini claims that the essay resulted from is conversations with Soviet architects during his recent visit to Moscow. The publication of the article in early 1929 suggests that it was influenced by his 1927-1928 trip to Moscow rather than a trip in 1929-1930 per Rifkind, Battle for Modernism. Several of the architectural plans and models reprinted in his article are dated 1928 and earlier. Paladini’s discussion of Ivan Leonidov’s work was likely informed by the display of his model in 1927 and the resultant debate that it caused in relation to the Lenin Library competition. For additional information about the debate, see Cooke, “Mediating Creativity,” 704.
The latter referred to the work of the OSA, which had been subjected to similarly worded attacks by rival Russian art organizations, like AKhRR. Informed by Soviet Constructivism and the October group, Paladini hailed “realism of the form...suggested by means of real elements.” In Soviet Constructivism, Marxism and Lenin’s dialectical materialism drove the focus on reality, which had been central to OBMOKhU and the Working Group of Constructivists. Because functionality and practical considerations were foundational to materiality and realism, critics also called the new architecture anti-expressive and therefore anti-human, which caused it to appear dull and uniform. Paladini countered by asserting that the new architecture responded to reality and therefore real needs. Finally, he addressed “the issue of the national character of construction, that is principally raised by the critic in order to challenge rational, constructivist, or scientific architecture (whichever term you prefer).” His statement operated on two-levels: it recognized intensifying nationalism in Italy and it equated the terms constructivist and rationalist. He hedged the issue of nationalism and the uniformity of modern architecture by declaring that, even if architects work with the same elements and theories, architecture would always vary throughout the world – an argument that recalled one of the founding manifestos of Gruppo 7. By making Constructivism interchangeable with Rationalism, he recognized the infusion of Soviet elements into the Italian movement.

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63 Paladini, “Lo spirito moderno,” 100. “Vi è attualmente tutto uno sforzo verso una concezione del mondo che si potrebbe chiamare di ’realismo formale’”
64 Lawton, “Introduction,” 45-47.
66 Paladini, “Lo spirito moderno,” 104. “Ed ecco affacciarsi il problema del carattere nazionale della costruzioni, che principalmente viene agitato dalla critica per impugnare l’architettura razionale, o costruttivista, o scientifica che dir voglia.”
The long preface then led into a discussion of recent architectural developments in the USSR, which revealed Paladini’s sustained interest in the political aspects of Soviet architecture. First, he provided a brief overview of its evolution, including its relationship to the October Revolution, recent events, and Suprematism. He admitted that Suprematism had a lasting impact on art and architecture, even if it contributed little “to the political and practical factors that are opposed to [Suprematism’s] excessive abstraction.”68 He also acknowledged that Futurism was once important to Russian art, even though it was primarily influential for poetry and painting, and had little impact on architecture. After establishing the historical background, Paladini identified the most important advocates of contemporary, anti-aesthetic architecture in the USSR: the group affiliated with Sovremennaia Arkhitektura (the OSA), including its editor, Gan, and its directors, Ginzburg and Vesnin; the students of the VKhUTEMAS; and the engineering school in Leningrad.69 Paladini’s mention of Gan, who he had also mentioned in a recent article on film, confirmed his deep familiarity with the multifaceted nature of Soviet Constructivism.70

Paladini then covered specific projects drawn from state-sponsored competition submissions, VKhUTEMAS degree completion designs, and actual constructions to inform his Italian readership of developments in the USSR. It is likely that his review was based on the OSA’s Pervaia vystavka sovremennoi arkhitektury (First Exhibition of Contemporary Architecture), which took place in the summer of 1927 and had been featured prominently in

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68 Paladini, “Lo spirito moderno,” 106. “…e particolarmente da quel tipico atteggiamento dell’estetica moderna nell’U.R.S.S. che è il suprematismo. Se questa scuola ben poco ha dato di veramente suo, specialmente a causa dei fattori politici e pratici che si sono opposti a queste teorie troppo astratte…”
His first example, Ivan Leonidov’s model for the state-sponsored competition for the Lenin Institute and Central Library (1927; Fig. 6.13), served to dispel any notion that Suprematism could serve contemporary Soviet society. Leonidov, who was a student of Vesnin and a member of the OSA, was heavily criticized for his project proposal. Paladini considered the design beautiful, but noted that it looked “like a suprematist construction.” He was aware of the contentious nature of the Leonidov’s design—it had been defended by some members of the OSA, but panned by others within the group and by rival architectural organizations. Paladini clarified that the core problem with the design was the OSA’s decree that Soviet architecture must be functional and serve the proletariat. Leonidov’s model, on the other hand, was “clearly inspired by concepts of a pure aesthetic nature…utilitarian, practical, and economic reasons do not play any part in this project...”

Paladini also addressed the significance of creating modern architecture to meet the political and social needs of the Soviet Union. Careful to navigate certain domestic pressure for Italianità, he opined that national specifics could be satisfied by internationalism. Shrewdly, this...
allowed him to interject elements of communist propaganda into his article. For example, he lauded the significant role state funding and resource allocation had in the development of modern architectural projects in the USSR. He noted that, although many of the projects had not yet been built, money had been designated as part of the “structure of the Soviet state” in order to respond to “the needs of the great masses.” He also praised projects like Sergei Kozhin’s design submission for the Palace of Labor for “establish[ing] intimate contact between the masses and the [government] assembly as well as [the building’s] deliberate and administrative functions, which is characteristic of the spirit of the political regime of the USSR.” Soviet architecture was designed to reflect the modern spirit of Communism and its free flow of political, social, and economic interactions. Similarly, he praised the Vesnin brothers as their home served as a gathering place for architects and fostered the communal development of modern architectural theories.

Lastly, Paladini reviewed Mosei Ginzburg’s work whose designs he considered marked by his studies in Italy, but profoundly engaged in the specific needs of the Soviet Union. Ginzburg was likely of great interest to Paladini due to his international perspective on architecture that often coalesced with his own ideas. Ginzburg had studied at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris and the Academy of Fine Arts in Milan just prior to World War I. He returned to Russia during the war and Revolution, eventually becoming a teacher at the VKhUTEMAS in 1921 and promoting purposeful, constructivist architecture. Like Paladini, 

76 Paladini, “Lo spirito moderno,” 108. “presente la struttura dello stato sovietico per comprendere come tali opere possano essere costruite” and “rispondenti alle necessità delle grandi masse”
Ginzburg considered the machine indicative of modernity, new social organization, and the constructive impulse.\textsuperscript{79} According to Paladini, Ginzburg’s architecture promoted the tenets of Communism inherent in collective housing, which he contrasted with “capitalist” counterparts.\textsuperscript{80} He added that the communal nature of the kitchen and library served the “daily exchange of ideas.”\textsuperscript{81} Although his writings began to lose their overtly communist tone around 1928 as Fascism increasingly limited freedom of political opinion, Paladini’s article was outstanding for the fact that it did not criticize Soviet architecture (which was more common during the period due to anti-Bolshevik propaganda). Instead, he praised those architects who understood that the needs of the Soviet masses and state were bound together.\textsuperscript{82}

After reviewing several major Italian architectural journals from the period, it becomes apparent that “Lo spirito moderno e la nuova architettura nell’U.R.S.S” was one of the most extensive exposés on contemporary Soviet architecture in the late 1920s.\textsuperscript{83} It was significant for not only providing an in depth analysis of the role of government funding for architectural projects and the push for communal housing, but it included a large quantity of reproductions of current Soviet projects. Significantly, Ginzburg’s famous communal dwelling plans for Narkomfin (1928-1932; Fig. 6.14) and Gosstrakh (1926; Fig. 6.15) were featured. Very few of

\textsuperscript{79} Mallgrave provides a brief overview of the basic premises of Ginzburg’s theories. Many resound with Paladini’s, which suggests that he may have been aware of the Russian theorist as early as 1923.

\textsuperscript{80} Paladini, “Lo spirito moderno,” 112.

\textsuperscript{81} Paladini, “Lo spirito moderno,” 112. “uno scambio giornaliero di idee”

\textsuperscript{82} Marla Stone, “Power and Spirituality: The Exhibition of Italian Soldier Artists of 1942,” Lecture for Graduate Center Art History Department, New York, October 26, 2010. Stone presented material from her forthcoming book on anti-Communism policies in fascist Italy.

\textsuperscript{83} I reviewed as many issues of *Rassegna di Architettura, Architettura, Quadrante, Casabella* and *Domus* that could still be accessed within the date range of 1928 to 1935. At the end of the 1920s, other journals had passing references to Soviet architecture, but Paladini’s article was one of the most in depth and was noteworthy for his direct contacts with Russian architects. Gaetano Ciocca’s texts were comparable, but not printed in *Quadrante* until June 1933.
Paladini’s architectural plans from the period survive, but his 1928 design for an apartment building is striking for its resemblance to Gosstrakh, particularly in the play between the recession and projection of the balconies as well as in the style of the roof garden (Fig. 6.16). Interestingly, Paladini’s design had analogous elements to Giuseppe Terragni’s Novocomum apartment complex (1928-1929; Fig. 6.17) and later Casa del Fascio (1936; Fig. 6.18) in Como, which suggests that both Italians were studying Ginzburg’s work. Terragni, who was a dedicated fascist, was awarded many commissions by the regime. Yet his Novocomum building clearly drew from Soviet models as it had the appearance of a hybridized version of Ginzburg’s Narkomfin and Gosstrakh, due to the inset windows, balconies, and roof garden. The similarities between Terragni’s and Ginzburg’s designs did not go unnoticed by critics. Indicative of rising anti-Bolshevism and nationalism, which soon became central to the debates surrounding modern architecture and Rationalism, Terragni was accused of basing Novocomum on Soviet sources and heavily criticized for it in Italian architectural journals in the early 1930s. In one of his rare mentions of the ardent fascist’s work, Paladini also observed that Terragni’s Como buildings recalled Soviet architectural projects.85

Rationalism and Mediterraneità

Paladini’s continued interest in Soviet Constructivism and advocacy for the internationalism of modern architecture began to conflict with his participation in the Italian rationalist movement with which he had become disenchanted by 1931, the year of the II

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84 Etlin, Modernism, 269 and 633 fn 41. Etlin cites an article by Ugo Ojetti that placed comparisons of Russian and Italian rationalist projects side by side to point out the lack of “Italian-ness” in the rationalists projects. Etlin cites Ugo Ojetti, “Dell’architettura razionale,” Dedalo 11, (1931): 951-952.
Esposizione di Architettura Razionale (Second Exhibition of Rational Architecture) inaugurated by Mussolini. He was also affected by the infighting among the rationalists. A divide between nationalism and internationalism had been simmering beneath the surface of modern Italian architecture since the early 1920s. Pietro Maria Bardi’s satirical Tavolo degli orrori (Table of Horrors; Fig. 6.19), however, triggered a heated and open debate on whether international style architecture was detrimental to the Italian spirit. The Tavolo degli orrori was first presented at the II Esposizione di Architettura Razionale and then reprinted in the pages of Quadrante in June 1933. It was designed as a biting critique of state-sponsored architecture that promoted traditionally Italian forms, such as those based on ancient Roman examples. The montage instigated uproar among established architects, notably Marcello Piacentini, who supported a compromise of stripped-down classicism and modern designs (Fig. 6.20). The backlash caused the rationalists being threatened with expulsion from the architecture syndicate, which would have made it impossible for them to work and to receive government commissions. Ultimately, the conflict was resolved by the disbanding of the recently formed Movimento italiano per l’architettura razionale. In turn, rationalists, like Bardi, redoubled their efforts to become the predominant architects of Fascism, sealing their political support of the regime and compromising their international agenda of functionalism.

Proponents of both nationalism and internationalism evoked the concept of mediterraneità to describe their respective styles. Those opposed to functionalist aesthetics condemned its inhuman and foreign elements. The international faction asserted that the white

86 Etlin, Modernism, 249-250.
87 Rifkind, Battle for Modernism, 44-47.
88 Rifkind, Battle for Modernism, 44-47.
89 The rationalist movement’s increasingly political affiliation with the regime has been well documented by architectural historians such as Richard Etlin, David Rifkind, Diane Ghirardo, and Dennis Doordan.
surfaces, extensive glass walls, and cubic volumes of modern architecture had an inherent \textit{mediterraneità} quality, citing Le Corbusier’s \textit{Vers une architecture}.\textsuperscript{90} Paladini clearly sided with those rationalists who promoted internationalism without the compromising lip-service paid to \textit{mediterraneità} and used his opportunity in a foreign publication to draw attention to the split within the ranks.\textsuperscript{91}

Paladini’s “Panorama dell’architettura moderna italiana” (“Panorama of Modern Italian Architecture”) was featured in the 1931-1932 issue of \textit{Stavba}.\textsuperscript{92} The article was clearly written before the disbanding of the MIAR and addressed changes within Italian Rationalism. He warned against rising nationalism and the concentration on traditional Italian forms, which had been a contentious discussion point in rationalist journals as early as 1929.\textsuperscript{93} Paladini disdained the traditionalists for their overly academic approach and unnecessary inclusion of arcades, archways, and barrel vaults to reference the Italian past rather than creating utilitarian and functionalist design.

The point of departure for “Panorama dell’architettura moderna italiana” was the \textit{II Esposizione di Architettura Razionale}, which had caused turmoil among proponents of modern architecture. According to Paladini, Mussolini’s interest in Rationalism unsettled retrograde architects, causing rampant infighting and intensified competition. Although Paladini never spoke directly against Mussolini, he astutely described a system of architectural competitions

\textsuperscript{91} Paladini did not identify specific architects who shared his sentiments; rather, he drew attention to projects by various architects that were internationl in style, such as Terragni, Aschieri, and Pagano.
\textsuperscript{92} Paladini, “Panorama,” 31-42.
driven by regime politics that divided and conquered. The result was two factions fighting over the fate of Rationalism: those who promoted *mediterraneità* and those who were focused on the same principles as their international contemporaries.\(^\text{94}\)

Paladini harshly critiqued how commissions were solicited and awarded, noting that they caused widespread architectural accommodations and pandering to the regime. In addition, the patronage system rewarded the invocation of nationalism and the use of historically Italian architectural elements. Paladini suggested that “official architects” exploited the architectural academies and the fascist syndicate system by “skillfully speculating on politics and tradition.”\(^\text{95}\)

As a result, these “official architects” determined the educational requirements and standards of practice, thus controlling future architectural production in Italy. As proof, he compared the few projects that had been completed by rationalists with the multitude of commissions that had been awarded to architects who had garnered “official” status. Paladini even professed that some rationalist architects, like Pietro Aschieri, intentionally planted classicizing motifs such as arcades and colonnades into their designs in order to obtain commissions, but then removed them for the actual construction. Paladini attacked the invocation of nationalism in architecture:

Thus aesthetic questions and nationalism are skillfully brought to the foreground to mask interests and privileges. Criticism, often exerted by persons with more literary and practical culture than awareness of architectonic problems...accused modern artists of wanting to standardize forms to arrive at an arid and cold language. They are accused of wanting to put [Italian architecture] on a spiritual plane of international taste that does not correspond to the Italian spirit, a spirit, which [for them] must be impregnated by memories of the past and Roman greatness.\(^\text{96}\)

\(^{94}\) Paladini, “Panorama,” 42.

\(^{95}\) Paladini, “Panorama,” 39. “speculando abilmente sulla politica e sulla tradizione”

\(^{96}\) Paladini, “Panorama,” 39. “Quindi le questioni estetiche e di nazionalismo sono portate abilmente in primo piano, per mascherare interessi e privilegi. La critica, esercitata spesso da persone che hanno più cultura letteraria e practica della lingua italiana che la conoscenza di problemi architettonici, pur dimostrando una certa generica simpatia per la tendenza razionalista, accusa a sua volta gli artisti moderni di volere standardizzare le forme per arrivare ad un
He then identified by name enemies to the rationalist cause: Marcello Piacentini, Armando Brasini, and Ugo Ojetti. All three were acclaimed within the fascist regime for their nationalistic agenda. Piacentini was quite powerful as he was the director of *Architettura*, which was the official journal of the fascist architecture syndicate, and he was on several government commission boards. Significantly, Piacentini and Ojetti, a critic opposed to modern architecture, were at the forefront of declaring Rationalism Bolshevik, and later Jewish, in an attempt to discredit the movement and to claim that it lacked Italian foundations.

Buried within Paladini’s article was a critique of all contemporary Italian architecture, including Rationalism. He stated that Italians were “more attracted to artistic questions than social and practical ones” and that even the rationalists were more interested in aesthetic issues than “the problems of collective housing, regulatory plans, and economical constructions,” which, according to him, were addressed more in other countries. Subtly acknowledging his revolutionary desires, he asserted “social questions will come into play when it is time to move

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97 There is a typo in the article as it lists “Oletti,” but it is clearly a reference of Ugo Ojetti, who was an advocate for Italian nationalism in art and architecture. See Etlin, *Modernism*, 425-26.


99 Etlin, *Modernism*, 590 and 269. Piacentini and Ojetti began raising this argument in 1931 and it was in part directed against Giuseppe Terragni’s Novocomum building, which was considered to have Soviet architectural sources. Etlin provides an extensive discussion of the project and its critics.

100 Paladini, “Panorama,” 39-40. “A causa del’aspetto polemico e teorico dell’mentalità Italiana, più particolarmente attratta da questioni artistiche che non sociali e pratiche, i principi in cui si forma il „movimento “razionalista” sono più specificamente estetici ed i problemi delle case collettive, dei piani regolatori, delle costruzioni minimo prezzo, non hanno qui quel carattere predominante che hanno negli altri paesi Europei.”
from theory to practice.” In other words, social questions were not yet being considered in Italy and he anticipated the day (and the implied political shift) that would bring them to the forefront of construction.

Paladini concluded by observing how the political climate in Italy was affecting, and to a degree, causing the current Rationalism debates. He noted that there were two main factions within the MIAR: those who “tend toward Mediterranean art” and those “who want a more clear and rigid adherence to the general principles of contemporary European art.” Yet the divide extended beyond the movement. It was based on political precedent and reflected a “rebellion against traditional forms. This is very difficult to achieve in Italy – a country zealously bound to its history and to its past art, particularly for political reasons.” In identifying the underlying political aspects of the rationalist debate, Paladini stood apart from his fellow architects and critics. The concepts of nationalist, rationalist, and fascist architecture were featured prominently in the early 1930s after the *II Esposizione di Architettura Razionale*.

What is noteworthy about Paladini is that he was one of the earliest critics to address the latent problems with the commission system. In addition, he continued to raise Soviet architecture as an example well after it was no longer acceptable due to heightened anti-Bolshevism.

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101 Paladini, “Panorama,” 40. “le questioni sociali entrano automaticamente in discussione quando si passerain più vasta scala dai progetti alle attuazioni pratiche.”
102 Paladini, “Panorama,” 42. “che tende ad un’arte mediterranea” … e quelli “che vorrebbero una più netta e rigida aderenza ai principi generali dell’arte contemporanea Europea”
103 Paladini, “Panorama,” 42. “ribellione alle forme tradizionali che era dì una grandissima difficoltà ottenere in un paese come l’Italia, così gelosamente legato alla sua storia, particolarmente per ragioni politiche, ed alla sua arte passata.”
105 After looking through several years of Italian architectural journals, I concluded that articles dedicated to Soviet architecture were rare in the 1930s, save for the few which were designed to
Two photomontages by Paladini featured in *Rassegna di Architettura* in April 1932 provided a compelling visual commentary regarding the debate about modern architecture in Italy and his continued promotion of Soviet models. Both montages were included as standalone elements within the journal and were not attached to any specific articles. The first photomontage praised the modern, functionalist style (Fig. 6.21), whereas the second mocked architecture that relied on useless, historical forms (Fig. 6.22).

The first celebrated the beauty of modern architecture by infusing the image with order, logic, and calm. Each cutout was culled from a printed source and arranged within a concise grid of upward pointing arrows. The gridlines guided the viewer’s eye from the bottom register, which included rationalist architectural designs and ship funnels (or smokestacks), to the top, which was surmounted by a factory and Ginzburg’s Gosstrakh apartment complex in Moscow. Near the middle of photomontage was the sculptural head of a queen from the Amarna era and the word “Forme.” Below the photomontage, a caption listed the key characteristics of the functionalist style: “Geometric forms / Repetition of Rhythms and Volumes / Pane glass and steel / Coldness / Purity.”

The photomontage was both visually and textually a manifesto of rationalist architecture that rejected the enforced use of *mediterraneità*. Here, modernity arose out of new materials and technical achievements rather than copying traditional Italian forms. The caption enforced this interpretation as Paladini celebrated the very qualities singled out for critique by the enemies of
demonize the communist government (such as Ciocca’s travelogues). Brief mentions of Soviet architecture also became infrequent. One of the few holdouts was *Casabella*, which continued to advertise Soviet architectural journals in the back pages dedicated to foreign publications, but this became infrequent after 1931.

Rationalism. The words culminated into “purity,” which suggested that functionalism cleansed extraneous elements from architecture. Reinforcing this interpretation was the placement of “Forme” in clean, bold typescript within the photomontage. The term harked back to the driving force of international modern architecture in the twentieth century, Louis Sullivan’s declaration that “form follows function.” The inclusion of the Amarna queen seemingly antagonized those who feared change – she symbolized a revolutionary period in Ancient Egypt known for upheavals of religious worship and of the political order as well as a flourishing of new art and architecture.

Paladini’s interspersing of buildings and ship elements specifically addressed the development of Rationalism. Comparing ocean liners with modern, functionalist architecture was a common theme in Italian rationalist journals due to Le Corbusier’s *Vers une architecture*, which drew a correlation between the two forms of design. But Paladini’s imagery was unorthodox because he only used snippets of the ship’s funnels or smokestacks, not the entire ship. Ten years after his initial man-machine hybrids, Paladini incorporated the smokestack as a veiled signifier of the proletariat. In addition, he recalled his own imagist technique of countering modern architecture with the factory. Significantly, he divided the top register between Ginzburg’s Gosstrakh (a functionalist, multi-family worker’s housing complex) and a factory with protruding smokestack. Although the smokestack no longer bears the communist

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flags symbolic of the factory occupations and his earlier overt invocations of architecture for the proletariat, Paladini’s photomontage affirmed the necessity of socially driven, purposeful architecture for the worker exemplified by the Soviet model. All arrows point to the ultimate purpose of the new architecture – to create economic homes and new factories for the proletariat.

The second photomontage clearly mocked the falseness of using historical and decorative elements in modern architecture. Although *Rassegna di Architettura* was supportive of Rationalism, the fallout from the 1931 *II Esposizione di Architettura Razionale* and Bardi’s *Tavolo degli orrori* was still felt among members of the movement. In an effort to maintain friendly relations with the more established architects of the regime, the editor added a caption stating that Paladini’s montage was “polite humor” in an attempt to diminish the harshness of his critique of traditional styles. Yet the biting power of his satire was undeniable.

Featuring cutouts of men staring dumbfounded at the sky with gaping mouths, Paladini collaged architectural interiors from past centuries with images from historic paintings. Within the chaotic atmosphere of the exceedingly decorative interiors, Paladini again used arrows to direct the viewer’s attention, but they pointed in conflicting directions, alluding to the ineptitude of using past architectural means for modern problems. The juxtaposition of the three graces and an elderly woman dressed in nineteenth century widow’s weeds suggests the death of creative inspiration that results from relying on obsolete forms. The photomontage was designed to exemplify the lack of relevance for traditional architectural elements in a modern age driven by the practical concerns of the mass population and by the need for egalitarian, economical, and utilitarian designs.

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Rationalism and the “International Spirit”

The founding of the architectural journal, Quadrante, in 1933 marked the height, as well as the beginning of the end, of Paladini’s writings on Italian Rationalism. Quadrante, directed by Bardi and Bontempelli, was geared toward a modernist and international perspective; therefore, both Paladini and Pannaggi were prime contributors owing to their contacts in Russia, Czechoslovakia, and Germany. Quadrante was instrumental in promoting Rationalism and it strategically emphasized the importance of modern architecture for the fascist regime. Paladini’s belief in Italian Rationalism as a socially committed architectural program waned rapidly as the movement became increasingly ensconced in Fascism and regime cultural politics in the 1930s, hence his tenure with the journal was brief.

Paladini’s first and only article for Quadrante, “Imborghesimento del razionalismo” (“The Increasingly Bourgeois Nature of Rationalism”), was published in 1933. Both the tenor and subject matter effectively severed his connection to the mainstream rationalists. The tone of the piece was that of a farewell; Paladini addressed with dismay that Rationalism with its anti-bourgeois foundation, like Futurism before it, had become corrupted. He once had great hope that Rationalism would be “foremost among the anti-bourgeois movements” and that it would “liberate [architecture] from the snares of traditionalism.” Now he feared that the rationalists had descended into mediocrity and had become intolerably tainted by their desire for success.

113 P.M. Bardi, Letter to Massimo Bontempelli, January 1, 1933, Massimo Bontempelli Papers, 1865-1991, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, California. Pannaggi is on Bardi’s list, but Paladini is not. Paladini was likely proposed by Bontempelli as they worked together on several journals.
114 Rifkind, Battle for Modernism, 55-84.
115 Vinicio Paladini, “Imborghesimento del razionalismo,” Quadrante 1, no. 3 (July 1933): 36.
“The bourgeois mentality corrodes all,” he lamented, and had reduced Rationalism to arguments and gimmicks in order to launch careers and obtain commissions. Paladini noted with irony, that just when Rationalism had finally found acceptance within Italy, “it runs the risk of drowning in the slimy bog of bourgeois ideas.”

Paladini pinpointed the exact cause of Rationalism’s transition to superficiality – its increasing requirements for “Italian forms” in modern constructions. He again asserted that Marcello Piacentini and the commission system were the source of the problem. Piacentini promoted a stripped-down classicism based on “modern forms,” which were consistent with “the Italian spirit of tradition.” Paladini feared that this style would continue to dominate as long as Piacentini had “some other prize to give young acolytes,” a reference to the senior architect’s role in awarding regime commissions. Paladini concluded that his article was not meant to be pessimistic, but rather to serve as a wake up call to the movement “to put everyone on guard against the danger of becoming absorbed” by the negative forces being imposed on Rationalism. His wake up call was either not well received by the journal’s readership or he was completely disillusioned by its political alignment, as he never contributed again.

Nonetheless, Paladini continued to work within Quadrante’s orbit. He appealed to Bontempelli to assist him in bridging the gap between the Soviet Union and Italy by creating a

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118 Paladini, “Imborghesimento,” 36. “si corre il rischio di affogare nel più melmoso pantano di idee borghesi”
119 Paladini, “Imborghesimento,” 36. Paladini directly quoted Piacentini within the text: “una architettura in cui le forme moderne sono contenute nello spirito italiano della tradizione…”
121 Paladini, “Imborghesimento,” 36. “Vorrei solo mettere in guardia i più contro il pericolo di venire assorbiti… i fenomeni negativi del movimento razionalista o funzionalista chi dir si voglia”
cross-cultural dialogue between architects in both countries through Quadrante.\textsuperscript{122} He went as far as establishing contact with the All-Union Society of Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries (Vsesoyuznoye obschestvo kul’turnykh svyazey s zagranitsey, or VOKS) during his trip to Moscow in 1934. VOKS was designed with the express purpose of establishing exchanges between Western European intellectuals sympathetic to the Soviet Union and Communism.\textsuperscript{123} In his letter to Bontempelli, Paladini requested assistance as a personal favor and emphasized how important this exchange would be for both countries.\textsuperscript{124} Paladini’s letter was followed by an official request from VOKS to Bontempelli, but no evidence exists that Bontempelli ever responded to either inquiry.\textsuperscript{125} Much like his attempts to import Vertov’s essays on Soviet film theory to Italy, Paladini continued to fight for the implementation of Soviet architectural models. Unfortunately, his plan for a cultural exchange was unheeded, which was understandable given the political realities in both countries.

Paladini also wrote a trio of articles for Il Tevere about his recent travels to the Soviet Union and the current conditions in Moscow.\textsuperscript{126} The Roman journal was a particularly unusual venue for interjecting his meditations on Soviet life, government, and the arts and suggests Paladini’s potentially entrist tactics. The pro-fascist Telesio Interlandi founded Il Tevere as an


\textsuperscript{124} Paladini, Letter to Bontempelli.

\textsuperscript{125} Gransberg (VOKS), Letter to Massimo Bontempelli.

“unofficial mouthpiece of Mussolini” that supposedly “reflected the regime’s official views.”  

In his second travel essay, “Mosca 1934” (“Moscow 1934”), Paladini discussed his perception of Soviet architecture. Although dismayed by the extreme poverty and disrepair of both old and new buildings, Paladini also praised Soviet architecture and its ability to not only serve, but also to convey the principles of the new communist society. 

“Mosca 1934” began with Paladini’s observation that not much had changed in Moscow since his visit five years ago. He, however, qualified this assessment by noting the large population of the city and that extensive work on the infrastructure was needed after years of neglect by the czarist regime. He claimed that Stalin’s First and Second-Five Year Plans were enacted to correct economic deficits and to modernize the Soviet Union. He also noted that despite the poverty and disrepair, “better times will come” as soon as the greater economic issues would be resolved.

Paladini then turned his attention to the positive changes that had been made in the modernization of Moscow. He first focused on the building of the Moscow Metrostoi (metro transit system), which was a massive undertaking to reconfigure the city. Within the Metrostoi project, he found evidence of the triumph of modern architecture that fulfilled a social function over outmoded, historicizing architecture that no longer served an ideological purpose for a new society. He recognized that “this gigantic work is an opportunity, like any work in the USSR, for propaganda of the communist ideas to the masses.”

He believed that the Metrostoi was central to the city’s redevelopment as it was “the framework on which all urban planning will be

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127 Cannistraro, Historical Dictionary, 281.
As such, the Metrostoi was symbolic of the changing mentality of all Soviet citizens and the ultimate incarnation of the communist state. Because the Metrostoi belonged to all citizens, everyone was required to participate in the building of the great network of the trams and subways. Paladini further discussed that a similar program was in place for urban dwellers to go out to the country once a month to participate in farming the land that would feed the city. Contrary to those who might think this was “fake rhetoric and declamatory,” he considered the system integral for “reclaiming the concept of equality of men” and “confirming the new collective persona that is at the heart of the Soviet government.”

Paladini reported that churches were being torn down and replaced by infrastructures and collective housing in an effort to modernize the city. Urban centers supported by surrounding agrarian systems were also being developed throughout the Soviet Union, including Odessa, Tiflis, and Stalingrad. He admitted that it would take years for these projects to be completed, “But the Russian people know endurance.” Although the functionalist enterprises had some setbacks, primarily due to poor materials and untrained labor, Paladini ended with a positive assessment. He concluded that when walking through the streets of Moscow, he sensed the offices full of architects, engineers, and workers were “creat[ing] new possibilities for the socialist industrialization of this enormous, rich territory…. It is truly impressive; one perceives that something of greatness, of power will come out of this and that all past miseries will be

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131 Paladini, “Mosca 1934,” 3. “un piano falsamente rettorico e declamatorio” and “di richiamo del concetto della ugalianza degli uomini” and “conformazione della nuova personalità colletivista che sta tanto a cuore al governo sovietico.”

The final sentence jarred the reader as it warned of the looming specter of war that hovered over Moscow during his visit. Whether Paladini was referring to another phase of the Russian Revolution or a future crisis is uncertain. Considering he was intent on creating cultural contacts via VOKS, the former seems more likely. Either way, Paladini was prescient in his observation that conflict would engulf Europe by the end of the decade.

Prior to his departure for the United States in 1935, Paladini’s last two articles published in Telesio Interlandi’s other Roman journal, *Quadrivio*, were biographical features on two rationalist architects: Mario Ridolfi and Adalberto Libera. In “Mario Ridolfi” from November 1934, Paladini made clear that he had come to the end of his affiliation with Rationalism, as it had been “incorporated into the devouring octopus of prize competitions.” He admitted he was once “attracted to this utopian vision of a mechanistic and anonymous architecture,” and despite the failures of the movement, he maintained that he would “always be convinced that these aesthetic principles were a good starting point.” The essay was, for the most part, a recounting of Ridolfi’s projects and his basic biography. It provided a non-polemical assessment of Ridolfi’s works, noting both his successful use of functionalism and his confusing departures into historical elements and forms drawn from the Baroque and Byzantine eras. Absent from the text was any sense of Paladini’s political commitment. In fact, his assessment of Ridolfi was shrewdly even-measured, likely due to the young architect’s successes under the fascist regime.

133 Paladini, “Mosca 1934,” 3. “È veramente impressionante, si intuisce che qualche cosa di grande, di potente uscirà fuori, e che tutte le passate miserie cederanno il posto ad una vita migliore”
Paladini’s “Adalberto Libera” featured in *Quadrivio* in February 1935 was again devoid of overt political references and focused strictly on the architect.\(^{136}\) Similar to his review of Ridolfi, Paladini provided Libera’s biographical data, an overview of his major architectural projects, and listed the commissions he had won. Paladini’s final two paragraphs were a blunt assessment of the recent years of fighting among Italian architects and of Rationalism, which he now considered mired by bourgeois intellectualism. He concluded that Libera and Ridolfi had fortunately both begun to develop clean, utilitarian designs and for Paladini, this was important for modern architecture. Paladini defended their functionalist style from “those of you who are still ranting about impersonality, internationalism, and functional architecture…Impersonality is just the other side of accusing functionalism of being cold, mechanistic, and anonymous.”\(^{137}\)

Within material and compositional selection, he opined, one found economy of means and formal creation that reflects intelligence. When these principles are not followed,

… architecture stumbles between imitation, culturalism, and fashion. It prostitutes itself to the basest modes of the current tastes. These words are a bit strong and so impassioned because one recalls that modern art has not yet had the last word, yet artistic idiots have had all the rights in the world. And so, it will be for our historical period.\(^{138}\)

Typical of his uncompromising aesthetics, Paladini’s pronouncement on the contemporary Italian artistic and architectural milieu was indeed harsh. Italian Rationalism was yet another movement that failed to deliver on its promises of social commitment or leftist aesthetics. He

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\(^{137}\) Paladini, “Adalberto,” 4. “a quanti vanno ancora farneticando di impersonalità, di internazionalità, nell’architettura funzionale….L’ impersonalità sta proprio dall’altra parte (basta farsi una passeggiata per Via Regina Elena) dalla parte di quanti accusano il funzionalismo di freddo meccanicismo anonimo.”

concluded that few still had faith in the renovation of Italian architecture and only pandering to fascist demagoguery remained. For Paladini, architecture and culture of the fascist era was marked by nothing less than “idiocy.” His unwillingness to compromise his ideals for regime recognition pushed him even further to the fringes of Rationalism.

**Racial Laws and Rationalism**

By the time the Racial Laws were passed in Italy in September 1938, Paladini had removed himself from the written debates surrounding Rationalism and was preparing for his second relocation to the United States. Yet his earlier articles had a lasting impact and provided fodder for architects and cultural critics, such as Piacentini and Ojetti, who launched anti-Semitic and anti-Bolshevik attacks against functionalist architecture. By the end of the 1930s, rationalists altered their initial pretense that the movement was based on the international style and agenda of the CIAM. Instead, they asserted that it derived from innately Italian architectural forms and that it responded to the specific social needs of the fascist regime. At the core of this historical revision was whether Rationalism was truly Italian or not.

Opponents of the movement, like Piacentini, consistently questioned the foreign influences on Rationalism, pushing his own agenda of modernist architecture via stripped-down classicism. Within Rationalism, the internal divide between those who promoted *mediterraneità* and those who admonished it for its nationalist undercurrents fed into the debates triggered by the passing of the Racial Laws. Rationalists, who wanted to maintain the significance of their architectural designs, defamed and lambasted fellow architects for being too international,

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139 Etlin, *Modernism*, 569-597. Etlin provides an timeline of the debate regarding international architecture and the rise of anti-semitism in Italy.
Bolshevik, Jewish, and anti-fascist.\textsuperscript{140} This scenario played out publicly with Giuseppe Terragni’s voracious attacks on Giuseppe Pagano. Central to their debate was Pagano’s *Casabella*, which retained its focus on the internationalism of modern architecture. Disturbed by the changing tenor of Fascism in Italy and its alignment with Nazi Germany, Pagano joined the Resistance and ultimately was imprisoned and died in a concentration camp in 1945.\textsuperscript{141} Terragni, however, remained committed to Fascism, was drafted into the military, and sent to the Russian front. After suffering a nervous breakdown, he returned to Italy and died shortly thereafter in 1943.\textsuperscript{142} Paladini escaped either fate by relocating to the United States for a second time in January 1939.

The devolution of Italian fascist culture into anti-Semitic and anti-Bolshevik campaigns at the end of the 1930s derived from the very foundations of Rationalism and a case study, like Paladini, illuminates how these sentiments evolved. As we have seen, Paladini’s promotion of Soviet Constructivism typified by the OSA lent validity to Piacentini’s claim that Rationalism was “tainted” by Bolshevism. Vaunted as a well-informed proponent of internationalism, Paladini’s role as a cultural writer became increasingly tenuous by the mid-1930s. Unlike Terragni, Piacentini, and Bardi, Paladini did not advocate for a specifically “fascist” aesthetic; instead, he consistently asserted that modern architecture derived from an international spirit and anti-aestheticism. His articles traversed the functionalist foundations of Rationalism, its increasing affiliation with Fascism, and its adoption of the concept of *mediterraneità* in order to maintain its compromised position as a new architectural movement within the regime. Paladini was one of the few to lay bare the rationalists’ accommodations to garner fascist patronage. As

\textsuperscript{140} Etlin, *Modernism*, 590-594.  
\textsuperscript{141} Cannistraro, *Historical Dictionary*, 385-386.  
\textsuperscript{142} Marco Bussagli, *Italian Art* (Firenze: Giunti Editore, 2004), 593.
an observer within the Italian movement, Paladini’s concerns addressed not only the fate of Rationalism, but also the compromised trajectory of the avant-garde under the fascist regime.
Chapter 7

Gadfly of Fascist Culture: Paladini’s Exhibition Reviews

*Arte nella Russia dei Soviets: Il Padiglione dell’U.R.S.S. a Venezia* from 1925 was one of Paladini’s most thorough and complex analyses of the nature of the avant-garde after World War I, yet it was only one of many exhibition reviews written by him that focused on the relationship between art and politics during the interwar years. Beginning in 1923 and continuing into the first half of the 1930s, Paladini appraised several local and international exhibitions for Italian cultural journals, including *Occidente*, and small anti-fascist periodicals, like *Fede*. Minor publications, which were not a priority for Mussolini’s censors and which the regime shrewdly allowed to operate within certain limits, provided Paladini with one of the few means available to obliquely critique Fascism. When combined with his articles on film, photomontage, and architecture, his meditations on the current state of both Italian and international art revealed an insider’s perspective of the cultural and political climate under Mussolini’s regime. His assessments of exhibitions tracked the increasingly nationalistic, militant policies instituted by the fascist patronage system, while addressing the process of self-fascistization and self-censorship undertaken by artists and architects. As such, Paladini’s reviews are a critical tool for understanding how an artist associated with the left perceived the regime’s shifting policies and maneuvered within them.

Due to his relocation to Germany in the second half of the 1920s, Ivo Pannaggi’s evaluations of international art exhibitions and architectural developments represent an outsider’s opinion on the cultural and political changes within Italy. They thus provide a bookend to Paladini’s reviews. Pannaggi’s writings on the German and Italian avant-garde suggested that he perceived Mussolini’s cultural policies as non-invasive in comparison to the disturbing program
of *Gleichschaltung* instituted by the National Socialists in Germany, which severely restricted artistic freedoms and enforced anti-modernist, anti-Bolshevik, and anti-Semitic policies.¹ The policy was touted as promoting pure Germanic culture: it included formularies for artists holding teaching positions to prove non-Jewish ancestry in order to maintain their jobs and it enforced restrictions on art criticism published in the press. Significantly, his essays on Adolf Hitler’s cultural programs, intended as a cautionary tale, unintentionally fed the fire of the rising anti-Semitic faction in Italy. Despite the increasingly close relationship and eventual alliance between Nazi Germany and fascist Italy, Pannaggi continued promoting modernist architecture, theater, and aesthetics developed by the Bauhaus in Italian journals until 1935, long after he personally witnessed the school’s closure by the National Socialists in 1933 (Fig. 7.1).

Paladini and Pannaggi’s use of cultural publications for regime critique, however, was not unique. Other writers during this period manipulated cultural criticism in order to express dissent with the fascist majority. A prime example was Mino Maccari of the *Strapaese* movement – he often mocked politicians, artists, and architects attempting to garner regime support and acclaim, such as Ugo Ojetti, Marcello Piacentini, and F.T. Marinetti, in *Il Selvaggio*.² Yet the key difference was that Maccari was an ardent supporter of Fascism, even though he disagreed with the party’s reduced militancy and increased bureaucracy. Giuseppe Pagano and Edoardo Persico also utilized their architectural review, *Casabella*, to draw attention to the infiltration of fascist politics into the cultural sphere. Their discussions of these issues, however, often responded to the debates among architects about defining fascist architecture and

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¹ Hinz, *Art in the Third*.
culture. Pagano initially supported the regime and the creation of a fascist, rationalist architecture until the 1940s when he joined the Resistance movement, whereas Persico celebrated modern architecture but maintained an anti-fascist point of view until his untimely and mysterious death in 1936. Paladini differed from Maccari and Pagano due to his consistently anti-fascist sentiments, as well as Persico due to his leftist commitment and use of Soviet models as a foil to fascist cultural policy. In addition, Paladini was quick to notice and to address the encroachment of fascist politics into mainstream and established cultural events, like the Venice Biennale, and artists’ willingness to self-fascistize. Together, Paladini and Pannaggi’s writings on art, architecture and exhibitions from the late 1920s until the mid-1930s provide a view onto the changing cultural climate in Italy as well as a means to understand how the influx of Nazi ideology added to the rising tension between modernists and traditionalists within Italy.

The Foundations of Paladini’s Exhibition Reviews

In order to frame the progression of Paladini’s exhibition reviews from 1923 to 1935, the overarching changes to Italian cultural policy during Fascism need to be outlined. Marla Stone has provided a succinct description of the three main phases and has centered her argument on the Venice Biennale, whose exhibitions Paladini regularly covered.

In the period of political stabilization (1925-30), the dictatorship focused on

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3 Pagano and Persico often included a preface or editor’s note page at the beginning of Casabella that addressed the infighting of modern architects and cultural critics. A prime example of Pagano using the venue to respond to Ojetti’s claims against his journal is Casa Bella, “Qualche appunto a Ojetti,” Casabella 9, no. 42 (June 1931): 9-10.
4 Cannistraro, Historical Dictionary, 385-386 and 420.
administrative and bureaucratic control of the arts by regimenting artists into fascist-run unions and by placing institutions of cultural display under official control. The middle years of fascist arts patronage (1930-37) simultaneously stressed the creation of visible modernist official cultural and the formation of cultural consensus around fascism. In the years 1937-43, the dictatorship drew on imperial and militarist discourses and on national socialist patronage models, deemphasizing the eclectic appropriation that had provided the consensus it originally had sought.  

As a result, the first phase allowed for largely unrestricted cultural pluralism, while the regime took its time to effect greater government oversight. The second phase was focused on the creation of “official” fascist culture through prizes and commissions to align aesthetic interests with those of the regime. The final period, triggered in part by Mussolini’s invasion of Ethiopia, was marked by conservative cultural policies that mirrored Germany’s *Gleichschaltung* program. Paladini’s exhibition reviews were quite brave, perceptive and timely because they commented on cultural changes when they were enacted by the regime, reflected the observations of the leftist minority, and specifically critiqued the use of nationalist rhetoric to garner political favor. He played the role of gadfly, constantly pointing out the faults in the system and identifying the underlying dangers in the creation of fascist cultural policies.

Paladini’s “Arti plastiche” published in *Noi* in the June/July issue of 1923 serves as a starting point in his understanding of the relationship between artists and the fascist regime. Penned shortly after the March on Rome in 1922, he did not mention national politics in relation to the arts, even though this was at the forefront of intellectual debates. Instead, the essay emphasized Paladini’s personal response to changes within Futurism, itself estranged from the fascist movement at this moment. The article belied the actual divide between his belief in the potential of the futurist machine aesthetic and the reality of the current artistic production of its members.

The two-part review examined Fortunato Depero’s section of the *Esposizione internazionale delle arti decorative* (*International Exhibition of Decorative Arts*) in Monza as well as the *Esposizione annuale di belle arti* (*Annual Exhibition of Fine Art*) in Bologna (Fig. 7.2 and Fig. 7.3). Paladini praised Depero’s creation of “A mechanical, clear, and simple style that calms our spirit with its geometric certainty.” He had designed an “environment where every man can gain strength” and “it has the advantage of refreshing our spirit.” Yet Paladini’s analysis subtly promoted his own leftist agenda, which advocated for the creation of new environments to invigorate the worker and stimulate his revolutionary spirit. Clearly Depero’s focus on the applied arts aligned with Paladini’s own “Appello Agli Intellettuali” in 1922 and with the contemporaneous productivist developments of the Russian avant-garde. This reinvigorated Paladini’s belief that Italian Futurism, if communist-inspired, could promote a social and economic revolution via the creation of utilitarian constructions and objects for the proletariat. Paladini continued to laud Depero’s application of Futurism to the applied arts in later essays; his enthusiasm for Depero’s projects, however, waned in the second half of the 1920s. In particular, his reviews became tinged with hesitation about the practical and revolutionary nature of Depero’s designs after the alliance of Futurism with Fascism.

Paladini countered Depero’s purposeful creations with those found at the *Esposizione annuale di belle arti*. Although restrained in his criticism of fellow futurists Tato (Guglielmo Sansoni), Angelo Caviglioni, Leo Longanesi, and Pietro Loreti Aterol, he asserted that the works

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8 Paladini, “Arti Plastiche,” 23. “…il vantaggio di rifrescare la nostra anima…”
10 Vinicio Paladini, “La XV Biennale Veneziana,” in *Vinicio Paladini fra arte e politica: 1922-26*, by Alberto Ciampi (Firenze: Edizioni Bi-Elle, 2002), 30-31. [Orig. pub. May 30, 1926] Paladini praised Depero as imaginative and playful within the “noisy” futurist pavilion, but his designs were not described as practical or utilitarian.
of these artists “betray in general the shortcomings of First Futurism, shortcomings that give an impressionist character, polemic and romantic like that type of painting. Their work is still dominated by ‘states of mind’ and technically bears above all the character of attempts and research, which results in superficial, chaotic and literary painting.”

Paladini’s critique not only expressed his concern with the retrograde nature of second-wave futurists, but also reiterated his desire to move away from easel painting and toward a more practical and utilitarian application of art. Because it recycled old techniques, easel painting had become passé and lacked the ability to conform to the constructive requirements of modern society and art.

Regardless of their shortcomings, Paladini suggested that these artists should be applauded for their efforts to bolster Futurism, which had waned in cultural significance after World War I.

Interestingly, Paladini’s dual critique identified two of the main elements that would give rise to futurist aeropittura: a basis in Umberto Boccioni’s doctrines of dynamism and the machine aesthetic. In his reviews he suggested artists stop painting in the impressionist-style of First Futurism and instead turn to the mechanical. Many of these young artists quickly adopted aeropittura, which melded futurist love of the machine with Boccioni’s dynamism to simulate the effects of flight. In particular, Tato and Caviglioni became significant adherents of the new machine style and Tato, along with Depero and Enrico Prampolini, was one of the original signatories of the “Manifesto of Aeropainting” in 1929 (Fig. 7.4 and Fig. 7.5).

Rather than discussing the changing political climate in Italy, Paladini’s article was a personal response that

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12 Paladini, Arte d’avanguardia, 6.
regurgitated his promotion of Komfut. It was steeped in his leftist political affiliation and reasserted the revolutionary significance of the machine aesthetic for the creation of practical objects for daily use by the proletariat.

Three events within Italy likely caused Paladini to use his subsequent exhibition reviews as a platform to stand guard against Fascism’s growing involvement in the arts. The first was Marinetti’s initial alignment of Futurism with Fascism at the First Futurist Congress in 1924. The second was the First Congress of Fascist Culture of 1925, which invited artists, intellectuals, and critics to confer about the creation of fascist culture. The third occurred primarily between 1926 and 1927 when Giuseppe Bottai, the minister of corporations, challenged artists to define fascist art. The latter became a dominant topic in cultural publications that lasted through the mid-1930s, until it became clear that the avant-garde had little room to operate in the totalitarian state. Essentially, the regime invited feedback from the cultural community, which meant that exhibition reviews and literary critiques were an open forum to offer suggestions on what styles were most appropriate to represent Fascism and how the new government could best support the arts. From the mid-1920s to the mid-1930s, Paladini and others, like Maccari, Persico, and Pagano, began to express their opinions on fascist culture in order to convey dissent, support the regime, promote their own art movements, or merely advance their careers. Paradoxically, these appraisals of cultural events and policies were often published in regime-sponsored journals and contributed to the livelihood of modernity and the avant-garde under Fascism during its period of aesthetic pluralism.

Paladini used his text, *Arte nella Russia dei Soviets: Il Padiglione dell’U.R.S.S. a Venezia*, which was discussed in an earlier chapter, to comment on the emerging relationship

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between Fascism and culture within Italy. Unlike mainstream expository essays by Ugo Nebbia and Edoardo Pansini, which barely acknowledged the political facets of the Soviet Pavilion and omitted any direct references to Italian artist organizations vying for official recognition, Paladini provided an incisive discussion of both aspects of the 1924 Venice Biennale. In particular, the last section of Paladini’s pamphlet disclosed his opinion of the avant-garde that extended beyond his distaste for Marinetti’s Futurism. State sponsorship of cultural production aligned with Paladini’s communist agenda, but he was worrisome of fascist control of the arts. He identified changes within the Italian cultural climate in the wake of Mussolini’s seizure of power, specifically institutions’ and individuals’ desires to achieve official status led to self-fascistization, self-censorship, and nationalistic overtures. The concluding pages were a scathing indictment of those changes and their impact on the Italian avant-garde. In particular, he disparaged the chief rival to Marinetti’s Futurism, the Novecento movement, led by Margherita Sarfatti. Paladini used the Soviet Union as a point of comparison and declared:

…we see presently the vitality, audacity, and freedom that dominates among the Russian creative force does not have a correspondence in any other country. The numerous Italian halls, which are only somewhat interesting for the “return to order” works of Casorati, Funi, and Sironi, could not escape from the appearance of exasperating monotony and are an index of the sick and tired spirit that wafts everywhere.

He argued that the promotion of modern classicism under Sarfatti’s Novecento was the direct result of a selection committee that perpetuated an anti-modernist position, barred young artists

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16 Nebbia, La Quattordicesima and Edoardo Pansini, XIV biennale internazionale d’arte della città di Venezia (Napoli: Edizione della Rivista di Belle Arte Cimento, 1926).
17 Paladini, Arte nella Russia, 34. “…presentemente la vitalità, audacia, libertà che dominano tra i creatori russi non hanno riscontro in nessun’altro paese. Le numerose sale Italiane, che pure sono così ricche di interesse per opere di Casorati, Funi e Sironi e di qualche altro ritornante non possono sfuggire all’aspetto di esasperante monotonia, indice di spirito malato e stanco, che dappertutto si sente aleggiare.”
from the exhibition, and maintained “the old, stale spirit that officially dominates the West.”

Paladini masterfully critiqued the new fascist regime by noting that Sarfatti’s Novecento was “officially” on display. Sarfatti, who had a long-standing role as an arbiter of Italian culture and had been intimately involved with Mussolini since 1913, had been at the forefront of establishing Novecento as an official fascist art. Paladini also drew attention to disjuncture between traditional figurative art, which was already vaunted as official fascist art, and modern art, which he considered revolutionary.

By comparison in this same section, Paladini asserted that the extraordinary spirit of the Soviet Union derived directly from Communism. He reiterated his Gramscian ideals and stated that the culprit for the “sickened” spirit in the West was “The bourgeois organization with its odious oppression of the proletariat, with its restriction of education and the possibility of developing the creative and critical faculties, restricting it to a limited class of individuals.” If workers were liberated from the confines of set social and educational structures, Paladini claimed, they would no longer be denied participation in cultural production.

Paladini’s assessment of the state of Italian art was surprising when considered in relation to the political milieu, especially the recent Matteotti Crisis and the Aventine Secession. Rather than celebrating the revolutionary spirit of Fascism, which shaped many discussions of art in early 1925, he identified that Italy, and the entire West, was suffering from a spiritual crisis.

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18 Paladini, *Arte nella Russia*, 34. “Ma questo non significa altro che riconoscere lo spirito vecchio, stantio, che ufficialmente domina nell’occidente.” [emphasis mine]


20 Stone, *The Patron State*, 43-45. Stone has identified that conservative factions within Italy promoted *italianità* and traditional art during the 1926-1927 debates on fascist art in *Critica fascista*.

21 Paladini, *Arte nella Russia*, 35. “L’organizzazione borghese con la sua odiosa compressione del proletariato, con quel restringimento dell’educazione e delle possibilità di sviluppo delle facoltà creative e critiche ad una ristretta classe di individui.”
Furthermore, he did not praise artists who created works to celebrate the new political regime in Italy; instead, he harshly criticized them in comparison to the Soviet artists on view at the exhibition and to communist ideology. In particular, he noted the disparity “between the works of painters in the USSR and those of all other artists. It feels foremost of a more youthful and virgin race, a country more accepting of innovation, a potently revolutionary and audacious spirit…a spirit that inebriates, dazes, and entirely conquers our spirit!”

Vying for Official Recognition in the 1920s

The alignment between Fascism and culture quickly solidified in 1925 after Mussolini declared a dictatorship. Many artists primarily took it upon themselves to self-fascistize before the approval of the syndical laws in April 1926 (officially enacted in 1927). For example, Marinetti appealed to Mussolini as early as 1923 with “I Diritti artistici propugnati dai futuristi italiani: Manifesto al governo fascista.” Between 1925 and 1926, writers and artists began to ruminate in cultural publications on how to create a fascist aesthetic. They vociferously debated which artistic movement would effectively reflect and promote the spirit and ideals of the new government. Artists, including those affiliated with as disparate of groups as Strapaese, Novecento, and Futurism, began to proclaim militant nationalism. The vigorous support of Mussolini and the new government did not go unnoticed by Paladini, who wrote brief exhibition reviews for Vita! Libertaria, a cultural offshoot of the anarchist journal, Fede, in which he criticized the futurists for their pandering.

22 Paladini, Arte nella Russia, 35. “…tra le opere dei pittori dell’U.R.S.S e quelle di tutti gli artisti. Ci si sente di fronte ad una razza più giovine, più vergine, ad un paese assetato di innovazione, ad uno spirito potentemente rivoluzionario ed audace e così pieno di amore per la vita, ad uno spirito che inebria, stordisce, conquista intieramente la nostra anima!”

In “Notiziario d’Arte” (“Arts Notice”) from April 1925 in *Vita! Libertaria*, Paladini humorously detailed the state of the arts in Italy in the wake of the increased self-fascistization of artists and the groups with which they were associated. In the first bulleted item, he mocked the futurist leader, drawing attention to a “contentious incident with F.T. Marinetti” at the opening of Antonio Fornari’s exhibition at Casa d’arte Bragaglia. The “incident” was likely a reference to Marinetti’s appearance at a discussion about Imagism hosted by the gallery and his subsequent claims that Paladini’s movement was actually a variation of Futurism. Paladini undoubtedly mentioned the incident to enforce a separation between his nascent Imagism and Marinetti’s Futurism.

The second item in *Vita! Libertaria*’s “Notizario d’Arte” condemned the alliance of Futurism and Fascism as well as the rise of official art in Italy. Paladini’s review focused on *La Terza biennale romana* (*The Third Roman Biennale*), which opened in March 1925 shortly after Mussolini’s announcement of dictatorship. Paladini began with an assessment of the futurist section and observed that this was the first time the movement had participated in a mainstream and established cultural event. This comment acknowledged the futurist’s new aspiration for official recognition. Paladini derided the futurist section, calling it “bellicosely pompous with fascist ardor (what bad taste!).” In addition to Futurism, he lodged similar complaints about the Novecento artists, who lobbied for regime recognition. He described the Novecento’s section as the “usual, official crew” and declared their exhibition a “chaotic marketplace” filled

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24 Vinicio Paladini, “Notiziario d’Arte,” *Vita! Libertaria* 1, no. 2 (April 1925), 16. “… un incidente polemico con F.T. Marinetti…”


26 Paladini, “Notiziario (April 1925),” 16. “…bellicosamente tronfi di ardori fascist (…ma che pessimo gusto!).”
with “pictorial-dilettantish work.” Paladini’s commentary scrutinized how and why artistic groups, such as Novecento and Futurism, gained official status as fascist art. It augmented his initial observations published in his extensive review of the 1924 Venice Biennale, but now he belittled the obvious overtures to the new fascist government.

In the next (and last) edition of *Vita! Libertaria*, Paladini’s “Notiziario d’Arte” revealed his preference for art that could not fall under the category of the nationalistic or classically inspired. In particular, he announced a forthcoming publication by La Bilancia on Amedeo Modigliani, which “will bring forth this exquisite artist from the unjust oblivion which Italians have held him.” He also promised an extensive discussion of the 1925 *Exposition internationale des arts décoratifs et industriels modernes* in Paris. *Vita! Libertaria*, however, never released another issue as it ceased operations (likely due to its contentious politics).

Instead, Paladini’s observations about the Soviet Pavilion in Paris were limited to those in his short article, “L’Arte in Russia,” featured in the Roman journal, *Spirito Nuovo*, in December 1925. Directed by Marcello Gallian, *Spirito Nuovo* was dedicated to promoting fascist avant-garde art. The short-lived journal, however, supported Paladini and other leftist artists, primarily those affiliated with Bragaglia’s Teatro Sperimentale degli Indipendenti, despite their opposing political agendas. Gallian, an anarcho-fascist who was later censored by the regime,

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27 Paladini, “Notiziario (April 1925),” 16. “…presente la solita “troupe” ufficiale, la terza Biennale Romana, accolta caotica del mercato pittorico-dilettantesco…”
29 *Vita! Libertaria* had many contributors in common with *Fede* and was likely its cultural offshoot. *Fede* ceased operations in Italy and relocated to France due to problems with the fascist regime.
maintained a working relationship with Paladini, who often illustrating his short stories in *Quadrivio*.  

Indicative of the intensifying pro-fascist rhetoric in Italy, the editors of *Spirito Nuovo* prefaced “L’Arte in Russia” with a note that stated the piece was printed in defense of Paladini, who had been attacked for his ideological position in other publications.  

Clearly, Paladini’s leftist politics became increasingly difficult to maintain after the murder of Giacomo Matteotti in June 1924 and the subsequent Aventine Secession, which led to Mussolini’s declaration of a dictatorship in 1925 and caused the eventual disbanding of all oppositional political parties, including the PCI and PSI. Despite the reference to what must have been a backlash to his political affiliations, Paladini reiterated his opinion that Western Europe suffered from cultural stagnation due to the lack of democratization of the arts. Instead, he noted the “extreme importance of the new spirit of the USSR in relation to the static nature of the social organizations of the West, which is diametrically opposed to the dynamism of the Russian Revolutionary movement.” He suggested that the Russian model promoted the “intellectual force that the proletarian class emits unencumbered by remembrance, the cultural jumble, and decadent poisonings” of bourgeois intellectualism. Paladini’s refusal to praise Fascism or to assert that the new regime reinvigorated the Italian spirit, which was a dominant theme in *Spirito*  

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32 Vinicio Paladini, “L’Arte in Russia,” *Spirito Nuovo* 1, no. 3 (December 1, 1925): 2.  
35 Paladini, “L’Arte in Russia,” 2. “…forza intellettuale delle classi proletarie spriigionarsi senza alcun impaccio dovuto a legami di reminiscenze, impastimenti culturali avvelenamento decadentistici…”
Nuovo, was completely at odds with the rhetoric promoted by artists and critics in 1925. Instead, he avowed once again in this piece that the Italian spirit was “sick” and “monotonous.”

During 1926 Paladini published several exhibition reviews and articles in Fede, which promoted his belief in a revolutionary art that was integral to a cultural, political, and economic revolution. Due to new policies and the intense campaign against Communism that was frequently featured in fascist journals, Paladini’s sentiments and those of Fede warranted unwanted attention from the fascist regime, which resulted in hiatuses in the publication of the journal and its ultimate relocation to Paris.\(^\text{36}\) Before Fede completely ended its run in Italy, Paladini contributed two significant reviews of the 1926 XV Esposizione d’arte internazionale a Venezia (Fifteenth Exhibition of Art in Venice). Often overlooked by art historians, save for Alberto Ciampi, both essays served to draw attention to the problem of art becoming bound with Fascism.\(^\text{37}\)

Paladini’s first article asserted “The Venice Biennale this year is nothing more than a retrospective exhibition designed to increase awareness of Italian work of the 1800s … this effort to give a new appearance and to increase the importance of this artistic period … originated from a question of national pride.”\(^\text{38}\) As Marla Stone has documented, the Venice Biennale was “insulated from the surrounding political and social upheaval” in the first half of the 1920s because the secretary-general, Vittorio Pica, had no defined political affiliation with the fascist

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\(^\text{36}\) Fede alluded to the problems the journal had encountered with the fascist regime on the back page of one of its last Italian editions printed in 1926. Technically an anarchist journal, Fede published extensively on the Matteotti Crisis and leaned toward a communist agenda.

\(^\text{37}\) Alberto Ciampi, Vinicio Paladini fra arte e politica: 1922-26 (Firenze: Edizioni Bi-Elle, 2002).

Yet Paladini keenly observed an underlying nationalism that was implemented by the organizers of the Biennale. Whether to stave off fascist interference in the administration of the exhibition or to garner favor from the new government during a period of political instability, Pica’s appeal to nationalism was a shrewd maneuver, especially considering the terse political climate caused by the contemporaneous Matteotti Crisis. Invoking nationalism became a common refrain under Fascism. According to Tony Judt, the government “blatantly favored ‘national’ intellectuals by applying to literature and the arts autarkic policies of protection and substitution similar to those imposed against more commonplace foreign products,” which led to the “complicity of many Italian intellectuals” during the course of the regime.

Paladini’s review noted a general climate within the arts, in which institutions and critics, like the new government, were immersed in nationalist rhetoric and they took it upon themselves to bolster and to assert the precedence of Italian artists. Paladini specifically addressed the Biennale’s special exhibition on “Macchiaioloismo” (as he termed it, otherwise called the Macchiaioli), a nineteenth century Italian art movement defined by the blend of realism with plein air painting and also by its Risorgimento subject matter and content (Fig. 7.6). He criticized the exhibition’s premise that the Macchiaioli were completely independent from the developments of French Impressionism. Paladini was quick to point out that in 1855 Tuscan painters were exposed to the beginnings of French Impressionism at L’ Exposition Universelle (The Universal Exposition) in Paris. He declared that “ultimately it [the exchange of artistic ideas] is a question of spirit and state of mind; this is something so big that it can not be closed

39 Stone, The Patron State, 35.
off by borders drawn by men!”

The desire to emphasize the significance of the Macchiaioli, according to Paladini, was “Don Quixote-esque” and an “exaggerated exaltation” designed to inflate the Italian ego artificially. His analysis of the Macchiaioli exhibition was quite perceptive; in recent Anglo-American literature on the movement, the heightened status of the Macchiaioli during Mussolini’s regime has been identified as part of an “ultranational and chauvinistic propaganda that downgraded French contributions to Italian culture.”

Paladini argued that the focus on the Macchiaioli at the Biennale was a concerted effort to give modern Italian painters a national, rather than French, source of inspiration, and that it denied the historic reality of international exchanges. Furthermore, he averred that the exhibition was designed to construct a sense of continuity and traditionalism in Italian national culture. The strategic organization of the artwork reinforced this ideology. The exhibition culminated in a room dedicated to Ardengo Soffici, who promoted the return to order in Italy, which reinforced a natural progression from the Macchiaioli to Novecento (Fig. 7.7).

Paladini’s review can be seen as a prescient recognition of the danger of self-fascistization through nationalist demagoguery.

In his second article on the 1926 Venice Biennale, Paladini discussed the international pavilions, which included the futurists who staged their exhibition in the 1924 Soviet Pavilion (Fig. 7.8). On the whole he repeated his fascination with Eastern models of Constructivism. Paladini praised the Czech presence at the exhibition, because not only was it their first entry at

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41 Paladini, “La XV esposizione d’art,” 27. “Poi definitiva è tutta una questione di spirito, di ‘stato d’animo’ e queste sono cose di portata tale che difficilmente si possono rinchiudere nelle anguste frontiere tracciate dagli uomini!”

42 Paladini, “La XV esposizione d’art,” 27. “Don Chisciotteschi” and “…è esagerato volere”


the Venice Biennale, but he also admired their “pavilion of sober constructivist architecture with
which they are aligned.”

His analysis of Czech art revealed his perceptive understanding of the
distinction between Western and Eastern approaches to material analysis. Paladini asserted that
Eastern European artists and architects were aware of Western aesthetics, but they had developed
entirely different, constructive practices that were more aligned with the Russian avant-garde.

He even noted the disjuncture between French Cubism and the Russian constructivist concept of
faktura. Paladini exemplified his analysis with the work of Antonin Procházka and Emil Filla, who
were exhibited in the Czech Pavilion at the Biennale. Both artists borrowed from the
principles of Cubism; Procházka, however, had moved beyond Cubism to create works derived
from material analysis reminiscent of the Russian constructivists’ “love of materials.”

Paladini’s exhibition review reflected his knowledge of the interactions between proponents and
theories of the international avant-garde. Likely informed by his own connections with Czech
artists and architects, such as Karel Teige, Paladini’s explanation divulged his awareness of
Soviet developments and how they had spread beyond the borders of Russia. Furthermore, his
analysis had a strong undercurrent of internationalism; he used the Czech artists as an example of
the importance of cultural exchanges across national borders.

Paladini concluded by focusing on the “noisy” futurists, who were exhibited in the
international section. The futurists had been granted the Soviet Pavilion after Marinetti lobbied
for it and displayed art derived from the machine aesthetic. Depero and Pannaggi, alone, were
praised. Otherwise, the futurists were described as “simply repeating with desperate monotony

architettura costruttivista con la quale è stato conformato.”
46 Paladini, “La XV Biennale Veneziana,” 31. “…l’arte del russo Schetermberg [sic], in quell suo
amore per le materie…”
the technical lessons of the old masters of Futurism, struggling in this formula without escaping this pitiful mode." According to Paladini, only Pannaggi’s architectonic paintings and abstract sculptural constructions demonstrated the utopian and socialist ideology that informed Constructivism in Western Europe (Fig. 7.9). Clearly ignoring reality in favor of old friendship, Paladini singled out Pannaggi as the lone futurist who understood that art had evolved to productive construction. He praised Pannaggi’s work for not “falling into the trap of empty and overly schematic abstraction.” His assessment of Pannaggi served subtly to reiterate Paladini’s opinion that Suprematism and De Stijl were useless to the proletariat and not to be confused with the Russian “constructors” who entered directly into industrial production. Pannaggi was also lauded because he escaped the “new academicism” of Futurism and he attempted to reinvigorate the Italian avant-garde with the “architectonic world vision” of Constructivism. Paladini’s description of Futurism as a new variant of academic art called attention to how Boccioni had become enshrined by Marinetti’s movement and the younger generation of futurists.

The futurist pavilion was designed by Marinetti to assert the significant role Futurism had played in the development of the machine aesthetic and to vaunt its position as an official art of Fascism. Paladini’s appraisal of the pavilion, however, reasserted the origins of machine aesthetic in Soviet Constructivism and Productivism and essentially denied Futurism a role in its development. For Paladini, the futurist machine had devolved into academicism and the


49 Paladini, “La XV Biennale Veneziana,” 31. “…senza per questo cadere nella vuota e troppo schematica astrazione dei costruttivisti russi ed olandesi.” See Chapter 3 for Paladini’s distinction between Russian Constructors (by which he means Productivism) and Dutch and Russian Constructivism.

The View from Abroad

Whereas Paladini’s exhibition reviews provided an insider’s awareness of the changing fascist cultural landscape of Italy, Pannaggi offered a different perspective during the late 1920s and early 1930s. From Germany, Pannaggi continued his affiliation with Futurism and by default, contributed to Marinetti’s agenda of achieving regime recognition for the movement. Engaged primarily with fellow Italians who lived abroad, Pannaggi remained distanced from the totalitarian coercions that unnerved Paladini. Instead, Pannaggi had reason to applaud the artistic freedom of the Italian system in comparison to the drastic changes that he had witnessed in Germany. Pannaggi praised Mussolini’s pluralism in comparison to Hitler’s strict cultural policies and introduced the Italian public to Germany’s racially based censorship of “degenerate art.” As early as 1931, Pannaggi identified and reported on the racist and anti-Semitic connotations of the National Socialist cultural regulations that ultimately culminated in the programmatic institution of Gleichschaltung.

Pannaggi first confronted the new art policies enacted by the National Socialist party in the Milan-based L’Ambrosiano on January 7, 1931. Although not specifically about Hitler, Pannaggi’s piece was accompanied by a drawing of the future Führer in his signature caricature style (Fig. 7.10). Nestled within another article (unsigned, but not by Pannaggi), “Arte e Politica” (“Art and Politics”), about the political climate in Italy after Mussolini’s call for artistic

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order, this fascinating essay has been overlooked. Because Pannaggi framed his discussion of Italian Fascism in relation to Germany’s National Socialism, his text implied approval of Mussolini’s pluralistic support for the arts and for modernism. This interpretation was encouraged by its proximity to “Arte e Politica,” which addressed Mussolini’s repeated call for a fascist Italian art.

Pannaggi contended that regional differences influenced the level of government involvement in the arts. To explain his supposition, he first delineated the difference between northern, or Nordic, art and its southern, or Mediterranean, counterpart. Northern art, Pannaggi stated, tended to be more meditative. In addition, recent social and economic problems had caused Northern people to focus their faith on political figures and to find comfort in art, which naturally led to the fusion of art and politics in Germany. He inferred that recent events, meaning recent demonstrations of National Socialist power, were the basis of his hypothesis. In contrast, Pannaggi proposed that the commingling of art and politics was anathema to Latin peoples and Mediterranean nations, like Italy. He claimed that this was the underlying basis for Fascism’s distinctly different manifestations, stating that the Nazis were “foreign fascists who have nothing in common with the Fascism of Mussolini.”

To highlight the problematic consequences of burgeoning National Socialist cultural policies, Pannaggi exposed an incident that revealed the intersection between new museum regulations, rising nationalism, and proclamations about the superiority of the Aryan race in Germany. He described an event that occurred in Weimar in October 1930 that resulted in many

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52 “Arte e Politica,” L’Ambrosiano (January 7, 1931): 3 and Luciani, “Regesto,” 451. This article has even been overlooked and omitted from the comprehensive monograph published on Pannaggi in 1995, Pannaggi e l’arte meccanica futurista.
54 Pannaggi, “In Germania,” 3. “Questi strani fascisti, che nulla hanno in commune con il fascismo di Mussolini....”
writers in Germany launching campaigns in cultural journals to draw attention to and to reprove
the government’s actions. Wilhelm Frick, a National Socialist and Minister of the Interior and
Education for Thuringia, seized seventy works of modern art from the Schlossmuseum, including
paintings by Otto Dix, Franz Marc, Oscar Schlemmer, and Wassily Kandinsky. Frick later
notoriously assumed the role of Minister of the Interior after Hitler’s official assumption of
power in 1933, instituting programs for the sweeping removal of “degenerate” art from German
museums. Pannaggi censured Frick’s reasoning by directly quoting the politician, who claimed
that modern art was contrary to the Germanic spirit and was actually a manifestation of races
from the East. Pannaggi declared that Frick’s sentiments were obviously informed by his
personal opinion rather than the true nature of current art in Germany, given that the “artists in
question are the most significant exponents of contemporary German art. They are the artists
who characterize the Germans in international exhibitions, in a way that one could not have any
concept of German art without referring to their works.”

To make sure that his Italian readers understood Frick’s intentions, Pannaggi clarified his
thoughts “When Frick mentions the races of the East, he means the Jewish influence on national
art as well as wanting to banish artists he considers out of place. It is ridiculous, especially for a
German, to fight against people like Barlach, Dix, Klee, Kokoschka, etc. or those who have died
like Marc and Lehmbuck.” Pannaggi’s words served as a criticism against the invocation of

55 Iris Schweisser, “Chronology,” in German Expressionism: The Graphic Impulse ed. Starr
dell’arte contemporanea tedesca. Sono quelli che nelle mostre internazionali caratterizzano la
Germania, in modo tale da non potersi fare un’idea dell’arte tedesca senza ricorrere alle loro
opere.”
57 Pannaggi, “In Germania,” 3. “Quando il Frick accenna alle razze dell’est, egli intende parlare
di infiltrazioni ebraiche nell’arte nazionale, ma anche in questo caso gli artisti da lui banditi sono
race as the basis of national culture as having anything to do with modern art. In his next several articles for *L’Ambrosiano*, Pannaggi focused on institutions, artists, and architects who were immediately targeted by the Nazis, and that he considered to be the height of German culture: the Folkwang Museum in Essen, the Bauhaus in Berlin, Erich Mendelsohn, Walter Gropius, and the Academy of Art in Düsseldorf. As a complement to these writings, Pannaggi also wrote features for *Casabella* that publicized and praised numerous modernist architectural achievements in Germany.

In “Cronache d’arte: Panorama Tedesco” (“Art Chronicle: German Panorama”) published in *Casabella* in September 1931, Pannaggi provided an overview of German art since World War I, giving special consideration to the Neue Sachlichkeit and the Novembergruppe. He concluded his essay with a discussion that praised Jankel Adler’s recent paintings. Although likely in an effort to demonstrate that the beauty of modern art should not be dismissed solely based on race, Pannaggi unfortunately mimicked the anti-Semitic phrasing and racial profiling used by the National Socialists in Germany. He described Adler’s art as “essentially Hebraic, lacking chiaroscuro and those plastic values which are the foundation of Western art and classically expressing the character of the race to which the artist belongs.”

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60 Ivo Pannaggi, “Cronache d’arte: Panorama Tedesco,” *Casabella* 9, no. 45 (September 1931), 61. “…essenzialmente ebraica, priva di chiaroscuro e di quei valori plastici che son oil
heavily praised Adler by stating that the value of his work resided in not only his technique, but also the liveliness of his canvases, inclusion of metaphysical architecture, and spatial consideration, which made him both a “representative of Hebraic painting and an artist of European significance.”

Pannaggi, like others of the time, used racial and nationalist stereotyping without intending to be racist or anti-Semitic. In private letters Pannaggi revealed his deep concern about Germany’s new political climate and the National Socialist enforcement of art and culture based on race. Pannaggi’s art historical analysis, which used race as a component of object study, was common for the period, however, it would be exploited by racist and anti-Semitic ideologues.

Despite the numerous articles Pannaggi wrote about German art and architecture between 1931 and 1935 for Italian journals, like Casabella and L’Ambrosiano, and his constant praise for the modern and international significance of institutions, such as the Folkwang Museum and the Bauhaus, his discussions of German cultural and racial policies under the National Socialists were limited to documentary statements. He heaped praise on artists who were early targets of National Socialist politicians and later declared degenerate under Hitler’s regime. His writing, however, lacked critical introspection on the new racially driven, anti-modernist cultural policies. Not until “Esposizione berlinese: Il IV Congresso Internazional d’Architettura Moderna” (“Berlin Exhibitions: The Fourth International Congress of Modern Architecture”) published in

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L’Ambrosiano in June 1933 did Pannaggi clarify the extent of the newly launched Gleichschaltung program and its impact on the artistic milieu in Germany.\textsuperscript{63}

The essay was written after Hitler’s appointment as Chancellor and it was framed as a review of various current exhibitions in Germany, but Pannaggi used it as a forum to outline disturbing new cultural regulations that promoted “German-ness” in the arts. He warned that the Nazi government was anti-avant-garde and enforced a program against Kulturbolschewismus (cultural Bolshevism), in which Cubism, Futurism, Expressionism and abstract art had all been banned.\textsuperscript{64} Despite the new laws, Pannaggi asserted that recent exhibitions continued to show avant-garde art. He praised the courage of organizers who exhibited artists considered questionable due to “excessive modernity” per the new cultural policies.\textsuperscript{65} Pannaggi also reported the new Aryanization laws that denied Jewish artists a role in any form of cultural production in Germany, including removal from artistic organizations, academic positions, and exhibitions based on a formulary of Jewish ancestry.

Pannaggi, who had been accepted to the Bauhaus in 1932, soon found his studies cut short and himself displaced from Germany after the closure of the school by the Nazis in April 1933, an event he mentioned in a later article as one of “the first cultural manifestations of the new [Nazi] mentality.”\textsuperscript{66} Thereafter, Pannaggi’s writings during a brief period in Florence shed any pointed commentary on politics in Germany or Italy; instead, they usually provided historical overviews of modern Scandinavian architecture, discussed the development of national

\textsuperscript{64}Pannaggi, “Esposizione berlinese,” 3.
\textsuperscript{65}Pannaggi, “Esposizione berlinese,” 3. “ora licenziato per l’eccessiva modernità”
art in Norway after the split with Denmark, or were travelogues from the Arctic Circle and Lapland.\(^{67}\) As a featured writer of travel stories for *L’Italia Letteraria*, Pannaggi divorced himself from deeper engagements with the changing political terrain of both Germany and Italy.\(^{68}\) In his reportage of the unsettling changes in Germany, it was clear that Pannaggi had no premonition that similar changes would be enacted five years later in Italy. His last essay dedicated to German art and culture was published in October 1933 in *Casabella*.\(^{69}\) Thereafter, he briefly mentioned the Bauhaus in a few articles in 1935 and in one of his pieces on tubular steel furniture, which was reprinted in other design journals until 1936.\(^{70}\) Pannaggi’s writings on modern German art and architecture published in *Casabella*, particularly those that featured Erich Mendelsohn’s designs, would eventually be considered proof of the Semitic corruption of Italian rationalist architecture and fueled the attacks directed at Pagano by Giuseppe Pensabene, Giuseppe Terragi, and Telesio Interlandi after the passing of the Racial Laws in 1938.\(^{71}\)

**The Nationalist Fascist Aesthetic in the 1930s**

Whereas Pannaggi witnessed and reported on the foreclosure of artistic freedoms in

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\(^{67}\) Pannaggi published various travel essays in *L’Ambrosiano* under the feature title “Lettere dal Nord.”

\(^{68}\) “Ivo Pannaggi,” *L’Italia Letteraria* 11, no. 27 (July 6, 1935): 1. The “special contributor” photograph of Pannaggi in *L’Italia Letteraria* was captioned “limpido rapporto… che è un brillante esempio dell’evoluzione giornalistica che ha per sempre abbanonato il ‘pezzo di colore’.”

\(^{69}\) Ivo Pannaggi, “L’architettura in Germania. Il concorso per la nuova sede della Reichbank,” *Casabella*, no. 10 (October 1933).


\(^{71}\) Etlin, *Modernism*, 589-591 and 676n122. Etlin points out that the articles on Mendelsohn and the Bauhaus were given as evidence against Pagano during the debates with Terragni, which were fueled by anti-Semitism and anti-Bolshevism (addressed in Chapter 6). Etlin, however, has only footnoted Pannaggi’s essays. After reviewing *Casabella*, Pannaggi was not the only contributor who wrote about Mendelsohn’s work, but he was the most prolific on the topic of German art and architecture.
Germany, Paladini’s final exhibition review warned of a similar fate in Italy. Written in response to the 1934 Venice Biennale, Paladini’s “La Vita artistica: Note sulla Biennale Veneziana” (“The Artistic Life: Notes on the Venice Biennale”) reflected the administrative changes of the international exhibition caused by the rise of nationalism and fascist control of the arts. By 1931 the Biennale was no longer an independent entity, but placed under the centralized control of the state. Historians now consider the close of the 1934 Biennale to be the end of the government’s pluralistic patronage and aesthetics and the beginning of prescribed art dedicated to the celebration of the fascist regime. Driving the changes in cultural policies were rising nationalist sentiments voiced by critics, who demanded strictly Italian art untainted by foreign influences. In addition, the Biennale itself had become increasingly conservative after coming under the purview of the regime, which was reflected in the special exhibition “Retrospective of Nineteenth-Century Portraiture” that dominated one-fifth of the main pavilion.

Almost ten years after his last Biennale article, Paladini’s lengthy “La Vita artistica: Note sulla Biennale Veneziana” articulated his complete disdain for the current state of the arts in Italy under the regime. In particular, he identified that the rise in nationalist and traditionalist rhetoric segregated Italian artists from international and modernist developments in the arts. Furthermore, he opined that some artists, who he wisely did not name, exercised their connections with the selection committee to coerce the omission of certain artists and avant-garde movements. Significantly, his essay was published in the April-June 1934 edition of *Occidente*. The journal, directed by Armando Gherlardino, was an international art and literature review that promoted

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74 Stone, *The Patron State*, 89. Stone has noted that portraiture was traditionally considered the most conservative of the art forms and has drawn a correlation between the choice in the special exhibition’s theme, its occupation of ten out of fifty rooms, and the changes in the regime’s cultural policies.
cultural exchanges and included non-Italian contributors.\textsuperscript{75} Occidente was also a stronghold against rising nationalism and anti-modernism.

“La Vita artistica: Note sulla Biennale Veneziana” began combatively as Paladini declared that his review would be “polemical and sectarian” to counteract the “subtle sectarianism of contemporary critics.”\textsuperscript{76} He railed against the selection of Italian artists on view and called the organizers anti-modern. Referencing the “Retrospective of Nineteenth-Century Portraiture,” he asserted that the selection committee gave preferential treatment to Italian paintings from the 1800s to the detriment of providing an accurate reflection of the prior century. Noticeably shortchanged, according to Paladini, were the French impressionists. He decried the chauvinism of the disproportionate inclusion of Italian artists to vaunt their significance over international counterparts and suggested that, instead, each nation should have been proportionally represented. He lamented that this focus on the past century also diminished the potential inclusion of new and younger artists.

Paladini observed that the exhibition revealed the current state of Italian art as regressive rather than progressive and that the search for new artistic techniques had been stunted. He maintained that few artists in Italy were still interested in contemporary aesthetic issues or in utilizing artistic means to resolve social problems; instead, most artists were content with traditional or past modes of production. Futurism, he lamented, exemplified the issue: “This movement is now closed in its principles with a stubborn obstinacy that is static and dead. Today it has only two artists that arise from the gray mediocrity of the group, more because they

\textsuperscript{75} Donati, Occidente.
\textsuperscript{76} Vinicio Paladini, “La Vita artistica: Note sulla Biennale Veneziana,” Occidente 3, no. 7 (April-June 1934): 61. “Quest’articolo...sarà polemico e settario... ma di fronte al subdolo settarismo della critica contemporanea....”
echo Paris with a certain force and technical ability than for their intrinsic creative quality.”

These two artists were, surprisingly, Prampolini and Fillia, two major proponents of Futurism and Fascism. Paladini, however, went on to minimize their significance and declared that they were nothing more than decorators. His tone suggests that being a decorator was far removed from the functionalist designs that he promoted in his writings on Rationalism. His pronouncement of a Parisian influence on Fillia and Prampolini also shrewdly undercut the futurist’s claims on the innate Italian-ness of the movement.

Paladini then turned his attention to the international pavilions and used them as an opportunity to address the problem of enforced cultural nationalism in Italy. He justly noted that nationalism was rampant on display at the Venice Biennale by various pavilions. Indeed, the fixation on presenting a unified culture was at the forefront of the institution of many government-sponsored programs in the 1930s, including the New Deal in the United States, the decree of Socialist Realism in the USSR, and the sweeping *Gleichschaltung* policies in Germany. Paladini countered those demagogues who believed “cultural leveling and internationalization [which] are reputedly the origin of all bad modern art.” He averred that internationalism was inevitable in the modern era “unless one wants to come to the absurdness of abolishing journals, trains, and airplanes,” and that the lack of international cultural exchanges would lead to the “intellectual impoverishment” of the nation. Like his “Arte, Comunismo, e Nazionalismo” essay from 1923, Paladini asserted that international exchanges bolstered national

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77 Paladini, “La Vita artistica,” 66. “Questo movimento oramai chiuso nei suoi principi con una ostinazione caparbia che è stasi e morte, non ha, oggi, che due artisti che possano levarsi dalla griglia mediocrità della massa, più perché echeggianti le voci che da Parigi ancora giungono con una certa forza, e par abilità tecnica, che per intrinseche loro qualità creative.”

78 Paladini, “La Vita artistica,” 67. “A molti tutto questo apparirà un male, chè il livellamento culturale e l’internazionalizzazione sono reputati origine di tutti i mali dell’arte moderna.”

79 Paladini, “La Vita artistica,” 67. “a meno che non si voglia arrivare all’assurdo di abolire stampa, treni, areopiani…..” and “un impoverimento intellettuale”
cultures. Furthermore, in an open criticism of the regime, he contended that only a weak nation could not handle the influx of new ideas. He turned the argument for *romanità* against itself, noting that the absorption of Greek culture by the Romans had fueled the initial flourishing of Italian civilization.

In addition, Paladini criticized the rise of individualism and the focus on the personality of an artist. He stated that the former was adverse to his “collectivist spirit” and at odds with the changes wrought by international cultural exchanges. In doing so, he suggested a conflation between internationalism and collectivism. Beginning a decade earlier, Paladini’s promotion of internationalism had always consistently aligned with major tenets of Communism, including a belief in the brotherhood of all men and the desire for educational reforms to overthrow bourgeois intellectualism. He also recognized the defeat of his youthful ideals. He realized that internationalism, and its collectivist connotations, should have caused a “leveling [of society] and then the disappearance of the individual,” but unfortunately, “the theories have shown themselves weak in the face of the fateful passing of events…” Overall, his survey refused to cede any ground to Fascism’s claim that it had propelled a revolutionary reinvigoration of the arts. Instead, he bemoaned the resultant waning of the modern spirit in Italy.

Paladini, however, found hope for his internationalism in the most unlikely places – the United States Pavilion. He described it as “the most astonishing” and declared “One could call it an international exhibition of avant-garde art more than an exhibition representative of a nation… the Americans present themselves as a young nation of the extreme left, which could

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81 Paladini, “La Vita artistica,” 67. “… portare ad un livellamento e quindi ad una sparizione del fatto individuo… le teorie si dimostrano sempre deboli di fronte al fatale andare degli eventi, per dirla con una certa enfasi declamation!”
have been said of the USSR at the 1924 exhibition...." In particular, Paladini applauded Francis Criss, Peter Blume, Charles Burchfield, and Edward Hopper and identified the various international movements that informed the work of each artist. He especially praised Stuart Davis because he was well versed in French Purism without its strict adherence to geometric abstraction. His assessment could be considered an appraisal of American leftist tendencies strictly in regards to avant-garde aesthetic experiments rather than a subtle reference to political affiliations. The fact that Paladini singled out Davis as an exceptional example of American internationalism, however, seemed too coincidental. Davis, who was appointed president of the Artists’ Union in 1934 and an illustrator for The Masses, had a strong commitment to leftist politics and social activism.

Paladini briefly addressed the exhibitions presented in the French, British, and Dutch pavilions, but concluded his essay with the Soviet Pavilion. His review was based on an interview with Anatole Knorre, who was the commissioner of the pavilion, and provided valuable insight into the current artistic and political situation in the USSR. His interview with Knorre underscored that Paladini maintained high-level contacts and connections with the Soviet Union. His discussion of the pavilion is also astounding as it was one of the earliest accounts in Italy of Socialist Realism.

Distrust of formalism, the push for factography, and the dissolution of artist unions

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82 Paladini, “La Vita artistica,” 67. “Il padiglione che più desta stupore è quello Americano. Si direbbe più una esposizione internazionale di arte d’Avanguardia che una mostra rappresentativa di una nazione... gli Americani si presentano come una giovine nazione all’estrema sinistra, quello che poteva essere l’U.R.S.S. nel ’26 [sic – corrected in text above]....” Paladini wrote 1926 exhibition, but obviously he meant 1924, as the Russians did not participate in 1926. In addition, he noted that he wrote about this exhibition at length, which references the pamphlet that he wrote in 1925 and, therefore, the 1924 Venice Biennale.

bolstered Socialist Realism and garnered the movement official status in 1932. Paladini observed that “The USSR has abandoned constructivist abstraction and futurist tendencies to orient themselves toward documentary painting,” specifically to capture the accomplishments of Stalin’s First Five-Year Plan. ⁸⁴ According to Knorre, it was not possible to sustain a continuous revolution in the arts, which alluded to the recent upheavals and infighting among Soviet artists. Although he expressed his reservations about the return to easel painting, Paladini, surprisingly, did not express disappointment with the changes in the Russian avant-garde. Instead, as if towing the Communist Party line, he contended that the documentary painting style derived from the inspiration of the Russian Revolution: “Despite all of the reservations that one could have about contemporary Soviet painting, all seen here is very incisive, dramatic, violent, typical, and clearly the fruit of a revolution that was truly felt and seen.” ⁸⁵ Paladini suggested that the paintings of Fyodor Semyonovich Bogorodsky, which were on display in the Soviet Pavilion, typified the new artistic trend in the Soviet Union (Fig. 7.11). ⁸⁶  

Tellingly, Paladini was drawn to the paintings by Aleksandr Deineka and called him the “most left” of the Soviet artists present at the pavilion in acknowledgement of the modernist inflections in his nominally realist works. Paladini was quite astute in his understanding of Deineka’s politically and aesthetically leftist tendencies, which have not been plumbed until

⁸⁴ Paladini, “La Vita artistica,” 73. “Ed infine andiamo al padiglione Sovietico, a chiusura della nostra sommaria rassegna. L’U.R.S.S. ancora più abbandona l’astrattismo costruttivista e le correnti futuristeggianti, per orientarsi verso la pittura documentaria.” ⁸⁵ Paladini, “La Vita artistica,” 73. “… malgrado tutte le riserve che si potrebbero fare sulla pittura attuale Sovietica, tutto ha un carattere molto incisivo, drammatico, violento, tipico, chiaro frutto di una rivoluzione che è stata veramente sentita e vissuta.” ⁸⁶ Paladini only mentioned the last name of the artist, which was common to a few artists of this era. Fyodor Bogorodsky was one of the more famous Socialist Realism painters and his work matched Paladini’s description.
recently. Deineka, who had been a founding member of the October in 1927, was also committed to figurative painting; he believed, however, that it needed to be stripped of past, bourgeois forms. Likely influenced by his affiliates in October, he believed easel painting could be reinvigorated as a revolutionary art form via experimental, constructivist techniques. Clearly enchanted by Deineka’s technique and likely aware of the Russian’s former involvement in the October group, Paladini asserted that his flat style and compositional methods were perfect for the depiction of modern activity. He contended, “very few modern painters would be able to withstand comparison to these vast, powerful compositions, which are rhythmic, well-formed, clear in design, spaciously lyrical, and above all, like the contemporary spirit.”

Paladini was not alone in his praise of Deineka. As Marla Stone has noted, the Soviet Pavilion was held up by fascist extremists as an example of “an artistic community willing (or coerced) to dedicate itself to a singular goal: celebration of the state and its policies.” In fact, Mussolini was supposedly impressed by Deineka’s paintings and the Italian government purchased The Race (1930) and Women’s Cross-country (1931) at the 1930 and 1934 Biennales (Fig. 7.12). For militant fascists interested in strictly nationalist cultural production, Deineka’s work and Socialist Realism exemplified the successful combination of state-sponsorship and

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87 Christina Kiaer, “Was Socialist Realism Forced Labor? The Case of Aleksandr Deineka in the 1930s,” *Oxford Art Journal* 28, no. 3 (2005), 321-45. The topic of Deineka’s leftist political and aesthetic tendencies in his art has not been fully explored until recently by Christina Kaier. She has published several articles on Deineka and will publish a book on him in the near future.

88 Kaier, “Was Socialist Realism,” 325.

89 Bowlt, *Russian Art*, 273.

90 Paladini, “La Vita artistica,” 74. “Allora ben pochi pittori moderni, crediamo, sarebbero in grado di produrre opere che regessero il confronto con queste vaste composizioni potenti come ritmo, bene chiuse, chiare nello schema, ariosamente liriche e soprattutto attuali come spirito.”


mandated artistic style. Yet Paladini was clearly opposed to this interpretation of Deineka’s paintings, which he indicated by drawing attention to their leftist nature and “contemporary spirit.” Furthermore, Paladini abruptly transitioned from praising Deineka to his concluding remarks about the Venice Biennale, which seemingly juxtaposed the modernity of the Soviets with the passéiste organization of the exhibition. In his final assessment of the 1934 Biennale, Paladini concluded that the Italian section’s focus on the 1800s “could only be brought about by people without a spine…” 93

Paladini’s analysis of the Italian cultural scene and state-organized exhibitions stood in stark contrast to his observations of Moscow published, surprisingly, in the conservative nationalist Roman journal, Il Tevere, in the fall of 1934. Based on his recent visit, Paladini’s article, “Divertimenti a Mosca” (“Entertainment in Moscow”), appraised leisure activities in the Soviet Union. 94 His essay provided an interesting look at the city’s cultural institutions as well as the importance of libraries, news kiosks, theaters, and collective sports activities for the proletariat, including tennis, gymnastics, swimming, and soccer. He reprimanded Italian critics who negatively skewed their observations of daily life under the Soviet regime, showing his own remarkable ability to block out the ill effects of Stalin’s increased totalitarianism. He called their commentaries “common bourgeois criticisms… saying that collectivism, the leveling of economic conditions, and destroying free economy tends to transform the current world into a

93 Paladini, “La Vita artistica,” 74. “Malgrado tutto ed a dispetto di tutti, questa Biennale ha dimostrato che la pittura è ancora viva e ben viva, e che ogni idea di ritorno all’800 non può essere stata partorita che da gente priva di midollo spinale: i francesi hanno una bella espressione per definire tale sorta di disgraziati, dei ‘pauvres types’.”
94 Paladini, “Divertimenti,” 3. Paladini’s correspondence indicated that he was in Moscow in August 1934.
large, gray barracks where no beautiful, fantastical entertainment can be found…”  

Instead, Paladini insisted that entertainment, in the hands of the Soviet government, had become a tool “that is handled with intelligence and has an educational purpose…”.

His positive analysis of museum and exhibition techniques in the Soviet Union contrasted with his observations of the same practices in Italy during the recent Venice Biennale. Paladini was particularly impressed by the informative and didactic components of museums in Moscow, which conformed to his Gramscian beliefs in the educational potential of art and culture for the proletariat. He observed that museums exhibited not only art, but also photographs, architectural renderings, and historic documents in order to “frame art in the political and social life,” so that it was relatable and comprehensible to the workers.

He noted that, while the Tretyakov Museum displayed only Russian art, including recent works by Socialist Realists, any potential nationalism was counterbalanced by an equally comprehensive museum dedicated to Western European art, which even featured a collection of contemporary Italian painters, such as Carlo Carrà, Giorgio de Chirico, and Achille Funi. Although Paladini did not provide the official name, this museum was likely the State Museum of New Western Art that was established in 1919 and closed in 1948, and which housed the former collections of Sergei Schukin and Ivan Morozov. He concluded that the art historical “panorama is complete” in Moscow.

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95 Paladini, “Divertimenti,” 3. “Uno dei luoghi comuni della critica borghese più specialmente caro ai letterati, consiste nel dire che collettivismo, livellando le condizioni economiche, distruggendo la libera concorrenza, tende a trasformare il mondo attuale in una specie di enorme grigio, caserma, in cui non potranno più trovare posto quei bei divertimenti fantastosi…”

96 Paladini, “Divertimenti,” 3. “Il divertimento.. nelle mani del governo, che se ne vale con intelligenze, ad uno scopo educativo….”


98 Maria Mileeva, “Utopia in Retreat,” The Closure of the State Museum of New Western Art in 1948,” in *Utopian Reality: Reconstructing Culture in Revolutionary Russia and Beyond*, ed. Christina Lodder, Maria Kokkori, and Maria Mileeva (Boston, MA: Brill, 2013), 203-217.
contrast, he lamented that exhibitions of modern art within Italy promoted an insular chauvinist worldview, ignored historical facts, and denied equal representation to the international community of artists.  

**From Soviet Constructivism to Socialist Realism**

The exhibition reviews of Paladini and Pannaggi not only provide insight into how each developed as an artist and critic, but they also demonstrate one of the main paradoxes of fascist culture: Mussolini tolerated a margin of critique in the art press. Within the bounds of cultural publications, Mussolini’s dictum for a revolutionary art created a public space in which avant-garde artists could continue to express left-wing based sentiments and serve as vehicles of transmission of foreign developments that were based on ideologies opposed to Fascism. Paladini could subversively criticize the regime’s cultural policies and promote a leftist agenda until 1935. His assessment of Italian art and his continued championing of Soviet models throughout his career suggest that Paladini never completely lost his belief in the need for cultural education to perpetuate a spiritual, social, and economic revolution. As his attachment to Futurism and then Rationalism collapsed due to each movement’s affiliation with Fascism, Paladini continued to exert influence in the one area that remained open to him: his voice as an international arbiter of culture.

Yet the space for open cultural discourse was rapidly waning under the new constraints enacted by fascist and communist regimes. By 1931 Pannaggi had already begun alerting the Italian public about the National Socialists’ programmatic restriction of modern art and architecture in Germany through *Gleichschaltung* and anti-*Kulturbolschewismus*. Paladini’s


architectural essays addressed the mandate for *italianità* and *mediterraneità*, which had been “officially” enforced by the committees awarding commissions, and his exhibition reviews tracked and confirmed the increasing focus on traditionalism and the changing tide of Mussolini’s cultural policies in Italy. After Stalin’s decree of Socialist Realism, Paladini was caught between three different authoritarian dictates on cultural production – all of which enforced a non-avant-garde aesthetic. Given his championing of Soviet Constructivism, Paladini’s acceptance of Socialist Realism at the 1934 Venice Biennale appears at odds with his earlier convictions and was perhaps a cautious appraisal of the totalitarian shifts shaping the 1930s.

Although he had reservations about the return of easel painting, Paladini still found inspiration in the Socialist Realism of Bogorodsky and Deineka. His analysis of their work suggested that elements of Soviet Constructivism remained, but that it had abandoned “constructivist abstraction” (which he equated with overly intellectualized Suprematism in his earlier writings) in tandem with the flourishing of Communism in the Soviet Union. Paladini’s declaration that the paintings were documentary instead established a connection to his late 1920s essays on Soviet constructivist developments in film and the significance of using documentary realism as the base material in artistic creation. Shortly after the Biennale, his October 1934 article on the film, *Three Songs about Lenin*, and letters to Dziga Vertov reiterated this sentiment.

In Deineka and Bogorodsky’s works, the “real” was being documented, not through photography, film, or photomontage, but through easel painting. Paladini declared that the Socialist Realism on view at the Biennale was the result of a revolution “truly felt and seen,” perhaps a subtle jab at the “realist” paintings preferred by Mussolini’s regime and at the passive
fascist revolution. Significantly, Paladini drew attention to the realness of Bogorodsky’s paintings and asserted that they evidenced the positive effects of the Revolution on the Soviet people, who now appeared full of bravura and strength in contrast to depictions of pre-Revolution Russians as “fatalistic, apathetic, and resigned.” Furthermore, Paladini described the figures in Bogorodsky’s paintings as architectonic and noted their focus on construction. Paladini also praised Deineka’s anti-capitalist masterpiece, *The Unemployed in Berlin* (1932; Fig. 7.13). The painting encapsulated Paladini’s desired criteria for film, calling it “effective and disturbing, dramatic and propagandistic, without becoming narrative or falling into the symbolic.” In short, Deineka’s artwork and Socialist Realism upheld Paladini’s convictions that art must be based on the real in order to serve the proletariat effectively as communist propaganda. Paladini’s acceptance of Socialist Realism proved his political convictions to be stronger than his artistic ones. Moreover, it demonstrated that he was willing to turn a blind eye to Stalin’s totalitarian mandates on art, but not Mussolini’s.

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101 Paladini, “La Vita artistica,” 73. “…ben lontani da quel popolo russo fatalista abulico e rassegnato che eravamo abituati a pensare per il tramite della letteratura Russa pre-rivoluzionaria.”

102 Paladini, “La Vita artistica,” 73. “Pur tuttavia il suo quadro «Disoccupati a Berlino» è efficace ed inquietante, drammatico e propagandistico, senza finire, per questo, col divenire narrativo o cadere nel simbolico.”
Chapter 8

The Politics of Photomontage and Photo-based Exhibition Design

Although pre-war Italian futurists emphasized the importance of the spectator and agitation (especially during their serata events), Paladini’s knowledge of Soviet film theories, particularly those of Dziga Vertov, suggested an alternate path. Paladini used filmic montage to inform his own photo-based artistic production beginning in 1928. His interest in photomontage, however, pre-dated his engagement with Soviet film theory, as seen in his imagist production. Yet those works were essentially an attempt to create agitational art through static, if visually conflicting, collaged images. His “discovery” of Soviet cinema in late 1927 resulted in his understanding that the combination of documentary footage along with the montage effect could stimulate the mind of the spectator and create a quasi-visceral reaction. The direct impact of photomontage and film on the mind of the viewer, in Paladini’s view, could subvert ingrained bourgeois educational foundations.

With his newfound awareness of Soviet film and montage theory, Paladini concluded that Western avant-garde models of abstraction, such as Surrealism, Dadaism, and International Constructivism, were insufficient for a politically leftist agenda, but were acceptable for his narrative driven designs. They often relied on overly intellectualized aesthetic theory that alienated the working class rather than created a true “mind-spirit constructivity” and “democratization of the conscience.” Furthermore, they tended to create the mere appearance of political art rather than an actual and transformative agitational effect. Content was not enough—persuasion, education, and stimulation had to be ingrained in the very nature of the medium and transmission. Only film and mechanically reproduced images could create a simultaneous

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reception on a mass disseminated scale, versus the static and contemplative form of traditional fine art objects. In his imagist writings, Paladini suggested how art could be agitational, if it were targeted at an intuitive level of understanding and information processing common to all people. He had not yet found the artistic means to articulate his ideas until he visited Moscow at the end of 1927. As discussed in Chapter 5, he became intrigued by Vertov’s and constructivist film theories. The photomontages Paladini created upon his return to Rome reflected the Russian filmmaker’s influence.

Although Paladini was considered an innovator of photomontage in Italy, very little has been written about his use of the medium, his awareness of Soviet practices, and the attendant implications for the development of a fascist aesthetic.² By reevaluating Paladini’s contribution to the artistic and political milieu in the late 1920s and early 1930s, his significance as a photomonteur in Italy will be reinstated. After 1928 Paladini created at least forty photomontages that were published in various cultural journals, including Quadrivio and Occidente, and that were featured as book cover designs for various authors who were represented by Le Edizioni d’Italia. Beyond innovative graphic design layouts, Paladini applied what he learned from Soviet film techniques to his photomontages to critique the fascist regime’s coercive patronage and censorship.

Paradoxically, Paladini, through his film theory essays and his own factographic practice, helped create the groundwork for photomontage to become a celebrated medium in Italy and one of the fascist regime’s most productive propaganda vehicles, including Giuseppe Terragni’s

Room O at the 1932 *Mostra della rivoluzione fascista* (*Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution*). El Lissitzky’s 1928 Soviet Pavilion at the *Internationale Presse Ausstellung* (International Press Exhibition, also known as Pressa) was not the main source of inspiration for Room O, as is often maintained, but rather it was a continuation of a dialogue among avant-garde artists in Italy.³ Paladini’s first writings on Soviet films, their propaganda value, and the significance of documentary realism for the medium actually predated Pressa; therefore, it is necessary to reconsider his role in the dissemination of these concepts. Documentary, filmic montage was central to Terragni’s design and the accompanying catalogue text for Room O, which suggests familiarity with Paladini’s articles on Soviet film theories published in late 1927 and early 1928. Because both film and photomontage originated from a leftist political position within Italy, a closer examination of how they became instruments of Fascism is crucial to help contextualize the propaganda nexus between the politically opposing factions.

Yet Paladini ostensibly caved to the demands of the regime and was hired for his leftist sensibilities to contribute to the avant-garde aesthetic of regime-sponsored pavilions at expositions in Brussels and Rome. His participation suggests his accommodation or conversion to Fascism. Instead, I propose that his career reflected *entrismo*, or entrism, a concept promoted by Palmiro Togliatti, the leader of the PCI after Gramsci was imprisoned. Togliatti recommended that communist adherents should work within the fascist system in Italy to affect change.⁴ Entrism provides a viable model to explain both Paladini’s seeming accommodations to the regime and his use of photomontage to critique Fascism from within.

⁴ Togliatti, *Lectures on Fascism*, 151-152. Togliatti became the head of the PCI in 1927 after Gramsci’s imprisonment and suggested working within fascist syndicates in order to break apart Mussolini’s regime using methods of agitational propaganda.
The Influence of Russian Film Theory on Paladini’s Photomontage

Soviet filmic montage developed as an extension of Russian Constructivism and Productivism and emerged contemporaneously with photomontage. Dziga Vertov, Aleksandr Rodchenko, and Gustav Klutsis were all affiliated with LEF and Novyi LEF, which sought to blend art with agitational propaganda and production in service of the permanent revolution. Both journals, along with Vertov’s Kino-Fot, utilized photomontage to illustrate the tenets of Constructivism and related film theories (Fig. 8.1). Margarita Tupitsyn has noted that Klutsis’s first agitational photomontage not only coincided with Vertov’s establishment of the Kinoks (Kino-Eye group), but that they shared “similarities in terminology and iconography.”

As discussed in Chapter 5, Vertov’s montages relied on film-truths, or the unquestioned indexical nature of documentary, photo-based material. Klutsis, who had been a member of the October group, was one of the first photomontage artists in Russia to make the transition from faktura to factography. Both Vertov and Klutsis emphasized the agitational and propagandistic power of the real in their work. Interestingly, Paladini conflated photographic and filmic montage, along with the concept of the mechanical eye of the camera, in his writing about Soviet cinema as well as in his own artistic production.

The biggest change in Paladini’s artwork after his visit to Russia in 1927-1928 was a direct result of his awareness of Vertov’s methods and the importance of documentary, objective

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5 Margarita Tupitsyn, “From the Politics of Montage to the Montage of Politics: Soviet Practice 1919 through 1937,” in Montage and Modern Life, 1919-1942, ed. Matthew Teitelbaum (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1992), 87. In this text Tupitsyn notes 1919 as the first overlap in technique; she later adjusts this date to 1922, a year she considers seminal for Klutsis’s engagement with film in relation to photomontage. For the adjusted date, see Margarita Tupitsyn, Gustav Klutsis and Valentina Kulagina: Photography and Montage after Constructivism (New York, NY: International Center of Photography, 2004), 37-40.

6 Tupitsyn, “From the Politics,” 83-127. Tupitsyn also demonstrates that Klutsis was wary of members of the group who fetishized the factographic rather than focusing on the needs of the proletariat.
realism for agitational art.\textsuperscript{7} His increasing adherence to this idea resulted in material studies for his photomontages in an attempt to simulate both the documentary and montage effects of film on the spectator. This new direction can be demonstrated by a comparison of \textit{La macchina del tempo} (\textit{The Time Machine}; Fig. 8.2) and \textit{Movimento e spazio} (\textit{Movement and Space}; Fig. 8.3), which were created in 1928. Both \textit{La macchina del tempo} and \textit{Movimento e spazio} are photocollages made from an assemblage of photographs from journals and painted elements, but the latter is more advanced than the former. Perhaps the biggest change in these montages is Paladini’s graphic study of lines in space and the containment of figures within geometric, constructivist spaces. His designs that pre-date his trip to Moscow in 1927, such as \textit{La Ruota Dentata Untitled}, retain a dadaist engagement with juxtaposed media images. Significantly, Paladini still relied on an implied narrative structure in \textit{La macchina del tempo} rather than the inherent formal qualities of the montage medium. This photocollage attempted to tell a story about modernity and did not rely solely on the intrinsic qualities of the juxtaposed images to affect the viewer. Paladini had not yet abandoned the hand of the artist as can be seen in the painted elements and the singularity of the work, but with \textit{Movimento e spazio}, he finally harnessed the lessons of the Russian avant-garde for a dynamic photocollage. In \textit{Movimento e spazio}, the photographic elements were placed in a less didactic manner, which freed the viewer to make his or her own visual connections.

Although remnants of his imagist techniques were present, Paladini’s \textit{La macchina del tempo} was more simplified and had fewer conflicting cutouts than his earlier photomontages, like \textit{La Ruota Dentata Untitled}. Instead of dozens of clippings from magazines, it only used six photographic elements. On the far left, Paladini positioned a pointing hand that directs the

\textsuperscript{7} Chapter 5 examines the impact of Vertov and Gan’s film theories on Paladini.
viewer’s gaze to follow a time-lapsed photographic exposures of a woman as she walks past an oversized pocket watch and into a turbine. The image of the woman was likely sourced from Eadweard Muybridge’s motion studies (Fig. 8.4), which were well known in Italy.\(^8\) A car slices through the foreground, nearly colliding with a well-dressed man. The gentleman, however, calmly continues on his path toward the giant machine. Unfortunately, the title might not be accurate and therefore cannot be relied on for adding meaning to the photocollage. In addition, the only accessible image of Paladini’s work is as a reproduction in a recent article on futurist photography, which lacks information on its origin or meaning.\(^9\)

In *La macchina del tempo*, Paladini combined imagist subject matter and themes with his initial understanding of Vertov’s film theories. His most obvious imagist element was the inclusion of the painted word “Bazar” [sic], hovering in the background. It recycled his earlier themes of amusement parks, arcades, and markets, which symbolized the overwhelming visual stimulation found in the modern world. In addition, *La macchina del tempo* retained the narrative aspects of Imagism and followed the same pattern as his own imagist stories about the transformative power of *irrealità*. As discussed in Chapter 4, Paladini’s *Luna Park traumatico* centered on a protagonist whose mind and perception of the world was altered when he encountered the shock of modernity, which was epitomized by an amusement park. The experience jolted him out of his bourgeois stasis. A similar narrative structure was built into Paladini’s photocollage. Here, the hand serves to guide the viewer, much like the plot outline of a story. The pointing finger directs the gaze to follow the woman into the machine, where she


\(^9\) Lista, “Futurist Photography,” 358-364. Lista may have given the photocollage its title and he does not provide information on its ownership.
will be transformed. Despite being on a collision course with a car, the man in the foreground attentively watches the unfolding scene, which helps reinforce that the spectator’s focus should be on the woman.

Paladini’s graphic study and placement of objects within space seemingly recalls the photoplastics of László Moholy-Nagy. He likely would have been familiar with Moholy-Nagy’s *Painting, Photography, and Film*, which had been published by the Bauhaus in 1925, due to his former collaborator, Pannaggi. Yet Paladini consistently omitted the Bauhaus from his writings and only mentioned Moholy-Nagy once as an aside, citing him as an important photomonteur in Germany.\(^\text{10}\) Instead, he often referenced the importance of Soviet artists working in film and photomontage; therefore, a more likely source of inspiration for his graphic studies would have been Aleksandr Rodchenko or Gustav Klutsis. Supporting this claim is the timing of his trip to Moscow and the immediate shift in his artistic practice upon his return to Rome.

*La macchina del tempo* differed from Paladini’s own imagist works and this also suggests that it was completed shortly after his travels to Russia. In his film writings from early 1928, Paladini’s concept of the transformative powers of modernity and *irrealità* had already merged with the mechanical eye and filmic montage.\(^\text{11}\) Direct encounters with documentary realism unfettered by artistic interpretation had the power to activate the spectator and impel revolutionary action. Paladini illustrated this profound, transformative effect of the cinematic experience and modernity on a spectator. He focused the spectator’s attention on the woman for a reason – she merges entirely with the mechanical means of production. In particular, the combination of Muybridge’s time-based motion study and the turbine was significant: the former was the basis for the development of film and the latter served to extract energy into a usable

\(^{10}\) Paladini, “Fotomontage,” 4.
Time-based photography, like filmic montage, could render optical the unseen, yet it retained a narrative structure. Noticeably, nothing seemed to emerge from the other side of the turbine, signifying that the machine had converted the woman into pure energy or something that could not be seen by the unaided human eye. The viewer is left to interpret what will happen next. Will the woman’s transformation be sufficient to convince the dapper gentleman that he too should enter the turbine? The oversized pocket watch infers that only time will tell.

Paladini’s second photocollage completed in 1928 equally demonstrated the impact of his visit to Moscow and exposure to Soviet film and photomontage. The title alone, *Movimento e spazio*, was likely a direct reference to the film theories of Vertov, who stated that one of the important material aspects of film was its ability to track movement in space, a concept Paladini had also discussed in his writings. In addition, his contemporaneous articles on Soviet film theory, such as “Cinematografo dal vero,” praised Vertov’s film-truth and lauded the significance of documentary material. Although Paladini never specifically identified Soviet photomontage artists, such as Aleksander Rodchenko or Gustav Klutsis, as influential on his work, the sudden change in his technique after his trip to Russia, indicates he looked closely at them as well.

For *Movimento e spazio*, Paladini greatly diminished the hand of the artist and increased his reliance on reality as per Vertov’s ideas. He used only images culled from newspapers and magazines. Extremely streamlined in composition, the photocollage combined only four cut out

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12 Braun, “Marey, Muybridge,” 252-254. Braun’s discussion is framed around the difference between Muybridge and Marey. Her thesis that Muybridge retained a narrative structure via his use of realism (which provided a foundational model for early cinema) reinforces my premise that Paladini was developing his own understanding of the depiction of reality via film and photomontage during this period. He did not fully understand the materialist aspects until after his trip to Moscow as is demonstrated in his post-1927 works.

items: a female diver, a press photograph of the racetrack from Fiat’s Lingotto plant (Fig. 8.5), a modernist spiral staircase, and a sculpture, *The Rape of the Sabine Women*, by Giambologna. The placement of the cutouts creates a visual trajectory from traditional figurative art of the past toward modern architecture: the Sabine woman in the sculpture reaches up toward a modernist staircase molded out of reinforced concrete. In addition, the Fiat Lingotto plant is adjacent to the sculptural bodies, reinforcing the tension between the Italian tradition of figurative art and contemporary architecture. The sculpture is inherently static in contrast to the dynamic movement of the racecars and the diver plunging into the void. *Movimento e spazio* also provided Paladini with yet another break from his futurist past. The use of spiraling forms simultaneously acknowledged Giacomo Balla’s *Stairway of Farewells* (1908; Fig. 8.6), but he replaced the traditional staircase with a modern incarnation. The Fiat Lingotto plant was a celebrated architectural structure in Turin due to its innovative internal spiral production ramp and rooftop racetrack.\(^\text{14}\) Ultimately, the montage’s juxtaposition of a historic sculpture and contemporary architecture evokes Paladini’s contention that intellectuals should focus on creating modern built environs to facilitate a revolutionary mindset and to create a locus for the proletariat.

Three stripes of primary color cut across the photomontage in straight lines, which cause it to resemble László Moholy-Nagy’s *Human Mechanics* (c.1925; Fig. 8.7) and again show Paladini’s awareness of Bauhaus activity. Yet the lines do not generate the same axionometric perspectival shifts. Instead, Paladini’s photomontage appears to echo artistic developments in

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\(^{14}\) Maria Antonella Pelizzari, *Photography and Italy* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd, 2011), 93-94. Pelizzari discusses Stefano Bricarelli’s, *Helicoidal Ramp at the Fiat Factory* (1927), which may have been known to Paladini through its publication in *Luci e Ombre*. Bricarelli’s photograph, however, is not the source of the spiral staircase image that Paladini incorporated into *Movimento e spazio*. 
Russia, which seems highly likely, as he would have seen examples of Soviet photomontage during his recent trip. In particular, Paladini’s *Movimento e spazio* corresponds with one of the nine cards Klutsis designed for the 1928 Spartakiad (Fig. 8.8). It was an international workers’ sporting event held in Moscow in the summer of 1928. The Spartakiad was instituted to counter the Olympics, which was considered “an elitist spectacle and distraction from the class struggle.”

One of Klutsis’s cards of a female diver is particularly resonant with Paladini’s *La macchina del tempo* and has nearly identical form and similar content as *Movimento e spazio* (Fig. 8.9). Klutsis’s postcard simulated time-based photography to depict the figure of a female diver as she freefalls into the water. He divided the planar space with blocks and lines of primary color, which created spatial juxtapositions that delineated different water sports, like rowing and a men’s swim team. Few words were included in the photomontage; they advertised the date and location of the Spartakiad event, but propaganda slogans were surprisingly absent. The most obvious overlap between Paladini’s *La macchina del tempo* and Klutsis’s postcard was the reference to time-based photography in each. Interestingly, Klutsis actually utilized different images of women and men to create the filmic freefall, which is more apparent in his original photocollage (Fig. 8.10). Paladini’s *Movimento e spazio* also closely resembles Klutsis’s postcard. Both featured a female diver in a nearly identical pose and blocks of primary colors. In another card from the series that depicts shooting skills (Fig. 8.11), Klutsis focused on the target and melded it with a banner that proclaims in German “Every worker must be a soldier in


The meaning of his photomontage is clear – Communism is the ultimate goal and all must fight on behalf of the Revolution. Coincidentally, Paladini began to incorporate targets in his graphic and collage works in 1928 (Fig. 8.12 and Fig. 8.13).

Paladini’s later series of photocollages titled Olympic Games (1934; Fig. 8.14, Fig. 8.15, and Fig. 8.16) provide additional evidence that he was aware of Klutsis’s Spartakiad postcards. Rather than photographs of actual athletes, like in his Movimento e spazio or in Klutsis’s work, Paladini used Greek and Roman sculptures locked against a black grid, emphasizing that antiquities were stagnant and lacked movement. The stasis of Paladini’s Olympic Games’ athletes compared to the dynamism of Klutsis’s Spartakiad postcards created a stark contrast between the two events and, therefore, two systems of government. In addition, Paladini’s posed and static sculptures were not engaged in sport; rather, some were juxtaposed with images of defeat, rape, and war, such a Roman copy of a Hermes sculpture seemingly castrated by the Battle of the Lapiths and Centaurs from the Parthenon Metopes (Fig. 8.17). His reason for creating these photocollages is unknown and it is unlikely that they were ever exhibited. Yet the sculpture provides a clue to their meaning. Hermes had been featured in Paladini’s earlier imagist works to symbolize intellectuals faced with the dilemma of choice to either aid the workers via cultural education or to remain locked in the past. The castrated sculpture perhaps speaks to Paladini’s frustrations with Mussolini’s regime and his own inability to effect societal reforms from within it. The series, which did not coincide with an actual Olympic event, was developed contemporaneously with Paladini’s questioning of the militantly nationalistic nationalistic

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17 Figure 8.10 text: “Jeder Arbeiter-sportler muss sein ein Soldat der Revolution” [sic]
18 The images are reproduced in Lista’s Futurism and Photography, but he did not include any information about the historic background of the photocollages. In addition, the Museo di Storia della Fotografia Fratelli Alinari, which owns the five of the images, does not have any information about them on their website.
promotion of *italianità* by cultural critics and of the rationalists’ invocation of *mediterraneità* in his architecture and exhibition reviews. It can therefore be surmised that these photocollages were intended as a critique of artists, architects, and politicians who appealed to Italy’s historic past in order to promote nationalism in the arts and to garner regime favor or patronage.

When compared to Klutsis’s postcards, Paladini’s photocollages lack two important elements: mechanical reproducibility for mass distribution and agitational propaganda slogans. Paladini soon embraced politically driven captions, which signaled a key transformation in his artistic production. Text became central to Paladini’s work in the early 1930s, particularly in photomontages that critiqued the fascist regime’s involvement in the arts and railed against the political use of *italianità* and *mediterraneità*. In addition, Paladini started to create photomontages specifically for mass production in newspapers and cultural reviews, including *Quadrivio*, *L’Italia Letteraria*, *Rassegna di Architettura*, and *Occidente*.

Paladini published his first and only essay dedicated to photomontage in November 1929 in the Rome-based cultural and literary journal, *L’Italia Letteraria*, entitled “Fotomontage” (“Photomontage”). *L’Italia Letteraria*, formerly titled *La Fiera Letteraria*, became a source for the dissemination of international avant-garde literature and art while at the same time promoting Italian national identity.19 During the course of its publication, co-editors included Curzio Malaparte and Massimo Bontempelli, the co-founders of *Novecento* ('900), and Paladini’s close friend, Umberto Barbaro.20 The journal published short stories and novel excerpts by American,

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Soviet, and European authors as well as employing several Italians living abroad as contributors, including Pannaggi and Corrado Alvaro.  

In a brief prelude to Paladini’s essay, the editor asked, “How many of our readers have never heard about photomontage?,” which indicated how unknown the technique was to the general Italian public. The timing of the article was significant as it was shortly after the *Internationale Ausstellung Film und Foto* (International Exhibition of Film and Photo, or FiFo) in Stuttgart. Lissitzky was again appointed to organize the Soviet section of the exhibition after his success with Pressa. Art historians have identified the most important facet of Lissitzky’s contribution to FiFo was his emphasis on documentary realism and his “symbiotic presentation of film and photography.” Paladini had already noted that these two concepts were pervasive in Moscow in his writings on Soviet film a year earlier. In “Fotomontage” he reiterated his earlier discussions of Soviet models, reasserting that he considered photography, photomontage, and film completely intertwined.

Beyond addressing the basic nature of the medium, Paladini focused on how prevalent photomontage was among the various international avant-garde movements. Although the exact origin of photomontage is highly debatable, Paladini was firm in attributing its genesis to Germany. Specifically, Paladini singled out Germany’s “neo-realist tendencies”, which was

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21 Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities*, 65. I have also reviewed the full run of *L’Italia Letteraria* due to Paladini and Pannaggi’s roles as occasional contributors; Ben-Ghiat does not mention either artists’ essays in her discussion of the journal.
22 Paladini, “Fotomontage,” 4. “Quanti dei nostri lettori non hanno mai inteso parlare di fotomontage?”
23 I could not determine if Paladini attended FiFo as his itinerary from the end of 1929 to the beginning of 1931 is vague. As noted in a prior chapter, some sources assert that he traveled to Czechoslovakia and Russia during this period. In this case, he could have conceivably visited Germany. “Fotomontage,” however, did not specifically mention anything about the FiFo exhibition, which suggests that he did not attend.
likely a reference to the Neue Sachlichkeit and George Grosz’s socialist-infused *tendenzkunst.*

His terminology seemed strategic considering that the verist wing of the Neue Sachlichkeit, including Grosz, was imbued with a leftist agenda that critiqued the rise of Fascism. Paladini had praised the German artist in a 1925 essay for his scathing depictions of the bourgeoisie and was familiar with his communist political affiliation. He also applauded the work of Hannah Höch and László Moholy-Nagy, but did not cite John Heartfield’s overtly communist images. In the text, he denied France a significant role in the development of photomontage and he did not address the surrealist’s use of the medium. He briefly mentioned Man Ray, but reduced his contribution to photomontage to pure formal abstraction. Although initially interested in the Freudian concepts on which the surrealist based their aesthetic theories, Paladini had become increasingly critical of the movement’s methods.

Paladini went on to argue that photomontage found its finest expression in the USSR. He lauded the Soviet Union as “particularly well suited to [photomontage’s] development where the necessity for propaganda found in this modern technique the most appropriate means to exert pressure on the popular imagination that is necessary for government art. In many films we have all seen photomontages in movement.”

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29 Paladini, “Fotomontage,” 4. “…trovava poi il terreno particolarmente adatto al proprio sviluppo nella U.R.S.S. dove le necessità della propaganda trovavano in questamodernissima tecnica il mezzo più idoneo per esercitare quella pressione sulla immaginazione popolare che era necessaria ai fini dell’arte statale. Fotomontages in movimento abbiamo tutti visto applicati in moltissimi films.”
theories. Paladini proved his understanding of these concepts when he asserted their importance in relation to photography as documentary realism:

Photography responds fully to that contemporary necessity of instantly fixing the constantly changing exterior aspects of our apparent world, from the very small to the very large, from the very distant to the very near. Photomontage has given us in turn the means of juxtaposing these aspects for expressive purposes, in a manner so as not to lose the sense of wonder that objective reality awakens in our spirit. Photographic objectification gives us the possibility of valuing fully that potent aesthetic factor which is documentation, to our more spiritually responsive goals.30

Photomontage was assigned the same fundamental nature as Vertov’s Kino-Eye and dependence on documentary material: it was timely, relied on the real, could enhance vision, provided multiple perspectives, and affected the viewer both physically and spiritually.

Paladini concluded with a declaration that he and his former colleague, Pannaggi, were the foremost photomontage artists in Italy and stated that his work was Proustian whereas Pannaggi was a constructivist. As I have demonstrated in Chapter 3, the term “Constructivism” was consistently used by Paladini to denote Suprematism and International Constructivism, by distinction to the Constructors he associated with LEF and Komfut.31 Here, however, the term, Proustian, surprises. There is no mention of it in his prior writings and it may have been a shrewd choice for the literati-dominated readership of L’Italia Letteraria. More likely, however, Paladini was underscoring his belief that photomontages had the ability to evoke a mental, 

30 Paladini, “Fotomontage,” 4. “La fotografia risponde pienamente a quella necessità contemporanea di fissare istantaneamente gli aspetti esteriori, eternamente mutevoli del nostro mondo apparente, dal più piccolo al più grande, dal più lontano al più vicino. Il fotomontage ci ha dato a sua volta il mezzo di accostare questi aspetti per una ragione espressiva, in modo da non perdere quell senso di stupore che la realtà oggettiva sveglia nella nostra anima. L’oggettivazione fotografica ci da la possibilità di valerci pienamente di quel potente fattore estetico che la documentazione, ai nostri fini più ripostamente spirituali.”
31 Paladini, Arte nella Russia.
physical, and spiritual response in the viewer, much like the heightened intensity of Marcel
Proust’s prose.

Paladini included one of his montages with the essay and it clearly focused on the
relationship between film and photography (Fig. 8.18). He thematically split the space along an
implied diagonal that spanned from the lower left to the upper right corner. This divide followed
the angle of a large, splayed hand poised at the top of the montage. On the left side, Paladini
placed fine art objects – a Greek sculpture leaning on a suprematist, axonometric study
surrounded by women clipped from reproductions of Renaissance paintings at his feet. The
suprematist drawing with its random placement of a san serif “K” recalls Paladini’s earlier
painting, *Equilibrismi*, which he self-deprecatingly mocked for its bourgeois and non-functional
nature. In contrast, cutout photographs from film stills dominated the right side of the
montage. This section was further divided into four vignettes of men crouching down and
shielding themselves, which makes it difficult to identify the actors or the characters that they
played. Although covering their faces, the men’s eyes were drawn to the same thing – the giant
face of a child suspended in the middle of the montage. The enlarged head almost suggests the
contemporaneous Neue Sachlichkeit concept of a modernist portrait, as it is unsparing in its
pictorial details. In contrast, Paladini skillfully positioned the sculpture and idealized women
from the Renaissance paintings so that they appear to have averted eyes, unable to look at the
floating head. Staring out from the center is a young boy with a gleeful expression, who looks
like Jackie Coogan from Charlie Chaplin’s famous film, *The Kid* (1921; Fig. 8.19).

\[32\] For a discussion of *Equilibrismi*, see Chapter 5. Paladini placed the painting in *Terra Madre*
alongside Bauhaus-style furniture in a scene depicting the bourgeois appropriation of
International Constructivism.
By using movie stills within the montage, Paladini’s work displayed and equated film and photomontage in a very literal way. Here, film and mechanically reproduced images have created “simultaneous collective reception” that extends beyond the montage into the realm of mass distribution via L’Italia Letteraria. Yet he also conveyed this thematically through the subject matter. The captive attention of the men signified the activating potential of cinema on spectators. Although they are unnerved, the men are fixated on the looming head of the child. In contrast, the traditional fine art objects are static, contemplative, and ineffective. If it is indeed Jackie Coogan, another level of meaning is added. Chaplin, whose communist affiliations were well known, focused on social issues and The Kid tackled the subjects of extreme poverty and child abandonment. The filmic men do not want to look, but are compelled to see the child. The implied meaning is that the child himself was not unnerving, but rather the conditions that caused his situation were. Unlike the lofty and abstract ideals depicted by Greek, suprematist, and Renaissance art, film had the ability to disturb the senses and to display reality that otherwise might go unseen.

Defining Paladini’s Narrative and Cultural Critique Photomontages

In the 1930s Paladini changed his approach to photomontage and began to utilize the medium to censure the Italian government’s involvement in art and architecture. He worked subversively within the system to critique the regime’s methods as well as self-fascistizing artists. Yet Paladini’s use of montage in the 1930s has been overlooked in the literature, perhaps

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33 Benjamin, “The Work of Art,” 217-242. Benjamin’s important treatise on mechanical reproducibility was published after Paladini’s essays on Soviet film and photomontage, but both are engaged with a similar concept of mass reception. Paladini focused more on the relevance of documentary realism but lacked the philosophical underpinnings of Benjamin.
because it is difficult to extricate this work from *Quadrivio*. As noted earlier, the journal was directed by Telesio Interlandi, who supported the fascist regime and increasingly used *Quadrivio* as a platform for spreading pro-fascist, anti-Bolshevik, and anti-Semitic propaganda. Initially the journal had an expansive approach to reporting on art and culture, but it became increasingly conservative leading up to the invasion of Ethiopia in 1935. Paladini worked for *Quadrivio* from August 1933 to April 1935, supplying articles, drawings, page layouts, and photomontages before this radical editorial change and thus his work bears no trace of imperialist propaganda or anti-Semitism – as one would expect. Often his photomontages addressed the inherent internationalism of modern art and architecture and poked fun at critics who advocated for *italianità* to the exclusion of foreign influences. Paladini left the journal prior to its intense focus on racism; nonetheless his compelling photomontage techniques were adapted by later art contributors and the medium was a featured element in *La difesa della razza* (Fig. 8.20).

34 Schiaffini, “I fotomontaggi,” 54-65. Schiaffini is one of the few who has considered Paladini’s photomontages. She does not explore the connections between *Quadrivio* and the actual text that Paladini is illustrating nor does she engage with a discussion of the political or narrative facets of his work. Carpi, *Bolscevico immaginista* and Lista, *Dal Futurismo* discuss some of Paladini’s photomontages, but they mostly overlook the works from *Quadrivio*.

35 This information was determined by looking through available issues of the journal. By mid-1935 the journal became increasingly political with a decrease in arts and literature. I could not locate any artwork by Paladini for *Quadrivio* after April 1935.


37 Etlin, *Modernism*, 290-291. Although founded with a basis in militant Fascism, Interlandi did not use *Quadrivio* as a platform to target international art and architecture until after the invasion of Ethiopia in 1935.

In order to understand how the Soviet-derived techniques used by Paladini were co-opted by fascist artists, it is first necessary to track how his photomontages developed in the early 1930s. This requires examining his work for *Quadrivio* as well as for Armando Gherlardino’s *Occidente* and Le Edizioni d’Italia. In contrast to Interlandi, Gherlardino promoted international artistic and literary exchanges, as well as modernism, in his cultural review and publishing company. Paladini created graphic designs that utilized photomontage for book covers in the modern writers series of Le Edizioni d’Italia and for *Occidente*’s contributors’ page. Only photomontages signed by Paladini will be attributed to him as other artists imitated his style, but they did not always sign their works. This distinction is important, as some images from *Quadrivio* have been confused as Paladini’s, misrepresenting his political position during this period. In addition, his imitators continued with *Quadrivio* after Paladini no longer worked for the journal and adapted his technique to promote race laws and colonialism. The end of Paladini’s engagement with *Quadrivio* in April 1935 coincided with his first flight from Italy to the United States. After reviewing the entire run of *Quadrivio* and by applying these criteria, more than twenty-five photomontages and fifty illustrations can be attributed to Paladini. In addition, he produced seven photomontages for *Occidente* and five photomontage cover designs for books published by Le Edizioni d’Italia.

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39 I am establishing this precedent after reviewing all of Paladini’s photomontages for *Quadrivio*. “Fiorini” and “S.E.M.” (Bernardo Leporini) are the two signatures attached to works that most closely imitate Paladini’s style of photomontage. Photomontages by S.E.M. replaced Paladini’s in *Quadrivio* when he stopped working for the journal in 1935. One major element that distinguished S.E.M. and Fiorini’s works from Paladini’s was the use of drawing on top of the photomontage. For additional information on S.E.M., see Cassata, "La Difesa della razza," 13 and 341-342.

Paladini’s photomontages from the 1930s can also be divided into two categories. The first category can be ascribed the term “narrative” because Paladini used the medium to illustrate short stories, excerpts from and covers of novels, travel essays, and biographical sketches of famous writers. In many ways, these works continued the art and literature collaborations of his imagist period and his technique was very similar; therefore, they only partially reflect his above described montage theories. He contributed narrative style photomontages to Le Edizioni d’Italia, Occidente, and Quadrivio in the 1930s. Paladini regularly incorporated montage effects, photo-based materials, and avant-garde graphic design in order to visualize the storyline. As Quadrivio became more conservative, his narrative photomontages were increasingly replaced by his drawings (Fig. 8.21). The second category will be referred to as “cultural critique” photomontages as Paladini made works that assessed the state of the arts in Italy and subversively countered the fascist regime’s involvement in cultural matters. These works were created almost exclusively for Quadrivio, which is surprising considering its pro-fascist and conservative platform.

Many of Paladini’s narrative images are particularly noteworthy because they appear to be inspired by the late and post-factographic period of Soviet photomontage from the late 1920s through the mid-1930s, which was typified by illustrated photoessays in journals such as SSSR na stroike (USSR in Construction, 1930-1941), Daesh (Let’s Give, 1929-1930), and 30 Dnei (30

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41 I am assigning the terms “narrative” and “cultural critique” and establishing the parameters of their definition, as these works have not been discussed in any of the writings on Paladini.
42 His last narrative photomontage was published on October 28, 1934 and accompanied Marcello Gallian, "Assedio a Roma," Quadrivio, 2, no. 53 (October 28, 1934): 2.
43 Paladini created two cultural critique works featured in Rassegna di Architettura, which were discussed at length in Chapter 6.
Days, 1924-1933). As discussed earlier, the shift to factography occurred in tandem with the launching of Novyi LEF, when writers began to emphasize “literature of fact” and artists used photography and film stills to illustrate the text (Fig. 8.22). Margarita Tupitsyn has suggested that the factographic period extended until the mid-1930s in the Soviet Union and was typified by an “emphasis on social facts and reference to topics of the moment,” but came to an end once photomontage was “utilized to mythologize post-revolutionary Soviet reality in general and the figure of Stalin in particular.” After reviewing SSSR na stroike from 1930 to 1937, which was known in Italy and advertised in Casabella until 1934, stylistic patterns and overlaps can be seen when comparing Paladini’s work with his Soviet contemporaries. In particular, SSSR na stroike used linear layouts with blocked typographic designs, circular insets, and standard print colors that emphasized industry, production and the new reality of Soviet life (Fig. 8.23 and Fig. 8.24). Special features and editorials would often include several photographs and photomontages intertwined as accompanying material to provide visual documentation. As will be demonstrated, Paladini incorporated similar designs in his own work. His style differed from other Italian photomonteurs, such as Luigi Veronesi and Marcello Nizzoli, who created layouts for Domus and utilized multiple colors, painterly elements, and overlaid drawings (Fig. 8.25 and Fig. 8.26). It is important to note, however, that there was an influx of influences from the


45 Lawton, “Introduction,” 47.

46 Tupitsyn, “From the Politics,” 120. See also, Buchloh, “From Faktura,” 117. Buchloh, however, states, “by 1931 the goals of factography had clearly been abandoned.” This date is based on Rodchenko’s photo-assignment at the White Sea Canal for SSSR na stroike. I use Tupitsyn’s dates and definitions of the factographic style and how it extended to SSSR na stroike.

47 I reviewed Casabella for mentions and discussions of Soviet architecture. No major articles were printed on the subject, but the final section of the journal dedicated to international architectural reviews listed and summarized SSSR na stroike until 1934.
Bauhaus and Soviet models into Italy beginning in 1932, as seen in the production of Studio Boggeri and Campo Grafico, yet Paladini’s foray into photomontage and his essays on film and montage techniques pre-dated this shift.\textsuperscript{48}

Paladini created multi-page, photo-based layouts to illustrate the content of narrative pieces, like his Soviet contemporaries. Yet a major difference between Paladini and Soviet photomonteurs was that the former illustrated fictional stories and authors’ biographies whereas the latter documented and propagandized current events, like Stalin’s Five-Year plans and communist life in the Soviet Union. Paladini likely opted to avoid the factographic method to illustrate current events in Italy, as it would have served as fascist regime propaganda. Regardless, Paladini mimicked the style, if not the content, of Soviet photomontage. He juxtaposed text with dynamic graphics and cutouts culled from documentary sources, such as photographs printed in newspapers. For example, the December 17, 1933 edition of Quadrivio featured an expository piece entitled “L’America parla,” which Paladini illustrated with news and magazine cuttings from or about America (Fig. 8.27). No author was listed, perhaps in an attempt to let America speak for itself through excerpts of literature by celebrated American writers, such as Waldo Frank and John Dos Passos.

In “L’America parla,” Paladini weaved together images that were meant to evoke America, including those of bloodied gangsters, police brutality, and union marches. Paladini used photographs of union strikes to encourage the factual nature of the article, but he also mixed in movie stills from crime dramas that were clearly not documentary photographs of real events. Scantily clad starlets, the Radio City Rockettes, and bathing beauties next to the phrase “sex appeal” dominated one section on the new, American women. His layout spread over several

\textsuperscript{48} Pelizzari, \textit{Photography in Italy}, 84-98.
pages, illustrating various facets of the story. He interspersed text blocks with photographs, utilized raked angles of vision, and reduced the number of manipulated cutouts—techniques that were prevalent in recent spreads in *SSSR na stroike* (Fig. 8.28).

Yet the piece did aim to criticize the United States’ decadence and downfall. Very anti-American, the essay completely contrasted with Paladini’s own writings and his celebration of American freedom in the arts, as seen in his 1934 Venice Biennale exhibition review. He was also romantically involved with an American citizen, Muriel Olsan, who he would eventually marry in 1935. As such, this photomontage and page layout typified how even extremist journals, like *Quadrivio*, hired artists despite their individual political orientation or personal lives until the mid-1930s. It seems particularly odd that Paladini would illustrate an anti-American piece, but it may be that photographic depictions of union uprisings and the inclusion of well-known American communist writers was an appealing assignment for him. “L’America parla” is an interesting example of how Fascism positioned itself as the Third Way between capitalism and Communism. Here, the words of Frank, an anti-capitalist, American writer affiliated with Communism, along with photomontages by Paladini, a noted leftist Italian artist,

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50 New York City, New York. Marriage certificate no. 12531 (1935), Paladini-Olsan; Office of the City Clerk Marriage License Bureau, New York. Muriel listed Olsan as her last name on the marriage certificate (it was her last name from her first marriage), but her maiden name was Paladini. This was determined by reviewing her marriage certificate, appeal for US citizenship, and US census records. In addition, ship logs show that she had already visited and was in contact with Paladini in 1931. Vinicio Paladini, United States of America Petition for Naturalization, February 26, 1945, Ancestry.com. http://www.ancestry.com (accessed November 15, 2012). The petition show that Paladini’s wife, Muriel, was born in France in 1907, immigrated to New York in 1907, and was granted US citizenship in 1932.
51 Cassata, "La Difesa della razza," 8. Cassata discusses how pro-fascist Telesio Interlandi included work by leftist artists (including Paladini) on the arts and culture page of *Il Tevere* and *Quadrivio*. 
were used to vaunt Fascism over rival systems of government.\textsuperscript{52} It also revealed that photomontage derived from leftist origin was potentially problematic, because the medium was intentionally ambiguous in order to activate and engage the spectator. Without didacticism, the images were open to interpretation and therefore their meaning could easily be swayed based on surrounding text or even the political orientation, real or implied, of the publication in which they were reproduced.

Paladini provided photomontages for excerpts from Riccardo Marchi’s \textit{La vigilia e la carne} (\textit{The Night and the Flesh}) in the May 13, 1934 issue of \textit{Quadrivio}. Marchi’s novel was one of the first books banned in Italy after changes in the regime’s literary censorship policies in 1934.\textsuperscript{53} Local prefectures were put in charge of book censorship, but beginning in April 1934 Mussolini enacted a policy that required publishers to submit copies of new books to the Ministry of the Interior and the Press Office for review. Some hypothesize that \textit{La vigilia e la carne} was banned for its racy material, but the excerpt included in \textit{Quadrivio} suggests that the book included material deemed questionable by the regime for its Bolshevik connotations.\textsuperscript{54} Interestingly, the excerpt drew attention to and questioned what was considered suspect by the regime. Furthermore, the commentary of the main character, a man named Luciano, alluded to the lurking racist accusations directed toward the avant-garde in the mid-1930s, and yet it also questioned those assumptions.

\textsuperscript{52} Carpi, \textit{Bolscevico immaginista}, 62. Carpi does not formally analyze this photomontage; instead, he positions it as a juxtaposition for Paladini between the myth of America and the Soviet Union.

\textsuperscript{53} Guido Bonsaver, \textit{Censorship and Literature in Fascist Italy} (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 95-128.

\textsuperscript{54} Bonsaver, \textit{Censorship and Literature}, 103-104. Bonsaver suggests that it was banned for being sexually provocative based on the title alone. In the excerpt reprinted in \textit{Quadrivio}, the story has sexual undertones, but it focuses primarily on the dadaist and communist books found in one of the character’s library.
The excerpt focused on Luciano’s perusal of a library that belongs to a beautiful woman named Mary. The foreign books that Luciano found within the room confused him. Among Mary’s collection were Dadaist writings. As Luciano’s eyes landed on the books, he commented aloud “Dadaism, the last effort of Jewish destruction.” Upon his anti-Semitic utterance, Luciano then began to ponder the true nature of Dadaism and debated whether Mary was not only beautiful, but also an intellectual. The excerpt is jarring because it jumps between Luciano’s assumptions and then his reconsiderations of those assumptions. Next, Luciano stumbled upon various communist texts in the library and found himself particularly fascinated by the Bolshevik poetry of Aleksandr Blok. Luciano ruminated on the meaning of the “beautiful” Bolshevik poems and then censored himself, noting how removed they are from “our spirit.” Confounded by Mary’s collection of Bolshevik literature, Luciano then compared her sensuality and charm to the various poems about the triumph of Communism. Beyond the confusing twists in the narrator’s perception of the foreign literature, Marchi did something quite unorthodox and reproduced large sections of the “questionable” poems by Blok and other communist writers. The vacillation between Luciano’s condemnation and praise of the “judeo-Bolshevik” texts and Marchi’s extensive reproduction of them was highly ambiguous. The technique used by him suggests how writers were able to insert communist writings subversively into mainstream journals, even as the book itself was ultimately censored.

Particularly noteworthy was Paladini’s Dada-inspired photomontage that accompanied this installment of Marchi’s story (Fig. 8.29). He played off of the sexually provocative story

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56 Marchi, “La vigilia,” 4. “Un’intellettuale Mary?” This comment directly follows Luciano’s discovery of the Dada book in the library and Marchi’s inclusion of a section of Blok’s poem.
and created a photomontage that featured a sensual woman placed prominently on the page. The word “Dada” was repeated throughout the image and strategically positioned across the woman’s body. A spiraling nautilus shell next to her head represented Luciano’s pondering of the complex nature of Dadaism, which he likened to a shell.\(^{58}\) Within the image Paladini also included the cast of characters cut straight from a playbill for Tristan Tzara’s *La Deuxième aventure céleste de Monsieur Antipyrine (The Second Celestial Adventure of Mr. Benzedrine, 1920).*\(^{59}\) Interestingly, this list of characters was not part of Marchi’s story excerpt. Paladini was likely familiar with the extremely anarchic play and its performance, and therefore added the characters to exemplify Dadaism in France. In addition, a stanza from Blok’s poem, “The Twelve,” overlapped the woman’s torso in the photomontage.\(^{60}\) The inclusion of the poem recalled Paladini’s review of the Russian Pavilion at the 1924 Venice Biennale, which quoted Blok’s “The Scythians.” “The Twelve” was also an incendiary poem that celebrated the Bolshevik revolution: “Wind, wind in all of creation: hatred for the bourgeoisie stokes a world fire and it extinguishes in blood; God bless us!”\(^{61}\) The portion of the poem reproduced by both Marchi and Paladini was significant as blowing wind was often Blok’s metaphor for the spread of Communism. Marchi’s book and Paladini’s photomontage flirted with the limits of what was acceptable during this period. Both created potentiality for mutually contradictory readings; they could be interpreted as anti-Dada and anti-Bolshevik or subversively complicit.

\(^{61}\) Marchi, “La vigilia,” 4. The following stanza from Blok is included: “Vento, vento, in tutto il creato/ In odio ai borghesi / attizzeremo un incendio mondiale / e lo spegneremo nel sangue! / Dio ci benedica!” Translation is based on the Italian text rather than the Stallworthy translation to retain the exactitude of what was printed in Italian.
Another subset of the narrative category was a group of works that Paladini designed for biographical sketches about famous artists, architects, and writers. One layout in particular, due to its circular insets and block text, resembled contemporaneous examples in SSSR na stroike (Fig. 8.30). “Massimo Bontempelli” by Marcello Gallian was published in Quadrivio in December 1933. Gallian provided a short biography of the Quadrante founder and celebrated his contributions to Italian literature (Fig. 8.31). Both Bontempelli and Gallian were acquaintances of Paladini, dating from the mid-1920s and resulting from their work for L’Interplanetario and Spirito Nuovo. Befitting a non-fiction piece, Paladini utilized a factual, photojournalist style of page layouts and photography. He used a variety of documentary photographs: some of Bontempelli during a live radio broadcast, covers of his books, and Novecento (‘900), the journal he founded in the mid-1920s. Interspersed were Paladini’s geometric graphics that provided continuity to the strict grid-like pattern of the photographs and enhanced the visual flow for the reader.

The majority of Paladini’s layouts for Occidente were narrative photomontages to announce an edition’s literary contributors. Many of these montages lacked the complexity of his Quadrivio designs and were simply cutouts of the heads of the various authors (Fig. 8.32). This same technique was used by SSSR na stroike and Daesh, especially for their “day in the life of” stories about shock workers, coal miners, and collective farmers. It was also common to Italian journals, like L’Italia Letteraria (Fig. 8.33), but the difference was that Soviet photomonteurs placed portraits directly within the text as a graphic element. One of the most

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62 Tupitsyn, “Photo-Still,” 35-53. Tupitsyn has described the style that typified this era of photomontage in the USSR.
63 Carpi, Bolscevico immaginista, 143.
64 Marcello Gallian, “Massimo Bontempelli,” Quadrivio 2, no. 9, (December 24, 1933): 3.
humorous examples of Paladini’s biographical photomontages was titled “Gioventù di Marinetti” (“Marinetti’s Youth”), which was featured in *Occidente* in January-March 1934 (Fig. 8.34). Here, Paladini assembled various images that referenced the life of the founding futurist. Perhaps the most entertaining portion is Marinetti’s face on the body of a North African woman in traditional dress, which recalled his invocation of his Sudanese wet-nurse in “The Foundation and Manifesto of Futurism.”66 Although the montage was not signed, it has been credibly attributed to Paladini.67 Interestingly, the list of illustrations page also omitted this information (perhaps a continuation of the animosity between Paladini and Marinetti) and instead documented the sources for each cutout, which provides rare insight into the extent of research Paladini put into the creation of his photomontages.68

Paladini also utilized the narrative technique for the covers of novels written by former imagist collaborators, such as Umberto Barbaro and Dino Terra, and he became a featured book cover designer for the modern series published by Le Edizioni d’Italia, which included Elio Talarico’s *Tatuaggio* (*Tattoo*, 1931, Fig. 8.35). His constructivist graphic design lent credibility to the international and modern claims of a publication division dedicated to the latest literary offerings by young authors. Paladini also manipulated these cover designs to insert his political opinions wherever possible, overlapping with his cultural critique style of photomontage. Talarico’s *Tatuaggio* was an exotic tale that documented the lives of the decadent bourgeoisie.69 Paladini used photographic images of both a classic Greek sculpture and an African woman (likely a Mursi), whose face bears an upper and lower lip plate. He marked both the Greek

67 Echaurren, *Vinicio Paladini futurista*, 84. Attributing the photomontage to Paladini is credible, especially after reviewing the entire run of *Occidente* and finding he was the only photomontage contributor to the journal.
68 “Note alla illustrazione,” *Occidente* 3, no. 6 (January-March 1934), 167.
69 Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities*, 57.
sculpture and the African woman with tattoos, which alluded to not only the title of the book, but also unified the two. Paladini’s montage provided a very different reading of African colonialism than commonly found in the period leading up to the invasion of Ethiopia as it reiterated his assertion of the commonalities among the brotherhood of all peoples. By graffititiing both the Greek sculpture and the African woman with tattoos, Paladini provoked the reader to contemplate whether a disparity truly existed between the two or if the promotion of colonialism and romanità were equally disturbing concepts. Yet cultural comparison photomontages would later be utilized for racist and colonialist purposes in La difesa della razza and Quadrivio in the second half of the 1930s (Fig. 8.36).

Paladini’s cultural critique photomontages illuminate how he operated within the fascist regime and responded to its changing policies on art, architecture, and literature. Clearly aware of the fine line between sponsorship and censorship, he noticed the problematic nature of a patronage system that awarded those artists who promoted regime propaganda. Rather than just writing about these issues, as he had done in his exhibition reviews, Paladini utilized photomontage to address coercion, cooption, and opportunism of the system. Some Italian modernists who were influenced by Soviet montage used the style to promote Fascism (Fig. 8.37), whereas others, like Paladini, employed it to critique the regime obliquely. The fragmentary collage structure allowed multiple ways of reading the montage. Although he was intentionally ambiguous with his images, he started to add captions in his work that were scathing indictments of regime sponsored cultural events and programs. Paladini’s photomontage and text combinations flirted with the limits of Mussolini’s pluralistic cultural policies in the

pages of *Quadrivio*, one of the more conservative fascist journals, critiquing the regime’s patronage programs and the resultant promotion of nationalism.

An example of Paladini’s cultural critique photomontages was included in the October 28, 1934 edition (Fig. 8.38). Placed at the bottom of the page and unrelated to the surrounding articles, the montage showed a winged man in long johns, trying to put on a black shirt. Behind him a chest of drawers overflows with non-black dress shirts. In the foreground another man with his back to the viewer directs the poet in the selection of his attire, coercing him into wearing the black button down. The meaning was suggested by the caption: “The black shirt of the poet, in other words, a desperate undertaking.” Paladini’s photomontage pointedly illustrated that the poet would need to cut off his wings in order to fit into the black shirt of Mussolini’s regime. The act of cutting off his wings was like falling from heaven; poets were compromising themselves in a Faustian bargain with the regime for patronage. It was probably the most succinct statement found in the Italian press of Paladini’s opinion of the new cultural policies of the regime and also how the fascist revolution was not something he equated with the spiritual revolution he desired.

A May 27, 1934 photomontage entitled “Paradise Lost” critiqued the recently opened Venice Biennale (Fig. 8.39). A bourgeois gentleman with dark wings and labeled “1800s” swoops down, blocking two modernist sculptures from entering the exhibition hall of the Italian Pavilion. Here, Paladini referred to the overwhelming amount of traditional art on view at the “Retrospective of Nineteenth-Century Portraiture” special exhibition and the antagonism toward modern art at the 1934 Venice Biennale. This photomontage was published contemporaneously with his *Occidente* review, “La vita artistica: Note sulla biennale veneziana,” whose content

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drove the same point: “This Biennale is seen by many as an affirmation against modern art, the so-called political and cerebral art,” an allusion to modern art being considered Bolshevik.73

In the July 22, 1934 issue, Paladini’s montage combined a beach scene and two bureaucrats shuffing papers between one another (Fig. 8.40). Five lifesaver ring buoys labeled with the word “premio” (prize) occupy the foreground. Below, the caption conveyed the meaning: “A.A.A. bathing articles – buoyancy guaranteed – lasts a minimum of a year – no longer unknown and misunderstood.”74 Although nothing denoted that the montage alluded to the fine art system, it can be surmised from the date that Paladini was again criticizing the 1934 Venice Biennale. In addition, the buildings reinforced that the location was likely Venice and specifically the Lido. Paladini equated the prizes to flotation devices in order to poke fun at the patronage award system. They provided artists with financial solvency and bestowed them with temporary fame. Paladini abhorred the system because it encouraged artists to pander to the regime rather than create relevant, or purposeful, works of art and architecture.

Paladini questioned the efficacy of the regime’s corporatist reorganization of book publishing companies in his montage from November 12, 1933 (Fig. 8.41). This photomontage featured a circle that showed the book publishing cycle – including elements that traced the process from writing to printing – but an arrow broke the circle. Paladini placed a man at the tip of the arrow and labeled him “public.” Paladini depicted the “public” as a worker, dressed in traditional blue-collar clothing complete with a Menlo Cossack style jacket. He contrasted the worker’s clothing with the publishing executives, who are clad in business suits. With his back

73 Paladini, “La Vita artistica,” 61. “Si è voluta vedere da molti, in questa Biennale, una affermazione contro l’arte moderna, la cosiddetta arte ‘polemica e cerebrale’…”
turned to the process, the worker’s posture suggests a complete lack of interest. The caption confirmed that the montage represented the new means of corporative book production and advised the reader, “Please note, the cycle needs a little repair,” for it clearly did not take into account the needs or desires of the workers.\textsuperscript{75}

Paladini’s ability to proffer his biting satire began to dwindle by 1935. His full-page photomontage layouts became increasingly rare in the pages of Quadrivio and eventually disappeared. Even his subsequent articles written about Mario Ridolfi and Adalberto Libera lacked full-page photomontages; they only had a few judiciously chosen photographs (Fig. 8.42). His photomontage story layouts ceased to appear and he began to work only as an illustrator. While his quick sketches captured the essence of a story, they too became less avant-garde and decreased in number during his tenure at Quadrivio. His drawings no longer tumbled across the page, interspersed with text and interesting graphics (Fig. 8.43), but were confined to small, set placement on the page (Fig. 8.44).

Quadrivio became more intransigent as the editor Telesio Interlandi aligned with Roberto Farinacci and the extremists of the fascist party.\textsuperscript{76} By mid-1935 Interlandi increased its political focus and decreased its cultural sections. Editorials on race and fascist policies modeled after the National Socialists were published consistently after Italy invaded Ethiopia. Avant-garde artwork along with a number of its contributors, such as Umberto Barbaro and Dino Terra, disappeared from the pages of Quadrivio, as they were considered associated with internationalism.\textsuperscript{77} Ultimately, Paladini’s photomontage commentaries were cut. Whether he

\textsuperscript{75} Vinicio Paladini, Photomontage, November 1933, in Quadrivio 2, no. 3 (November 12, 1933): 1. “N.B. [nota bene] – il ciclo ha bisogno d’una piccola riparazione.”
\textsuperscript{76} Cannistraro, Historical Dictionary, 194-197 and 281.
\textsuperscript{77} This information was determined by looking through the journal. Barbaro continued to publish articles on film through 1936, but these eventually ended as well.
was no longer invited to participate or whether he chose to stop contributing to the journal is unknown. Regardless, Paladini’s affiliation with the pro-fascist *Quadrivio* came to an abrupt end in April 1935. In addition, after that year, his essays and artwork were no longer featured in any publications within Italy.\(^7\)

**Paladini’s Soviet Film and Photomontage Theory Applied to Fascist Exhibition Design**

The *Mostra della rivoluzione fascista* in 1932 was one of the most significant manifestations of modernist and photo-based design used for regime propaganda in Italy. The exhibition opened at the Palazzo delle Esposizioni in Rome on October 29, 1932 in celebration of the ten-year anniversary of Mussolini’s triumphal March on Rome.\(^7\) Mario De Renzi and Adalberto Libera modified the neoclassic façade of the building to reflect both modern architecture and the strength of the fascist regime. Multiple artists and architects contributed to the creation of the individual rooms within the exhibition space, including the Novecento artist, Mario Sironi, and the futurist, Enrico Prampolini. Although each artist and architect designed their rooms based on individual aesthetic concerns, the *Mostra della rivoluzione fascista* maintained a consistent flow, as each room exemplified a different moment within the ten year history of the regime.\(^8\) Dino Alfieri, who organized and coordinated the event, appealed to the

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7 The last article Paladini published in *Quadrivio* was about the architect, Adalberto Libera – see Paladini, “Adalberto,” 4 and Chapter 6. The last image he printed in *Quadrivio* was a set of illustrations and a potential set design for Marcello Gallian’s *I Tre Atti* on April 21, 1935. See Vinicio Paladini, Illustrations, *Quadrivio* 3, no. 25 (April 21, 1935): 7. I could not locate any articles or artwork by Paladini published in the journal after April 21, 1935.


public to provide original materials related to the rise of Fascism to be incorporated in the exhibition rooms. The inclusion of fascist ephemera and photo-based exhibition designs imbued the event with a documentary quality that was reinforced by Alfieri and Luigi Freddi’s attendant catalogue.

Giuseppe Terragni, a rationalist architect, created Room O, which has been vaunted by historians as the pinnacle of the *Mostra della rivoluzione fascista* due to its powerful combination of photomontage and dynamic spatial arrangements (Fig. 8.45). The room was designed to affect the spectator with overwhelming visual stimulation. Rather than small, newspaper-sized photomontages, Terragni used large-scale photo-based imagery that covered every surface, creating a filmic quality. A metal contour sculpture of a striding Duce was anchored above the spectator on one side (Fig. 8.46); another wall was covered by the masses gathered ostensibly to listen to the fascist leader speak. Cutout photographs of hands extended out from the crowd in a dynamic angular pattern across the wall, recalling the fascist salute (Fig. 8.47). The photofrieze crowd also merged with giant turbine wheels, emphasizing the role of every Italian citizen in the progress of the regime. Interspersed throughout the room were historic materials curated by Arrigo Arrigotti, which documented the triumphal year of Fascism. Every element in the room served to testify to the power and success of the fascist regime.

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Terragni’s Room O has often been considered a fascist commandeering of El Lissitzky’s 1928 Pressa and 1929 FiFo exhibition designs and Klutsis’s posters for Stalin’s Five-Year Plan for regime propaganda (Fig. 8.48, Fig. 8.49, and Fig. 8.50). Yet there was already a culture of photomontage and an interest in propaganda in Italy before artists saw it applied to exhibition design. Jeffrey Schnapp has traced the beginning of fascist photographic propaganda to the regime’s use of current event images in Rivista Illustrata del Popolo d’Italia in the mid-1920s. In addition, Emily Braun has drawn a correlation between the Mostra della rivoluzione fascista and Mario Sironi’s exhibition designs for the Terza Biennale Internzionale d’Arts Decorative in Monza in 1927 and the Italian section at Pressa in 1928. Even so, the Mostra della rivoluzione fascista is considered a departure from these early Italian incarnations of photographic propaganda for its extensive use of Soviet montage and exhibition techniques. The actual influence of Paladini’s writings about Soviet models, which were published in Italian journals prior to the Mostra della rivoluzione fascista, has yet to be explored. In particular, his dissemination of the propagandistic usage of documentary realism, spectator activation, and mass reception has yet to be fully addressed in relation to Room O.

Benjamin Buchloh has suggested that P.M. Bardi’s knowledge of Lissitzky’s work and Paladini, “an expert on the art of the Soviet avant-garde,” informed Terragni’s Room O. Indeed, Terragni, as an architect and fellow Rationalist, would have been aware of Paladini’s

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86 Braun, Mario Sironi, 142-157.
87 Buchloh, “From Faktura,” 110. Buchloh is citing Herta Wescher, Collage (Cologne: Dumont Verlag, 1968), 76. Wescher and Buchloh both assert that P.M. Bardi created his Tavolo degli orrori based on examples of Lissitzky’s work published in Western art journals. Paladini’s interest in Soviet photomontage is solely attributed to his birth in Moscow. Neither delves into details of Paladini’s life, his Soviet contacts, or how he was instrumental to the discussion of Soviet film and architectural theory in the late 1920s in Italy.
publications on Soviet art and architecture. Buchloh, however, does not consider the specifics of Paladini’s influence, his promotion of photographic and filmic montage in the Italian press, or his impact on fascist culture. Significantly, he fails to mention Paladini’s affiliation with Communism and long standing engagement with Soviet Constructivism. Instead, Buchloh has drawn a loose connection between Lissitzky’s Pressa and two Italian artists, Bardi and Paladini, and has summarized that the photomontage aesthetic underwent a conversion in the hands of Italian fascists. Although the Pressa and FiFo photomontage exhibition designs were clearly influential, as maintained by several historians, Lissitzky was only one piece of a much larger mosaic of influences on Room O at the Mostra della rivoluzione fascista. Room O needs to be reconsidered in light of Paladini’s contributions to the discussions of the filmic montage and documentary realism to understand how these concepts were transformed by Terragni from a medium apropos for communist agitational propaganda to one that promoted Fascism.

Paladini’s essays helped provide the theoretical groundwork that led to the filmic spectacle of Terragni’s Room O. The underlying culture of photographic and filmic montage, the desire for objective realism, and the documentary requirement for propaganda had foundations in the articles Paladini wrote about Soviet film and photomontage beginning in 1927. The relationship between his photomontages and film has been overlooked because they are two seemingly different fields; he, however, considered the two interchangeable and had established a precedent for the use of documentary images in film and photomontage as the most effective way to activate the spectator. Lissitzky had similarly connected the documentary photographic and filmic montage at FiFo in 1929. Paladini, in “Fotomontage,” affirmed the

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88 Buchloh, “From Faktura,” 110.
89 Schiaffini, “I fotomontaggi,” 60-61. Schiaffini suggests a connection, but never provides evidence through visual analysis or comparative study of film theory. In contrast, I focus on the specifics of how Paladini’s photomontage technique and theory was informed by Dziga Vertov.
connection in the Italian press and had been making the same claim since 1927. Furthermore, the content of his photocollages and montages asserted the same connection since he returned from Moscow in early 1928. Paladini went one step further – he began using his photomontages for, albeit extremely ambiguous, political commentary in mass distributed publications. It was only after the influx of fascist photomontage and the Mostra della rivoluzione fascista that Paladini abandoned his cultural critique montages (with their often difficult to discern political messages) in minor cultural reviews. Thereafter, he began to add captions and to publish his work in major regime-sponsored journals, like Quadrivio, which suggests that he was reacting against the strategic employment of Soviet models for fascist propaganda.

Paladini’s references to the film theories of Alexei Gan and Vertov featured in his writings, such as “Cinemagrafo dal vero” and “Lettere dalla Russia Cinematografi – Teatri e propaganda nella Russia sovietica” both published in 1928, focused on the impact of propaganda and the educational efficacy of documentary montage for the masses. Paladini asserted that documentary images were integral to educate the masses about the full extent of the communist revolution in the remote regions of Russia, because they were immediately recognizable by workers who had experienced and witnessed revolution as it emerged from the factory floor. Although Paladini’s articles celebrated the distinctly communist foundations of photo-based agitational propaganda, the concept was readily transferable to the Italian context. In Room O the inclusion of documentary photographs, crowd scenes, and filmic scale reproduced the Soviet propaganda experiments addressed by Paladini in his contributions to journals and in his discussions of irrealità. The juxtaposition of images was designed to awaken the spectator by directly stimulating his mind and revealing that which is normally unseen by the naked human

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eye. Paladini introduced spectatorship into his montages by incorporating small crowds attentively watching the scene unfold before them. Here, Room O functioned visually to inform those who entered (and may have not actually witnessed the March on Rome) about the early years of Fascism by combining documentary materials with crowd scenes. The scale jarred the senses by making the spectator the same size as the crowd, causing the viewer to feel included and involved as a witness to the birth of Fascism.

The cinematic scale of the Room O montages simulated Soviet filmic montage, yet subverted the purpose of documentary realism and its foundations in Lenin’s materialism by using it to herald a fascist revolution. Rather than activating the viewer with an overwhelming sense of truth (or what Vertov and Klutsis termed “dynamic realism”), the exhibition inundated the viewer with visual stimuli.92 Herein lies the problematic nature of photomontage: regardless of the ideological foundations in either Fascism or Communism, photomonteurs utilized the same technical strategies. Terragni adapted the didactic and activating components of Soviet photomontage and film that Paladini had written about since 1927 for his installation. The angled walls and looming sculpture of Mussolini bore down on the visitors, imposing a rigid sense of control. Room O completely subverted the leftist origins of the medium by transforming it from documentary to doctrinaire; from objective realism to subjective realism. The institutionalization of fascist myths in Room O mimicked the concurrent transition of Soviet factography to mythography rather than Vertov’s theories of material realism.93

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For Vertov, documentary material required no explanation and revealed the dynamic reality of the rise of the proletariat. In this sense, Terragni’s Room O had more in common with the doctrinaire and propagandistic practices of Lissitzky and Vsevolod Pudovkin; the former created accompanying texts for his exhibition designs and the latter relied on film scripts. The portion of the *Mostra della rivoluzione fascista* catalogue dedicated to Room O didactically proclaimed the purpose of every element in the room and constantly asserted that it was documentary. Disturbingly, it reiterated Paladini’s articles on the impact of propaganda and documentary realism on the spectator. The author repeatedly used the term “document” to emphasize the veracity of the room’s images celebrating Fascism and the message behind it: “The artistic component of this room, which documents the year 1922 up to the beginning of October, is the work of Giuseppe Terragni; Arrigo Arrigotti is responsible for the historical element. The room documents the triumphant march of Fascism...”.94 The blend of text and photography in Room O aimed to enforce the regime’s claim to its revolutionary status and natural progression in the preceding ten years. The catalogue described Terragni’s installation as a means to give “the entire documentary collection a sense of construction.”95 It goes on to claim that visitors “should experience an immediate and contradictory sensation, one both essential and dynamic,” which echoed Paladini’s understanding of Vertov’s filmic montage as the constructive organization of objective realism to create a physical response in the viewer.96

One visual component within Room O, the churning turbine wheels, is significant as it undermines Paladini’s belief in the liberating force of the machine and bears witness to the

95 Alfieri and Freddi, “Room O,” 231.
96 Alfieri and Freddi, “Room O,” 231.
ultimate subversion of his Soviet constructivist ideals into fascist propaganda. Here, Buchloh’s
description succinctly analyzes Terragni’s masterful image of the crowd and turbine:

…the outstretched hand of the individual is replaced by the outlines of the
machine (the propeller, the turbine), which contains the image of the masses of
the people. And it is clear that the Fascist image means what it unknowingly
conveys: that the subordination of the masses under the state apparatus in the
service of the continued dominance of the political and economic interests of the
industrial ruling class has to be masked behind the image of technological
progress and mastery… it appears as an image of anonymity and subjugation
rather than one of individual participation in the construction of the new
collective^97

The turbines in Terragni’s photomural, as well as the metallic Mussolini sculpture, were perhaps
the most important iterations of the machine combined with photomontage. It was precisely the
subversion of Marxist ideology and Soviet lineage of the machine aesthetic and photomontage
that made Terragni’s installation so powerful for the fascist state and yet disconcerting for an
artist like Paladini. From his earliest Komfut-inspired proletariats to his contemporaneous
photomontages of industry, Paladini had consistently asserted that the machine and industry were
liberating and revolutionary forces. His use of the documentary was meant to activate and
educate the worker via objective realism, convincing him of a potential communist revolution
and subsequent collective ownership of the factory.

In Terragni’s photomural, the reverse was true. His turbines made each individual
insignificant to the overarching goal of industry. Rather than each worker being an autonomous
cog within a collective machine that was jointly possessed by the workers, the giant machine
consumed the multitude of workers. Individuals became smaller than cogs and were no longer
functional mechanical units. An individual could easily disappear from the montage and it would
not change the form or content of the installation. Here, Mussolini represented the ultimate

^97 Buchloh, “From Faktura,” 112. Buchloh has noted that the saluting hand concept is taken
from Klutsis’s Five-Year Plan posters.
fascistized body, a cyborg-superman striding over the Italian people. Paladini would soon demonstrate his application of Soviet montage theories to a photo-based exhibition design that would empower the spectator and would counter fascist propaganda from within.

**Accommodation or Entrism?**

In 1935, Italy sent a delegation of artists and architects headed by Adalberto Libera and Mario De Renzi to design the Italian pavilions for the *L'Exposition Universelle et Internationale de Bruxelles* (the Universal and International Exposition of Brussels). Libera and De Renzi had become celebrated rationalist architects within the regime due to their architectural façade of the 1932 *Mostra della rivoluzione fascista* and were selected to coordinate several Italian expositions throughout the 1930s. They were also contemporaries of Paladini’s at the Scuola superiore di architettura in the mid-1920s, members of the rationalist movement in Rome, and were recently spotlighted in his articles for *Quadrivio*. Paladini’s decision to work on a project for the fascist regime seems counterintuitive, especially when one recalls his tepid assessment of Libera’s works. Yet there are a few reasons why Paladini may have taken the project, including his chance to work with rationalist colleagues and his need for stable employment. The more likely reason is that the exposition was outside of Italy and it provided him with the opportunity to both apply the principles of Soviet montage to his own work and to leave the country.

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101. Lista, *Dal Futurismo*, 60 and Ministero del’Interno, Direzione Generale di Pubblica Sicurezza, Divisione Polizia Politica, Fascicoli Personali 1927-1944, busta 940, Vinicio Paladini,
Paladini was assigned the Padiglione dell’Opera Maternità e Infanzia (Maternity and Childhood Pavilion) at the exposition in Brussels.\textsuperscript{102} The room was completely decorated with photomurals that documented the welfare programs for women and children instituted by the fascist state (Fig. 8.51). The photomurals combined images of everyday people with statements issued by Mussolini and charts documenting the financial assistance given to families. The room utilized some of the most effective techniques Paladini learned from the Russian avant-garde and avoided the dehumanizing aspects of Terragni’s Room O. What is particularly relevant in Paladini’s photomurals is that he denied Mussolini’s superman status found in other artists’ depictions of him and instead focused on the people of Italy. It is also noteworthy that these photomurals were completed shortly after his 1934 trip to Russia and his correspondence to Vertov about the power of montage and documentary realism to affect the spectator.

All of the photomurals were designed to create a personal connection with the viewer, including one that features a family of four listening to Mussolini as he issues a proclamation (Fig. 8.52). The family was given prominence in the scene with Mussolini receded into the background behind a lectern and placed at a slightly lower level than the family. With their backs turned to the viewer like romantic period \textit{rückenfigur}, the family’s placement invited the spectator into the space to read the words of Mussolini’s speech. Faux bricks split the scene with the family and Mussolini on one side and a prominent factory complete with smokestack on the other side. This element recalls Paladini’s \textit{Il Proletario della III\textsuperscript{a} Internazionale construção Archivio centrale dello stato, Rome, Italy. There is no documentation in his police files of requesting a visa for this project nor is there any information indicating that he would be leaving for England and America after completing the pavilion.\textsuperscript{102} Echaurren, \textit{Vinicio Paladini futurista}, 95 and “Biografia e dati del Fondo Vinicio Paladini,” Fondo Francesco Moschini A.A.M. Architettura Arte Moderna, http://ffmaam.it/collezione/vinicio-paladini/biografia-e-dati-del-fondo-vinicio-paladini#biografia-e-dati-del-fondo-vinicio-paladini (accessed May 10, 2013).
meccanica, which featured a factory smokestack delineated by a uniform, faux brick pattern (Fig. 8.53). In addition, the layout, which typified Paladini’s Bolshevik-futurist and imagist works that split the background between factories and modern architecture, raises the question of whether this photomural was a complete reversal of his earlier beliefs to celebrate the corporativism promoted by Fascism or if it celebrated the heroic return of the factory as a symbol of the proletariat.  

The rückenfigur concept was also incorporated on the opposing wall; a group of people with outstretched hands reaches for the Italian landmass (Fig. 8.54). Although it is difficult to discern from the reproductions of Paladini’s pavilion, the Italian nation seems to be composed of a multitude of faces. Paladini broke with contemporaneous depictions of crowds in Italy. He instead utilized photomontage and crowd scenes to represent the people that populate the nation. Unlike Terragni’s Room O, the crowd was not dehumanized as a piece of industrial machinery or crushed under Mussolini’s footsteps; instead, the role of the people as vital components of the nation was reinstated. Another facet of his photomural that distinguishes it from Terragni’s is the use of hands. In Terragni’s Room O, a series of hands simulated the fascist salute, whereas the figures from Paladini’s photomural all have different hand poses and reach out to receive support from the Italian nation; a concept which was reiterated on an adjacent wall (Fig. 8.55). His depiction of the crowd was also in stark contrast to Xanti

103 The factory was prominently featured in SSSR na stroike. It is a prime example of a symbol that was used by both the Italians and Soviets in the 1920s and 1930s to represent two different concepts: the former to represent corporativism in contrast to the workers’ ownership of industry by the latter.

104 Schnapp, “Mob Porn,” 39-42. Schnapp discusses the frequent use of crowds as part of regime propaganda, seeking to find distinctions between the focus on crowds in Italy and the Soviet Union and finding a sense of fascist regime crowd control within the images. In Paladini’s work, there is no evidence of the regime or its policing of the people; rather, the faces of the nation are the focus.
Schawinsky’s popular image of Mussolini in which his coat is made up of the people of Italy (Fig. 8.56). Mussolini was given domain over the Italian nation in Terragni and Schawinsky’s depictions, encouraging his monumental, superman status. Paladini’s photomural disrupted this paradigm and gave precedence to the people.

Despite downplaying the role of Mussolini, Paladini’s participation in *L'Exposition Universelle et Internationale de Bruxelles* suggests either his accommodation to the regime or the problematic nature of Togliatti’s concept of entrism. His introduction of the factographic techniques employed by his Soviet counterparts for photomurals and photoessays facilitated the regime’s demands for a fascist aesthetic, both realist and modernist, in the second half of the 1930s. Notably, documentary photomurals became more popular than photomontages for Italian exhibition design. For example, photomurals were used throughout the Italian pavilion at the 1937 *Exposition Internationale des Arts et Techniques dans la Vie Moderne* (International Exposition Dedicated to Art and Technology in Modern Life) in Paris.¹⁰⁵ Those created by Erberto Carboni for the tourism room (Fig. 8.57) and for the graphic room (Fig. 8.58) utilized refined, grid-patterned photomurals that differed entirely from the chaotic photomontages in Terragni’s Room O.

According to Giovanni Lista, Paladini departed for America immediately after the exhibition opened in Brussels without informing anyone in Italy of his plans.¹⁰⁶ Ship logs confirm that Paladini first went to London after the exhibition and then sailed straight for the

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¹⁰⁵ Golan, *Muralnomad*, 83-121. Golan provides insight on the use of photomurals in the 1937 Italian Pavilion in Paris and reproduces several images, but she does not mention Paladini in her discussion of Italian photomurals.

¹⁰⁶ Lista, *Dal Futurismo*, 60.
United States where he remained for the next year. These records also suggest that he may have had forged travel documents in order to flee the country. Regardless of Paladini’s surprising decision to participate in the Brussels exposition, two things can be concluded about the project: it allowed Paladini to experiment with Soviet theories of montage and spectator activation and it also gave him the opportunity to leave Italy prior to the invasion of Ethiopia.

When he could not find permanent employment in the United States, Paladini moved to France briefly in 1936 and returned to Italy in 1937. In Italy he worked on various projects, such as set designs for Barbaro’s film, L’ultima nemica. Unfortunately, no functioning copy of Barbaro’s film can be located to see what his set designs looked like for the film. Paladini also assisted with various pavilion exhibition designs and layouts, including the Mostra nazionale colonie estive e assistenza all’infanzia (National Exhibition of Summer Camps and Day Care) organized by Libera and de Renzi, Mostra del Tessile Nazionale (Exhibition of National Textiles), and the Mostra del Minerale (Mineral Exhibition) in Rome. Little can be discerned from the few existing documentary photographs of Paladini’s works at the Mostra nazionale colonie estive e assistenza all’infanzia. From what can be seen, Paladini’s exhibition design utilized straightforward panels of photographs (Fig. 8.59). They also lacked the play between vision and spectator found in his photomurals at L’Exposition Universelle et

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109 Lista, Dal Futurismo, 60.
110 I have contacted two of the largest film archives in Italy, Cineteca Bologna and Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia, and was informed by both that L’ultima nemica is not available. The images of the exhibitions are reproduced in Echaurren, Vinicio Paladini futurista, XLIII and 98.
111 Cennamo, La Prima esposizione, 259 and Lista, Dal Futurismo, 60.
One installation shot shows Mussolini looming before a group of children at camp (Fig. 8.60). The inclusion of the Duce dressed in military cap and overcoat was perhaps a pointed statement that his forced coercions extended even to small children.

Paladini’s return to Italy was short-lived. By the summer of 1938, he was making plans to return to the United States and he set sail for New York in January 1939. His sudden departure from Italy has been ascribed to political reasons. Significantly, the timing coincided with the passing of the Racial Laws and the increased arrests of anti-fascists in 1938. Paladini’s persistence in his attempts to relocate between 1934 and 1939 insinuate that his accommodations to the regime were not the result of an overwhelming conversion and commitment to Fascism.

From his leftist political background to his use of photomurals for regime exhibition design, Paladini’s engagement with photomontage provides a fascinating example of how fascist cultural pluralism led to accommodation with the regime. The fascist regime did not enforce a singular artistic style; instead, the state supported various forms that allowed leftist intellectuals to operate within the system until the mid-1930s. Paladini was able to vaunt ideas derived from the leftist artists in the Soviet Union without espousing Italian nationalism or romanità in his writings. As Togliatti pointed out in his lectures on Fascism, even devout communists had to join the fascist party in order to maintain their livelihood and to affect change from within the country. Yet as the desire to define the new fascist culture emerged in 1925 and became militantly nationalistic by the mid-1930s, the possibility of maintaining a separation between

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112 Lista, Dal Futurismo, 60.
113 Stone, The Patron State, 65-70.
114 Togliatti, Lectures on Fascism, 82-86. Throughout his lectures and writings, Togliatti emphasizes that abstaining from participation with fascist groups and organizations eliminates contact with the masses and results in an inability to effect change, to undermine Fascism, and to promote Communism.
political beliefs and artistic production was shattered by the reality of the true requirements of the patron state.

Many artists, like Paladini’s former machine aesthetic collaborator Ivo Pannaggi, avoided the problem by living abroad; Paladini attempted to work within. Paladini, who believed that film and photomontage were best suited for communist propaganda, unwittingly contributed to one of the regime’s most effective propaganda events, the *Mostra della rivoluzione fascista*. He then knowingly implemented his own version of propagandistic photomontage to critique the fascist regime’s cultural policies and utilized documentary realism for the *Padiglione dell’Opera Maternità e Infanzia* in Brussels. Did Paladini cross the line between entrism and regime accommodation? Was he interested in subversive politics or was he merely in search of work? As a case study, Paladini’s oeuvre reveals that the effectiveness of entrism as a subversive political strategy is questionable, especially within a regime that promoted cultural pluralism. Paladini’s intent was to promote Soviet ideology and aesthetics within Italy, but instead he brought legitimacy to the fascist regime’s program for cultural renewal. He perpetuated the bourgeois hegemony Gramsci had lamented as “an instrument of government of dominant groups in order to gain the consent of and exercise hegemony over the subaltern classes” rather than its proletariat counterpart.\(^\text{115}\) Ultimately, Paladini failed to activate the viewer to revolutionary change and his leftist aesthetics lost their efficacy as a tool for the spread of Communism; instead, they became a doctrinaire component of the right-wing fascist propaganda within Italy.

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