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The Art of Objects: The Birth of Italian Industrial Culture, 1878-1928, Luca Cottini, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018. 328 pp. Cloth \$75. ISBN 978-1-4875-0283-6.

Luca Cottini's book represents a sizeable contribution to knowledge and understanding of Italian history in the half-century from 1878 to 1928, a crucial period in Italy's development as an industrial nation state. Cottini aims to reveal 'the different and often hidden hermeneutics of Italy's transition to modernity' by offering 'fragmentary symbolic episodes and exemplary cases revealing the interplay of high-, middle- and lowbrow cultures' (p. 4). The approach enables him to write of cycling, for example, that it both laid 'the groundwork for the growth of the Italian mechanical industry (in the production of motorcycles, automobiles and aeroplanes)' and, alongside the development of tourism and sport, supported 'the industrial bourgeoisie's project to endow Italy with a shared national imagination' as literary and fine art representations of bicycles 'enacted an experimental space of aesthetic negotiation and investigation into industrial modernity, corporeity and 'the new "moving" dimension of culture' (p. 75). Turning to smoking, Cottini's approach enables him to conclude of cigarettes that they assisted in the construction of a 'new modern being' via associations with 'fashion, war, lightness, self-annihilation, pleasure, and thought' (psychoanalysis) and that their smoke reveals not only 'Italian fascination for, and resistance to, industrialism' but also 'an "unfinished" space of trial, action, fusion of opposites, and self-reflexivity' forming a 'new experimental modernity' (p. 148).

Although the book's structure is very clear, I wonder whether it might have been reconfigured to more effectively amplify the argument being made. After the introduction, two contextualizing chapters 'At the Origin of Italian Industrialism' and 'The Industrial Laboratory of Italian Modernity' treating 40 years (1878 to 1918) and 10 years (1918-1928) respectively frame the intervening chapters. These offer six typological discussions

concerning timepieces, photography, bicycles, sound technologies, smoking, and (in one chapter) toys, clothes and furniture. The typological approach in the main body of the book produces chapters which are very separate from one another; they make sense individually, and apart from the book in which they are housed, and therefore have something of the character of extended articles. This may make the book especially useful in teaching, as chapters can be assigned individually. There are links between the chapters, of course, the chief one being Cottini's approach to bridging the histories of art and design, but also Futurism which runs through the consecutive chapters on smoking and toys, clothes and furniture respectively. Other links include the interest in media history, shown in Cottini's emphasis on the dual function of the Italian press in exemplifying and showcasing Italy's industrial production, in the chapter 'Gramophones, Radio and the New Languages of Sound', and in the final chapter where Cottini rehearses the problem of Fascist censorship and suppression.

Cottini regards the book as bridging Italian literary and cultural studies, which have ignored material culture, and design studies which has 'failed to see the influence of high culture on the evolution of new industrial forms' (p. 4). *The Art of Objects* is characterised by dualisms: it sits between Italian Studies and Design Studies, and contributes to each (the latter must surely include Design History, this reader hopes); it engages industry and art and their relationship, as well as art and design and theirs. Sometimes these dualisms can seem to become contradictory, however.

For example, the book's title foregrounds 'objects' but these are not shown in the plates or illustrations. Of the 24 plates, 7 show artworks (paintings and prints) and 17 show graphic works combining illustrations and text. The six figures show people, buildings, advertising

and graphic design. Design historians would not be content in telling the history of industrialisation through images alone; rather we would examine objects in three-dimensions and consider, too, associated materials such as drawings, models, and patents. Cottini, on the other hand, gives readers an extended account of representations of objects in literature. Chapter two, on timepieces, begins with a history of modern time and a discussion of some paintings, then returning to novels and then moving to discuss business, namely Bulgari and Borletti, before closing with paintings again. This pattern is consistent with the book's aim of demonstrating the influence of high culture on mass and popular culture, or of art on design, but it also risks eliding representation and the histories of design and business. Cottini is conscious of the difference and is fully aware of the complex ways in which images function to obscure as well as expose reality. When writing about 'Industrial Photographs and the Fictional Vision' he recognises the political function of faked and staged photographs in photo-reportage which 'extended the vision of the present to future generations, yet also flattened and fetishized its memory' (p. 57). Turning to Secondo Pia's photograph of the Turin shroud Cottini notes that as it revealed the outline of (Christ's?) body, so it 'turned from a "reproducible" industrial artefact (promoting an industrial exhibit) into a paradoxical icon, endowed with a mystical aura, different layers of meanings and an inherent critical apparatus' (p. 62).

Cottini further distances himself from design history and its practitioners when he tells notes that the British Arts and Crafts Movement was 'launched in 1887 by John Ruskin and William Morris' (p. 22) which is a simplification. Similarly, in closing the book, Cottini briefly reviews the points in time at which other scholars have identified as constituting 'the origins of Italian design', as though such a point might be identified, which I doubt. Also notable is the fact that the history of technology is not mentioned in the book, yet the chapters

focus on technologies of time, the photographic process and cycling, all of which are technologies. Writing about the development of the Italian press, for example, Cottini shows it to be a product of the printing innovations brought about by industrialization and a showcase of products of technological progress, especially those focussed on Italy's distinction in textiles and food. For Cottini, industry and technology are conflated, but while it is a missed opportunity that he hasn't situated his narrative and his research within the history of technology, I hope his really excellent book will engage the readership it deserves in the history of technology as well as Design Studies and Italian Studies.

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