

## Giorgio Morandi, Ardengo Soffici and Strapaese: Modern italian landscapes between the wars.

Mariana Aguirre.

In 1932, Mussolini inaugurated the Mostra della Rivoluzione Fascista to celebrate the ten year anniversary of the fascist's seizure of power. Many artists were invited to decorate the Palazzo delle Esposizioni in Rome, most notably, Mario Sironi and Giuseppe Terragni. The exhibition incorporated works in traditional media as well as pieces derived from the avant-garde's experiments, such as photomontages. The Mostra's diversity in terms of style and media as well as the mass appeal it sought clashed with the intimate nature of Giorgio Morandi's production dating to that year<sup>1</sup>

His Landscape (1932, vit. 174), for example, seems unfinished and borders on abstraction, as thin monochromatic washes of paint articulate flat planes rather than give a sense of Grizzana's hillsides (fig.). In Still Life (1932, vit. 173), a single vase and fragments of other vessels subvert its status as a still life, giving an incomplete picture of the entire arrangement (fig.).<sup>2</sup> Morandi's production's apparent aloofness from fascist iconography led to the artist's disassociation from Fascism after World War II. Nevertheless, the very qualities which seemingly distance Morandi from Fascism and its art, namely, its humble subjects, small scale and 'honesty,' allowed Strapaese's magazines to embed his art with a distinctly fascist and ruralist discourse rooted in Ardengo Soffici's toscanità.

Morandi's participation in Strapaese describes the Morandi-Soffici project at its most important phase (1927-1939) as well as his complex relationship with Fascism. Although Morandi's move towards a realist style in 1920 after his metaphysical phase did not immediately render him a representative of Soffici's toscanità, his involvement with the Strapaese magazines *Il Selvaggio* (1924-1943) and *L'Italiano* (1926-1942) situated him within the older painter's discourse. This essay considers Morandi's active choice to promote his works in these magazines, his espousal of Soffici's

views in 1928, and his willingness to use his friends' connections within the fascist cultural sphere in order to advance his career.<sup>3</sup> As such, it is a counternarrative that challenges ruralist and formalist criticism about the artist, which characterize him as an isolated individual. Moreover, it attempts to correct Arcangeli and Del Puppo's attempts to deal with Morandi's *decennio paesano*, which carefully dislodged him from Strapaese's ideology.<sup>4</sup>

Soffici and Morandi's development of a ruralist aesthetic will be traced by analyzing their art works and the contemporary critical literature. I will first show how Soffici's *toscanità* was instrumental for the development of Strapaese and how the latter movement articulated a ruralism close to that of Fascism. Beyond that, the ruralist reading of Morandi was based on Sofficean tropes, and in a 1928 autobiographical article Morandi chose to position himself within this discourse. Morandi's and Soffici's respective visual production during these years will also be taken into consideration, both in terms of how their art engaged in a dialogue, and with respect to the ways in which Morandi articulated and undermined Strapaese's idealization of the countryside. Most importantly, despite the literature's unwillingness to trace Morandi's links to Strapaese, his eventual success abroad as a formalist painter was made possible by *Il Selvaggio's* publication of his art and the benefits he derived from being a part of their group during the fascist regime.<sup>5</sup>

### **Fascism and the Aesthetic Realm**

Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi's account of how Fascism aestheticized politics is useful in describing Soffici and Morandi's relation to fascist aesthetics. She describes how the regime instituted rituals, created symbols and occupied public spaces in order to permeate Italian citizens' life and establish its credibility. The cult of Mussolini, for example, was solidified by inundating the public sphere with his likeness by reproducing it on coins, posters, newspapers and newsreels. Additionally, Mussolini considered politics an art and saw himself as an artist, further linking the artistic and political sphere.<sup>6</sup> Because of his status as a dictator and approach to the arts, Mussolini was the main creator in charge of a total work of art, namely, the fascist project.<sup>7</sup> More importantly, by not

restricting itself to a style, the regime welcomed all artists to collaborate, eventually urging them to create a national aesthetic that reflected Italy's military and political power.

Strapaese's dual interest in politics and art is related to Fascism's reliance on aesthetics. Like Fascism, Strapaese blurred the lines between aesthetics and politics. As will be explained below, *Il Selvaggio* was founded as a political journal, shifting to culture in 1926. Although the ruralism it sought did not fall within the realm of what we commonly consider as fascist propaganda, which contained clear references to Rome or the Renaissance, it remains as an example of aestheticized politics. In general, Strapaese's members responded to Mussolini's call by creating an aesthetic that supported Fascism's rural policy. Additionally, the fact that *Il Selvaggio* left politics for culture mirrors the regime's change from a revolutionary movement to a dictatorship.

*Il Selvaggio*'s politicization of aesthetics allowed intellectuals to participate in Fascism without committing an overt political act. This is especially important in the case of Morandi, who thrived in this 'safe space,' and was able to eventually divorce himself from it. While Soffici wrote about Fascism during the 1920s and 1930s, leaving no doubt regarding his commitment to the regime, Morandi's participation in this project can only be documented via his ruralist works and the art criticism which placed him within Strapaese's circle. Nevertheless, if we consider how Fascism extended its project to include the arts, it is clear that even if indirectly, Morandi was participating in the fascist project. Although Morandi did not sign Giovanni Gentile's "Manifesto of Fascist Intellectuals" (1925), neither did he sign Croce's rebuttal to this, the "The Manifesto of Antifascist Intellectuals" (1925), thus operating between these two opposing poles. As will be seen below, during the mid-1920s and for most of the 1930s, he was an active participant in the fascist project by way of Strapaese.

### **Soffici, toscanía and *Il Selvaggio***

Mino Maccari founded *Il Selvaggio* in Colle di Val d'Elsa in 1924 during the crisis following the murder of the socialist Parliament member Giacomo Matteotti. In 1924 and 1925, the magazine was mostly political and dealt little with art and culture. The *selvaggi* were against the bureaucratization and normalization of the Fascist Revolution, proposing rural Tuscany and the violence of fascist *squadrismo* as the true sides of an ever-changing Fascism and opposing the institutionalization of the party as well as Rome's centralism. Although Soffici did not create *Strapaese*, his development of *toscanità*, which began in 1907, initiated a discourse that allowed for the rise of this movement and its magazines.

Soffici's trajectory had prepared the ground for anyone who was interested in promoting a utopic vision of Tuscan rural culture. Beyond that, his descriptions of violence in the Tuscan countryside in the novel *Lemmonio Boreo* (1912) were strangely prophetic of the actual rise of Fascism in the Italian provinces. A revised edition of this book was published in 1923 after the fascists' seizure of power, and it incorporated more violence, as the artist attempted to connect *Lemmonio's* methods to the tactics used by the fascist squads in the countryside.<sup>8</sup> This predated *Strapaese's* own glorification of fascist *squadrismo*, drove the *selvaggi* to recognize their roots in pre-World War I Florentine culture and more importantly, led them to proclaim *Lemmonio* as the first fascist in 1925.<sup>9</sup>

As early as the middle of the twenties, then, Soffici's novel was considered as key for the development of fascist rural culture, as was the rest of his written and pictorial production, much of which addressed *toscanità*. Artistically, Soffici had attempted to reevaluate the *Macchiaioli* (most of them Tuscan or active in Tuscany), promoted the Tuscan Primitives as models for a realist art, looked at popular Tuscan art (*trofeini*) and depicted an idealized Tuscany in his landscapes. Thus, he provided the younger artists with a ruralist blueprint for the promotion of this region's culture that encompassed high art, folk culture and the violent rise of Fascism itself.

While Soffici was developing his *toscanità*, *Il Selvaggio* shifted from politics to culture, demonstrating that these realms overlapped within the Fascist regime despite the absence of an officially sanctioned style. Based on the precedent set by Soffici, Maccari's magazine relied on tropes such as the purity of the rural people, landscape, and customs in order to critique the road Fascism had taken after 1922; he later used these tropes to describe an aesthetic suitable for regime. The degree to which the same language could be applied to both politics and culture further demonstrate their codependence during Fascism.

Although the change in *Il Selvaggio*'s outlook could be seen as capitulating the right to criticize the regime, it offered Maccari and the other *selvaggi* an opportunity to shape fascist culture. Additionally, the regime called for everyone to contribute to the formation of the fascist state, and, given Italy's history, culture was seen as an important sphere within this project. Hence, *Il Selvaggio*'s new direction brought culture into the foreground and ensured that Maccari's and Soffici's ideas received space as viable exponents of fascist art. Moreover, an exclusive focus on culture allowed the *selvaggi* to compete with other currents that tried to secure the regime's favor, especially Futurism and Margherita Sarfatti's *Novecento*. Beyond that, Maccari's *Il Selvaggio* continued the Florentine avant-garde practice of mingling politics and culture, which began with *Leonardo* (1903-1907) and *La Voce* (1908-1916). Soffici's *Lacerba* (1913-1915), for instance, had gone from a cultural magazine to a political one by using futurist collages and *parole in libertà* to persuade its readership about the necessity of Italy's entrance into World War I.<sup>10</sup> Thus, within Tuscany's cultural context, it was natural to mingle politics and culture, as these spheres were not completely divorced from each other.

While *Il Selvaggio* was created without Soffici's intervention, Maccari decided to consult Soffici before changing the magazine's orientation from political to cultural. In a 1926 letter to the artist, Maccari positioned his new project as an extension of the latter's *Lacerba*. By mentioning *Lacerba* as well as its supplement, the *Almanacco Purgativo* (1914), Maccari acknowledged Soffici's

role in Florentine culture, hoping to convince the older artist to participate.<sup>11</sup> He did so by inserting Il Selvaggio within the latter's already formulated toscanità, simultaneously paying tribute to it.

## Il Selvaggio and Fascism's Ruralism

When comparing Il Selvaggio to official publications dealing with rural life or aimed at a rural audience, it is evident that despite the fact that it often criticized the government, it shared its concerns regarding the Italian countryside and manifested them in similar ways. In reality, Strapaese's ruralism was a component of a wider reaction against modern life within fascist Italy, which arose as a condemnation of modernism and cosmopolitanism. This preference for the rural over the urban was the theme of Italian films and novels such as Alessandro Blasetti's *Sole* (1929) and Corrado Alvaro's *Gente in Aspromonte* (1930).<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, it is more productive to consider Il Selvaggio in light of other ruralist magazines produced under Fascism.

Although their respective audiences and tones were different, Il Selvaggio and the regime's magazines *L'azione delle massaie rurali* (1933-1939) and *La massaia rurale* (1939-1943?), both published by the Fasci Femminili's Sezione Massaie Rurali (Female Fasci Section of Rural Farmwomen) offered similar views of country life. *L'azione delle massaie rurali* and *La massaia rurale*, geared towards a rural audience the selvaggi idealized, were modeled after traditional farmers' almanacs.<sup>13</sup> Its format, like Il Selvaggio's (and *L'Italiano's*) recalled a broadsheet.<sup>14</sup> Ironically, both the official newspapers and Il Selvaggio focused on the countryside at precisely the time when it was changing the most, each clinging to the hope that reiterating what the countryside and its inhabitants should be like would preserve this way of life.<sup>15</sup>

Although the Sezione operated throughout Italy and Il Selvaggio dealt mostly with Tuscany, their approach did not diverge considerably in terms of their postures regarding women, urbanism and farming practices.<sup>16</sup> The Sezione's emphasis on autarky, or economic self-sufficiency, was itself reflected in the cultural autarky sought by the selvaggi and other artistic groups. After the invasion

of Ethiopia in 1936, international sanctions against the regime led to the promotion of its domestic products. This reflects the regime's insistence on Italian self-reliance and how it entered realms as diverse as its policy regarding peasant women as well as art criticism. While the *selvaggi* exhibited their artworks at the Stanza del Selvaggio, the Mostra dell'Incisione Moderna and the Mostra della Rivoluzione Fascista as a way to promote their status as fascist artists, the *massaie* were expected to form part of special celebrations organized by the regime. The latter's public performance in folk costume and the *selvaggi's* exhibitions thus constitute examples of government propaganda and artistic production belonging to the same rustic vein.<sup>17</sup>

### The Strapaesani's reading of Morandi

Morandi gradually conformed to the mold Soffici created for his ideal artist within a Tuscan context, which began with the former's praise of Cézanne's and Rimbaud's abandonment of Paris. Morandi had made himself available to this discourse by leaving the metaphysical style in 1920 and portraying himself as a 'common man' in his self-portraits, distancing himself from de Chirico's nuanced self-representations as an artist. Because Soffici's *toscanità* and Strapaese were interconnected, Sofficean tropes appear in Maccari and Longanesi's ruralist interpretation of Morandi. More importantly, using Soffici's vocabulary and values, Strapaese claimed Morandi as a member of their group; they stated that he was detached from the evils of modern life and had overcome the avant-garde's experiments. Eventually, formalist critics would exploit this isolation in order to distance the artist from Fascism.

Maccari's article on Morandi, published in a Bolognese newspaper in 1928, stresses the connection between Morandi, his art and his so-called poetry of simple things. Indeed, as Bacchelli and Franchi, had done in 1918, Maccari saw the art and artist as entities that informed one another.<sup>18</sup> Maccari acknowledges Morandi's avant-garde experience, but chooses to highlight the painter's eventual distance from it. He notes that Morandi took the 'strada maestra' instead, placing him within a provincial context, which links him to Soffici's and other artists' whose subject

was a town's main street and used this expression as a title, such as *Strada* (1933) and *Strada del Poggio* (1935). Beyond that, Maccari considers Morandi in relation to the Italian tradition and its reemergence:

...Morandi's art is italianissima, it has deep roots in our most genuine tradition and is nourished by the same vital lymphs that gave us the world and can only return it to us.<sup>22</sup> (emphasis mine)

Maccari's particular way of characterizing Morandi within Strapaese is by describing his art as the poetry of simple things; his still lifes and landscapes made their subject's beauty readily available to the viewer, although their simplicity could lead to their being overlooked.<sup>19</sup> His paintings were: "...still lifes, towns, fields, solitary angles of non-'picturesque' nature, neither horrid nor dazzling, but common, simple, without excessive lines, colors and contrast."<sup>20</sup>

This description proposes the artist as a privileged viewer who pointed out simple things to people. This notion reveals that Strapaese's project was interlaced with a fear of a general indifference towards the countryside in favor of the city's attractions such as the cinema, department stores and factory jobs. As such, Morandi guarded the landscape's beauty and by extension, rural life as a whole.<sup>21</sup> In Maccari's reading, Morandi's art could save rural life by reintroducing it to those who are unable to appreciate it; here was a remedy against 'excessive lines, colors and contrast,' or styles not based on the Italian tradition, such as Cubism and Futurism, thus blaming modern art's 'garishness' for the rural world's disappearance.

As was common in Morandian literature, Leo Longanesi, another member of Strapaese, equiparated the artist's work and his life. Longanesi's Morandi is a 'strapaesano di razza' and his painting is:



...free from trickery, genuine, home-made like bread with oil. Looking at a painting of his means getting to know his character, his family, his house, his street, his city.<sup>22</sup>

Equating Morandi and Bologna allowed Longanesi to contrast the painter's roots with those of avant-garde art, which the latter claims left no trace in Morandi. Longanesi's consideration of culture and politics, implicit in Maccari's reading of the artist, joins these two spheres. Indeed, the writer believes that the avant-garde's mistakes were no different than the mistakes committed by Italian politicians.

Whether via Maccari's more subtle reading of Morandi as a poet of simple things and guardian of the countryside or Longanesi's negative assessment of the avant-garde, these articles demonstrate that Morandi was needed by the Strapaese magazines as much as he needed their positive reviews and space at their group shows and publications. Moreover, they propose Morandi as a painter who protected the supremacy of Italian culture, thus placing the artist within the fascist project.

### **Morandi, the Selvaggi and the Fascist Art Establishment**

Despite disagreements with the government and a general animosity towards official culture, the selvaggi saw themselves as promoters of the Fascist Revolution's ideals. An alliance between the selvaggi and official culture occurred in the show *La Stanza del Selvaggio*, held in Florence in 1927.<sup>23</sup> Morandi's participation betrays his connection to the regime's project to create a more 'fascist' culture for Italy, which was an important element within Soffici's trajectory after 1920.

Mussolini's speech during the inauguration of the *Prima Mostra del Novecento* in 1923 demonstrates the degree to which artistic policy and politics intermingled during Fascism. Without calling for an art of the state, the dictator drew parallels between art and politics:

The “political” creation, as the artistic one, is a slow elaboration and a sudden divination. In a certain sense, the artist creates with inspiration, the politician with decision.<sup>24</sup>

La Stanza del Selvaggio inserted this group into the government’s artistic project by taking up Mussolini’s ideas about art and politics. In the article “Addio del pasato” (1926), which described Il Selvaggio’s move from politics to culture, Maccari used Mussolini’s speech as a point of departure in order to assert the importance of cultural activities:

Political or pseudopolitical episodes, their development and their vicissitudes no longer interest us [...]. We have heard correctly that today not everyone is allowed to go into politics. With Fascism, politics is the art of Government, not of the party...

There is nothing but art. Art is the supreme expression of the intelligence of a stock. A revolution is first and above all the attitude and orientation of intelligence. Hence, a revolution’s index of value will be given to us by its artistic production. The Duce’s speech at the Mostra del Novecento confirms such concept: it has weighed decisively on the Selvaggio’s crisis, whose attitude had all the characteristics of an artistic manifestation already; so no one will wonder that the Selvaggio closed its squadristic period and elected as a task a new life of cultivating art.<sup>25</sup>

Although the first paragraph seems to lament his inability to infiltrate the political sphere, Maccari suggests that this can be done by focusing on art, a sphere privileged by none other than Il Duce himself.

In spite of the magazine’s critique of the regime during its political years and even afterwards, the selvaggi had ties to powerful government officials. Giuseppe Bottai, then Minister of the Corporations, gave an inaugural speech at the Mostra del Selvaggio which was similar to

Mussolini's speech and Maccari's article discussed above.<sup>26</sup> Bottai's speech describes in no unclear terms the government's (and the selvaggi's) position on art's relationship to politics, noting that 'they work together to establish in Italy a shared and fundamental conscience of italianità.'<sup>27</sup> Although Bottai is considered to be responsible for the relative openness of fascist culture to foreign influence as well as styles beyond realism and romanità, this speech restricts the purpose of art under Fascism to instilling a sense of unity. More importantly, by inaugurating the show in name of the head of state, Bottai acknowledges the selvaggi's important role in fascist culture.<sup>28</sup> As such, Morandi's participation in this exhibition marks the beginning of his art's existence inside a governmentally sanctioned artistic sphere. Had he been as isolated as the formalist criticism argued after World War II, his art would not have entered such venues.

After the Stanza del Selvaggio, the selvaggi succeeded in securing their participation in the Mostra dell'Incisione Moderna in 1927, also held in Florence. In a letter to Morandi, Maccari referred to this show as an opportunity to represent Italian culture internationally.<sup>29</sup> Maccari's enthusiasm towards the exhibition shows that he saw his group as worthy exponents of Italian culture; his appeal to Morandi further demonstrates the artist's important role within this group and this group's self-appointed mission to represent Italian culture.

In 1927, then, Morandi participated in two shows with other selvaggi that portrayed Il Selvaggio as a guardian of the Italian tradition, situating Morandi's art within the regime's discourse for a cultural renaissance. Moreover, had he not been part of Strapaese, it is unlikely that Morandi would have been awarded the chair of etching at the Accademia di Belle Arti di Bologna. It appears that Morandi's harsh words towards the Accademia in his 1928 autobiographical article as well as his less than stellar academic record had initially prevented him from getting the job.<sup>30</sup> Morandi wrote to Soffici describing the trouble he was having obtaining the position, mentioning that Longanesi and the painter Cipriano Efesio Oppo (another member of Strapaese and the director of the artistic syndicates created by the regime between 1925 and 1930) were to contact Giuliano

Balbino, Minister of National Education.<sup>31</sup> Hence, despite the fact that Strapaese's ruralism did not become Fascism's official style, artists affiliated with it occupied positions of leadership and often helped each other. Such was the case of Morandi and his friends.

Morandi got his job at the Accademia at a time when Fascism was institutionalizing cultural production via its artistic syndicates and official exhibitions.<sup>32</sup> The syndicates and exhibitions did not seek to censor art and accepted all styles at first; initially, being a member of the fascist party was not compulsory in order to exhibit in the Regional, Interregional and Quadriennale (National) artistic exhibitions, but did offer advantages (Morandi was a member). In the case of Morandi, his closeness to Soffici and Oppo secured him a livelihood within this system both in terms of exhibition space and with regards to the teaching position mentioned above. Although it is impossible to know whether or not Morandi actually believed in Fascism, it is important to highlight the fact that he was one of the many Italians who directly or indirectly benefited from the regimes' new institutions due to his direct connections to powerful officials such as Oppo. As such, the idea of Morandi as an isolated individual must be dispelled, since the fact that he valued his privacy and preferred to stay in Bologna does not mean that he held himself aloof from groups such as Strapaese and, more importantly, from the opportunities they offered him.

### **Soffici and Morandi in Strapaese**

Morandi and Soffici were close to each other between 1928 and 1932. This occurred personally and artistically, and was noticed in the critical literature. Although Soffici did not go as far as describing Morandi as 'primitivo' or 'campagnolo,' as he had done with Cézanne and Rimbaud, his 1932 article reads the younger artist in an Italian key.<sup>33</sup> This article represents the transformation of Soffici's toscanità into a cultural and political italianità fully embodied by the younger Morandi, whose earlier career had been shaped to a large degree by Soffici's teachings.

Soffici and Morandi's convergence in 1928 began with their interaction in the early 1920s. The two painters had exchanged letters since 1923, and they visited each other four times between 1928 and 1933.<sup>34</sup> Additionally, Soffici purchased paintings by Morandi in 1928 and in 1931, which indicates that he approved of the direction the younger painter was headed in.<sup>35</sup> In the meantime, Morandi praised Soffici's submissions to the 1928 Biennale paintings.<sup>36</sup> Thematically, the convergence of their respective works is clear, since both artists concentrated on painting landscapes during the late 1920s and most of the 1930s. During these two decades, the majority of Italian pictorial production centered around figural representation, however. As such, Morandi and Soffici stand out as two of the few major painters from this era to focus on landscape and to a lesser degree, still lifes.

While in 1920 and 1921 Morandi approximated Soffici's style in his still lifes, in the late 1920s his landscapes, which were painted as a member of Strapaese, closely overlap with Soffici's production. Soffici had been painting landscapes such as *Bulciano* (1909) and *Street in Poggio* (1909), which featured the Tuscan countryside, its houses and its roads, since his return from Paris in 1907. Thus, Morandi's return to landscape painting in 1924 reinserted the artist within the modern Italian tradition of this genre (figs. 3.3 & 4.8). Although pieces such as *Landscape* (1932, vit. 173), discussed above, are very different from Soffici's landscapes, others, such as *Landscape* (1927, vit. 119) and *Landscape* (1927, vit. 121) are similar in their treatment of space and composition to *Fields and Hills* (1925) and *Church at Poggio* (1927), by Soffici (figs. 4.4, 4.9-4.12). Though Morandi's brushwork in some of these paintings is more substantial than Soffici's and the landscape is not rendered in detail, their depiction is rustic and immediate. Similarly, Morandi's cropping of the composition and the ruggedness present in some of the paintings fits into the selvaggi's and Soffici's claims regarding the authenticity and simplicity of the Emilian and Tuscan countryside.

Morandi's still lifes likewise responded to Soffici's and Strapaese's ruralism. The opaque colors and earth tones he selected in several Still Lifes from 1926 (vit. 114) and 1928 (vit. 128 & vit.

133), suggest Bolognese interiors and domestic life (figs. 4.13-4.15). Likewise, his heavy brushwork and careful arrangements showcase his painterly craft, justifying Longanesi, Maccari and Soffici's claims with respect to the paintings' distance from the avant-garde's visual experiments. Two Still Lives (vit. 114 and 128) are particularly evocative of actual interiors, and Morandi's use of common objects such as oil lamps, pitchers and bottles that might be used by himself or other members of his household justify the sense of domesticity perceived by Maccari and Longanesi (figs. 4.14 & 4.15).<sup>37</sup> Compared to the earlier moody metaphysical pieces, the paesano still lives appear to be uncomplicated and wholesome.

When examined as a group, both artist's works dating from about 1924 to 1932 or so describe the landscapes and domestic interiors of Northern rural Italy. While the landscapes illustrate the countryside that inspired Soffici to abandon Paris, Morandi's still lives also represented the plastic values praised by Soffici, which were rooted in the Tuscan Trecento and Quattrocento, Italian sources meant to temper the avant-garde's influence. Additionally, the simplicity and self-effacing nature that the selvaggi read into these objects relates to Soffici's ruralist Fascism and the distance that both the older painter and Strapaese maintained from official Fascism. These still lives were an antidote to the urban, industrial sophistication of the regime's buildings in the International Style as well as to the bombastic monumentality of Sironi's murals. Moreover, the still lives and landscapes evoke a quiet, everyday Fascism, one that was not spectacular like Mussolini's speeches or the Mostra della Rivoluzione Fascista, but which was praised by Strapaese and cultivated by the regime in order to build consensus.

Despite being the only surviving written statement by Morandi (other than his correspondence), little attention has been given to his autobiographical article, published in 1928.<sup>38</sup> Morandi's student Pompilio Mandelli later claimed Longanesi penned the article, likely because of its clear espousal of Fascism.<sup>39</sup>

I had a lot of faith in Fascism since its first inklings, a faith that never waned, even in the grayest and most tempestuous days.<sup>40</sup>

The fact that it was published in *L'Assalto*, the official magazine of the Bolognese Gioventù Universitaria Fascista explains the unequivocal assertion of his allegiance to the regime.

Morandi's use of Soffici's vocabulary throughout his autobiography proves that the artist was well versed in art criticism and could deploy it effectively. By selectively narrating his involvement in previous artistic movements, Morandi erased his early experiments, highlighting instead Soffici's (and Strapaese's) rural, nationalist aesthetics. First of all, he minimized his participation in Futurism, leaving out the several occasions he participated in Futurist serate and exhibitions in 1913 and 1914.<sup>41</sup> His incomplete narrative with regards to Futurism could be explained by this group's disdain for the Italian tradition and their praise of technology and urban life, which ran counter to the strapaesani's values. Unfortunately, it is impossible to evaluate Morandi's Futurism, since the majority of his works in this style were destroyed by the artist.

As in the case of Futurism, Morandi's autobiography does not focus on his engagement with the Metaphysical School. Overall, the artist described the metaphysical style as a useful but ultimately misleading study of the past, which led him to the Old Masters.<sup>42</sup> Morandi employs Soffici's characterization of the Old Masters as sincere and simple, which the latter had used to describe the Primitive painters as well as Rousseau and Cézanne.<sup>43</sup> Thus, the Bolognese painter depended on Soffici's discourse of *toscanità* not only as it was mapped onto him, but as one of its many users.

Morandi's desire to draw himself closer to Soffici's *toscanità* becomes even more evident as his biography continues. First of all, he declares an 'affinità spirituale' with Florence, mentioning that the Tuscans painters Giotto and Masaccio were among his favorite painters.<sup>44</sup> More interesting,

however, is the claim in which he lists Corot, Courbet, Fattori and Cézanne as the most legitimate heirs of the Italian tradition.<sup>45</sup> This affirmation, which appropriates French modernism to applaud Italian art was a leitmotif in Soffici's writings. The Bolognese artist's espousal of Italian and in particular, Tuscan culture culminates in Morandi's praise of Soffici and Carrà as the living artists who had exerted the most influence on him.<sup>46</sup> As such, in this article Morandi chose to embody the ideal painter of Strapaese, shunning modernity and avant-garde art and actively endorsing the ruralist ideology mapped onto him by Soffici, Longanesi and Maccari.

Soffici's 1932 article about the artist was in line with Morandi's own ideas about himself. In spite of being published in *L'Italiano* Longanesi's magazine, it distanced the artist from other members of Strapaese:

Giorgio Morandi, painter, etcher and draughtsman, is, of the young Italian painters, perhaps the one who most rapidly walks precisely on the proper road.<sup>47</sup>

Indeed, Soffici's immediately identified Morandi as the best Italian painter to continue on his own road. He appropriates Morandi to a greater degree by dismissing the latter's avant-garde past, noting that an artist:

...is only capable of real order he who has lived the spirit of rebellion, this is a good and promising beginning.<sup>48</sup>

Thus, Soffici's Morandi was a rebel in search of order, much like Soffici's Rimbaud, and more importantly, Soffici himself.

According to Soffici, Morandi's painting was saved from the Metaphysical School by the painter's 'gusto nativo,' and eventually became 'a first rate painter perfectly representative of a



rebirth—of the artistic rebirth that is particularly ours.<sup>49</sup> In Morandi's third epoch, more or less during the Strapaese years, his research was successful:

An artistic organism is the result, perfect, full, vital, and therefore of exemplary and classical nature. And I mean classical in the Italian style; that is, real and ideal, objective and subjective, and traditional at once.<sup>50</sup>

With this phrase, Soffici positions Morandi as a quintessentially Italian artist integral to the development of his own *toscanità*. Additionally, Soffici's article on Morandi departs from Strapaese's interpretation of the artist by leaving behind a rural identity that might limit him. Instead, the critic catapulted Morandi beyond the pages of *L'Italiano* by portraying him as a classical Italian painter—thus transcending the rural-urban debate. More importantly, he places Morandi at the forefront of this nation's artistic and political rebirth, Fascism's main goal.

Although Morandi and Soffici's shared aesthetics were developed rather informally, the closeness between them was registered by several groups. The strapaesani listed them among their members in a humorous, if wistful, take on Mussolini's artistic policy:

Mussolini has called to him Soffici, Rosai, Longanesi, Maccari, Oppo, Bartoli, Morandi and has told them:—you, Soffici are in charge of presiding over all of Fascism's artistic and building activities, and will choose the architects, sculptors and painters that will help you [...] You Morandi will make the banners, the standards, the pennants and the coats of arms for the legions and the fasci.<sup>51</sup>

—This passage demonstrates that Morandi and Soffici were key to Maccari's construction of Strapaese's role within Fascism—he relies on Soffici's actual status as a cultural authority and politicizes Morandi's art, which is seen fit to create fascist regalia.

Not everyone saw Morandi and Soffici's closeness in a positive light, however. Morandi's former classmate at the Bolognese Accademia delle Belle Arti, Osvaldo Licini, bemoaned his friend's involvement with the Strapaesani as late as 1939.<sup>52</sup> Licini's paintings were oriented towards abstraction, and the artist saw Morandi as stuck in an official circle, referring to him as a 'creatura,' that is, as a child of the strapeasani. The fact that this article was written as late as 1939 points to the slippage of readings in the Morandian literature; he could still be perceived in a ruralist key at a time when the first formal readings were emerging.

### **Morandi's Art and Strapaese**

Both Soffici and Morandi ascribed a ruralist reading to Morandi's art and persona during the mid to late 1920s and early 1930s. Yet, how did Morandi's art published in *Il Selvaggio* and *L'Italiano* interact with Strapaese's ruralist ideology? Is it correct, as Arcangeli and del Puppo have done, to acknowledge the rusticity of Morandi's pieces from the 1920s and 1930s while carefully dislodging them from any sort of ideological charge?

Del Puppo's position with regards to Morandi's involvement in *Il Selvaggio* is somewhat contradictory. He notes that from 1926 to 1940 the artist published thirty-four drawings and etchings in the magazine and that his graphic production was tied to this publication.<sup>53</sup> This is followed by an attempt to minimize Morandi's and *Il Selvaggio*'s connections to Fascism, which I have discussed above.<sup>54</sup> Moreover, by claiming that anything that was not 'official fascist rhetoric' was unrelated to Fascism, del Puppo misrepresents both Morandi and the regime.

---

Beyond appearing in Strapaese's magazines, Morandi's art frequently supported their ruralist discourse, since occupied the same space as their articles. Morandi's self-portrait and Soffici's column "Semplicismi" shared the first page of *Il Selvaggio* on 15 March 1927 (fig. 4.17). The drawing is enveloped by the text, serving as an example of the art Soffici called for. Since the portrait features a palette, it could also suggest that Morandi was the ideal Italian painter Soffici

called for in his article. Here, the critic claimed that most modern artists were followers of gothic art, which produced the same effects as 'mortal games, strong liquors and mind altering drugs.'<sup>55</sup> In contrast, he believes that Italian art had: 'senso della disciplina, chiarezza, equilibrio, discrezione, sobrietà, sapiente grazia.'<sup>56</sup> As a result of appearing alongside Soffici's column, Morandi's Self-Portrait was embedded with a discourse which was often used describe Fascism itself. Indeed, writing about art during Fascist that valued concepts such as 'equilibrium,' 'discipline' and 'clarity' was common in Italian art criticism during those years, appearing in Terragni's descriptions of his buildings, for example.<sup>57</sup>

Along with Maccari's, Longanesi's, Soffici's and his own writings about art, Morandi's works reproduced by the Strapaese magazines erased his ties to Futurism, the Metaphysical school and the avant-garde in general. Still Life with Bread Basket (1921), published in 1927, is similar to contemporaneous paintings by Morandi featuring a seashell, such as Still Life (1921, vit. 58), and both rejected the metaphysical style (figs. 4.18 & 4.19).<sup>58</sup> The rendition of the objects clashes with the sharper, clearer masses of the metaphysical still lifes in paintings such as Still Life of 1919 (vit. 44) (fig. 3.12). In the etching, the right-most vessel seems to dissolve into the background; in the painting, the open canister and the vessel behind it containing the shell appear meld into one piece. Although Morandi renders the table top in the painting, in both the etching and the painting, the figures seem to exist suspended in an indeterminate space different from that of the tensely rendered metaphysical canvases; the later works also portray their objects from a different point of view. Morandi's yellowish-ochre palette and visible gestural brushwork also succeed in creating a distance from the metaphysical works he had published in Valori Plastici. This fluidity reappears in many of his graphic works reproduced in Il Selvaggio via his careful cross-hatching. This rejection of de Chirico's style reappears in Still Life with Bread and Lemon (1921) and Drawing (1920), from 1926 and 1927 respectively, which are clearly indebted to Cézanne, and more importantly, to Soffici (figs. 4.20 & 4.21, 3.5-3.7).<sup>59</sup> By publishing works that dated from his 1920-1921 return to realism in Il

Selvaggio's issues printed in 1926-1927, Morandi ensured that this change registered in the public's eye, as if trying to highlight his previous abandonment of de Chirico's school.

Soffici's and Morandi's works' convergence in *Il Selvaggio* is even more evident when they depict country houses. Morandi's *Landscape (House in Grizzana)* (1927) is very similar to Soffici's *Town* (1927-1928) (figs. 4.22 & 3.23).<sup>60</sup> Although Soffici's piece is a woodcut and is less detailed than Morandi's etching, their composition and subject are similar. Despite the fact that Morandi's landscapes have been described as 'pure and extraneous to rural rhetoric,' this is not the case.<sup>61</sup> Indeed, the depiction of country houses, or *case coloniche*, was a minor genre within Italian art during Fascism and an interest in their preservation was another instance of this type of ruralism.<sup>62</sup> Hence, Morandi's representation of such country houses, like his *paesano still lives*, alluded to traditional country life and the desire to preserve it.

Despite his connections to Strapaese, Morandi's landscapes and still lives often undermined ruralism. The artist illustrated the poet's Vincenzo Cardarelli's book *Il sole a picco* (1929), published by *L'Italiano's* press. Within this publication, the relationship between Cardarelli's writings and Morandi's pieces suggests that the regionalism and authenticity the Strapaesani treasured so highly was distorted by their own nostalgia.

The integration of Morandi's depictions of Grizzana, which is in the Emilian countryside, into a book that is mainly about Tarquinia, the poet's hometown in Lazio, questions Cardarelli's project by forcing the images to operate as representations of a countryside they were not based on. Though Del Puppo believes that there is a clear relation between the landscape and Cardarelli's biography in *Il sole a picco*, this only occurs within the text.<sup>63</sup> The poem "Soggiorno in Toscana," for example, is illustrated by one of Morandi's country houses (fig. 4.26), which is rendered with sparse means and is almost obscured by the trees in front of it, depriving the reader of a picturesque Tuscan landscape, its cypresses, roads and hills. In contrast, Cardarelli focuses on describing

Tuscans, emphasizing their 'typical' personality traits.<sup>64</sup> The discrepancy between Morandi's sparse Emilian rendition and Cardarelli's detailed account of his visit to Tuscany, points to the fact that despite the latter's description of this region and its people, the result amounts to a pale reflection of the poet's experience. Beyond that, like Soffici and his character Lemmonio Boreo, Cardarelli remained an intellectual for whom the landscape and its people were useful insofar as they confirmed his notion of culture.<sup>65</sup> Thus, Morandi's odd representation of a country house, in which the house is crowded to the left and relegated to the background, undermines Cardarelli's detailed description of Tuscany and its people.

Cardarelli's poem "Il contadino" recalls Soffici's descriptions of peasants in Lemmonio Boreo (1912), which cast them as naïve children.<sup>66</sup> Cardarelli found the fact that peasants were not the proprietors of the land reassuring, as it kept them from becoming too ambitious and prevented social upheaval. Yet, Cardarelli's view of the peasantry did not reflect their conditions; in Northern Italy, farms were more industrialized and the relationship between the farmers and landowners could be extremely tense. Moreover, the harmonic relationships between landowner and sharecropper described by Cardarelli were disappearing, and in fact probably never existed. Indeed, many of the peasants sympathized with socialism after the Great War, which in turn led the landowners to rely on the fascist squads to attack socialist interests and resulted in a general worsening of the sharecroppers' contracts.<sup>67</sup> In many ways, Strapaese's views of the countryside not only idealized the peasants conditions, but also masked the provincial social issues that led to the rise of Fascism in rural Italy. The fact that Morandi's landscapes never included figures emphasizes Cardarelli's, and Strapaese's static view of the countryside and the peasants. In other words, the lack of farmers in Morandi's art points to Strapaese's general refusal to engage with them and their social and economic realities both before and after the rise of Fascism.

## Conclusion

Although *Il Selvaggio's* ruralist aesthetic did not become Fascism's official style, it was an important component of its visual culture, as is demonstrated by its similarities to the regime's ruralist magazines. Maccari and Longanesi's participation in the *Mostra della Rivoluzione Fascista* shows that a rustic style could coexist with styles derived from avant-garde culture as well as with those which sought to return to Rome's grandeur. Moreover, the regime's use of both avant-garde and traditional styles debunks the misguided notion that aligns avant-garde art and progressive politics.<sup>68</sup> Since the history of modernism has been written to either exclude political art or to privilege art aligned with the left, it is imperative to reconsider Fascism's use of avant-garde aesthetics as well as the classicist and/or ruralist reaction against the avant-garde.

Soffici's ruralism, though initially rooted in his exploration of the Parisian avant-garde scene, served as the basis for *Il Selvaggio* and *L'Italiano*. These magazines allowed Soffici and Morandi's painterly rusticity to flourish and were pivotal for the development of the younger artist's career. Although in 1932 Soffici had annointed Morandi as the leading young painter working towards the renaissance of Italian art, by the late 1930s, he was able to draw upon a number of young artists such as Lega, Martini, del Rigo and Gallo and gave them space in the pages of the magazine *Il Frontespizio*. Indeed, Soffici's and Morandi's still lives and landscapes constructed a link between Soffici's early career and younger generation of Italian artists working in a rustic vein during late Fascism.

Morandi's status as one of the main artists of Strapaese and his role in the development of Soffici's rustic aesthetic was eventually forgotten. Regardless of the degree of Morandi's personal commitment to or belief in Fascism, in the late 1920s, the artist chose to align himself with a nationalistic view of art and culture expressed by Soffici and the strapaesani. More importantly, Morandi's autobiographical article demonstrates that his shift from the Metaphysical school into Strapaese's ruralism was put into motion by none other than himself. The active role the artist had

in determining what readings could be mapped onto him became evident due to his preference for Cesare Brandi's formalist interpretation in 1939 and his harsh rejection of Francesco Arcangeli's monograph during the early 1960s. As such, Morandi's involvement with Strapaese is key to understanding the artist's progression from the Metaphysical school to a post-World War II context, a transition which has been heretofore neglected by the literature. This important stage lasted roughly from 1926 to 1939, and beyond encompassing his links to Fascism, was instrumental to his success in Italy, and eventually, abroad.

Morandi's persona's provincialism and rusticity, carefully constructed by himself, Soffici, Longanesi and Maccari was allied to the landscapes and ideals valued by Strapaese. Their ruralism is of an intellectual sort, and it should be stressed that both Morandi and the countryside, as they appear in *Il Selvaggio* and to a lesser degree, in *L'Italiano*, were created by fascist intellectuals. Indeed, Morandi's identity as a rustic painter would unravel during late Fascism's call for an empire, as the regime urgently called for large-scale public art and propaganda that was clearly linked to the Roman empire and the Italian Renaissance.

---

<sup>1</sup> Abramovicz, Giorgio Morandi, 148-149.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 149. Abramovicz reads the white flower vase in *Still Life* as a Christ figure not unlike that depicted by Piero della Francesca in *Resurrection*.

<sup>3</sup> Giorgio Morandi, "Autobiografia," *L'Assalto* (31 December 1927).

<sup>4</sup> See Arcangeli, Giorgio Morandi, 110, 167. See also Del Puppo, "Classico e Italiano."

<sup>5</sup> See Mino Maccari, *Il Selvaggio*, edited by Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti (Venice: Neri Pozza, 1955), 35-36. Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti writes that Morandi's work in late 1920s early 1930s was mostly known because it was published in *Il Selvaggio*. This magazine was crucial to his success and presented him, Carrà, Rosai and de Pisis as modern master.

<sup>6</sup> Falasca-Zamponi, *Fascist Spectacle*, 15-16.

<sup>7</sup> See Ulrich Schmid, "Style versus Ideology: Towards a Conceptualisation of Fascist Aesthetics," *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 6 (June 2005): 128.

<sup>8</sup> Adamson. *Avant-Garde Florence*, 161. See also Chapter One for a discussion of Lemmonio Boreo, Fascism and toscanità.

<sup>9</sup> We can also recall the singular movement that, more or less ten years ago, revolved around the groups of artists and letterati of Leonardo, of *La Voce* and the unforgettable *Lacerba*. It is right, however, to recognize that with regards to our case, compared with them, we are an embryo, a sign—but a rather promising one: more political, in any case, more completely revolutionary. The fact that Ardengo Soffici, whose influence on the current—fascist—generations—is useless to point out, esteems us and receives us in his Poggio a Caiano, fatherland of the first fascist, Lemmonio Boreo, has a decisive significance.

<sup>10</sup> Poggi, “*Lacerba: Interventionist Art and Politics*.” See also Adamson, *Avant-Garde Florence*, 191-203.

<sup>11</sup> See Papini and Soffici, *Almanacco Purgativo* (Florence: Vallecchi, 1914). This publication was written by Soffici and Papini during the duration of the Futurist exhibition sponsored by *Lacerba* at the gallery of Ferrante Gonelli, in Florence, November 1913 - January 1914.

<sup>12</sup> See Ben-Ghiat, “Blasetti, Camerini, Matarazzo: Three Visions of a Different Modernity,” in *Fascist Modernities*, 80-87. See also Corrado Alvaro, *Gente in Aspromonte* (Milan: Fratelli Treves, 1931).

<sup>13</sup> The *Sezione Massaie Rurali* also published an actual almanac, but its distribution was not as wide.

<sup>14</sup> See Perry Willson, *Peasant Women and Politics in Fascist Italy: the Massaie rurali* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 110.

<sup>15</sup> See Anthony Cardoza, *Agrarian Elites and Italian Fascism: the Province of Bologna, 1901- 1926* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982).

<sup>16</sup> This is reproduced in Alessandro Leone, “*Sezione Massaie Rurali*,” 26 October 2006, <<http://www.littorio.com/pnf/ordmas-i.htm>> (15 February 2006). The original text reads: “Art. 2) La Sezione massaie rurali si propone di: [...] b. favorire l’allevamento igienico della prole, procurando una particolare assistenza alle tutti massai con prole numerosa. c. fare apprezzare i vantaggi della vita dei campi per contrastare le dannose tendenze all’urbanesimo. [...] f.. incrementare, ai fini dell’autarchia economica, l’attività produttiva delle massaie con provvedimenti tendenti a facilitare gli allevamenti avicoli e cunicoli, i piccoli allevamenti familiari delle pecore, la raccolta e il collocamento dei prodotti derivanti dalle piccole industrie rurali ed artigiane delle massaie, la lotta contro gli sprechi, la fornitura dei mangimi, materiali, sementi, attrezzi ecc.”

<sup>17</sup> The similarities between *Il Selvaggio* and *L’azione delle massaie rurali* indicate that the countryside was of deep concern to fascist officials as well as intellectuals who, though committed fascists, were sometimes skeptical of the regime’s policies. Perry Willson has studied the officers in charge of *L’azione*, concluding that most of them were urban, educated women.<sup>20</sup> That intellectuals and educated women claimed to safeguard the countryside’s culture and speak for its peasant class, further demonstrates the strength of fascist rural policy and its ability to penetrate groups that could voice the regime’s concerns.



<sup>18</sup> Knowledge of the life and work of Giorgio Morandi has in fact the power to suggest many thoughts and observations of a general order; and this testifies to their exemplary force.

<sup>19</sup> Maccari, "Giorgio Morandi." Braun, "Speaking Volumes," 96. Ibid. The original text reads: "Sono nature morte, paesi, campi, angoli solitari della natura non 'pittoresca', nè orrida, nè smagliante, ma commune, semplice, senza eccessi di linee, di colori e di contrasti."

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. The original text reads: "Sono nature morte, paesi, campi, angoli solitari della natura non 'pittoresca', nè orrida, nè smagliante, ma commune, semplice, senza eccessi di linee, di colori e di contrasti."

<sup>21</sup> This is why Giorgio Morandi is a poet, in this way he is the custodian of that poetry that many say is dead because they cannot see, indifferent or blinded by too many artificial lights.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. The original text reads: "...senza trucchi, genuina, fatta in casa come il pane con l'olio. Vedere un suo quadro vuol dire conoscere il suo carattere, la sua famiglia, la sua casa, la sua strada, la sua città."

<sup>23</sup> Morandi exhibited alongside with Semeghini, Carrà, Galante, Soffici, Rosai, Maccari, Lega, Longanesi, Boncinelli and Martini.

<sup>24</sup> Benito Mussolini, "Il Novecento," *Il popolo d'Italia* (15 February 1923) given on the inauguration of the Mostra del Novecento, reprinted in *Opera omnia di Benito Mussolini*, ed. Edoardo and Duilio Susmil (Florence, 1951-1963), vol. 19, 187-88. The original text reads: "Primo: quale rapporto intercede la politica e l'arte?...Che la politica sia un'arte non v'è dubbio. Non è, certo, una scienza. Nemmeno empirismo. É quindi un'arte. Anche perché nella politica c'è molto intuito. La creazione "politica" come quella artistica è una elaborazione lenta e una divinazione subitanea. A un certo modo l'artista crea colla ispirazione, il politico colla decisione."

<sup>25</sup> Maccari, "Addio del passato," *Il Selvaggio* (1-14 March 1926). The original text reads: "Gli episodi politici o pseudopolitici, i loro sviluppi e le loro vicende, non ci interessano più (...). Noi sentiamo bene che oggi non è permesso a chiunque fare della politica. Col fascismo, la politica è arte di Governo, non di partito (...). Non c'è che l'arte. L'arte è l'espressione suprema dell'intelligenza di una stirpe. Una rivoluzione è anzitutto e soprattutto un atteggiamento e un orientamento dell'intelligenza. Dunque dalla produzione artistica noi avremo l'indice del valore d'una rivoluzione. Il discorso del Duce alla Mostra del Novecento conferma tale concetto: esso ha pesato in modo decisivo sulla crisi del Selvaggio, il cui atteggiamento aveva già tutti i caratteri d'una manifestazione artistica; sicché nessun potrà meravigliarsi dell'aver il Selvaggio chiuso il suo periodo squadristico ed eletto a compito d'una sua nuova vita la coltivazione dell'arte."

<sup>26</sup> Bottai led a squad during the March in Rome. From 1929 to 1932 he was Minister of the Corporations and from 1935 to 1936, the mayor of Rome.

<sup>27</sup> Bottai, "Arte e Fascismo in un discorso di Giuseppe Bottai per l'inaugurazione della Mostra del Selvaggio," *Il Selvaggio* (1 October 1927). The original text reads: "...lavorano insieme per instaurare in Italia una comune e fondamentale coscienza di italianità."

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Mino Maccari, to Morandi, undated [circa 1927], Archivio Morandi, Bologna. The original text reads: "Non devi mancare perchè hai ottime cose che son piaciute a tutti e faremmo grande figura. Pensa che d'italiani non ci sono altri gruppi che quello di De Karolis! Quindi è un dovere da parte nostra partecipare."

<sup>30</sup> See Abramowicz, Giorgio Morandi, 130 and Morandi, "Autobiografia."

<sup>31</sup> Giorgi Morandi, to Ardengo Soffici, Bologna, 3 October 1929, in Morandi, Lettere, 34.

<sup>32</sup> See Marla Stone, The Patron State.

<sup>33</sup> I did not detect a particularly anti-french sentiment that led the publication of this to be delayed for four years. Perhaps it was revised before final printing.

<sup>34</sup> As the years passed, they became better friends, and visited each other in 1928, 1929, 1931 and 1933.

<sup>35</sup> In 1928 the Bolognese sold Soffici two canvases (vit. 118 and 127). Soffici also bought several paintings by Morandi that were exhibited in the 1931 Quadriennale, most likely, and in total, owned six oils by the artist plus assorted works on paper (vit. 6, 118, 127, 147, 148, 285). See Cavallo, A Prato per vedere i Corot, 21.

<sup>36</sup> Soffici had sent two portraits and several landscapes to the Biennale, all of them from 1927. Giorgio Morandi to Ardengo Soffici, Bologna, 5 May 1928, in Morandi, Lettere, 32. The original text reads: "Ho visto a Venezia i suoi quadri che mi sono piaciuti moltissimo e sono fra le cose più belle dell'esposizione." Sleeping Woman and Maid (1927), Sergio (1927), Cabins (1927), Wind on the Ocean (1927), Evening at Forte dei Marmi (1927), Street at Querceta (1927) and Church at Poggio (1927) were the paintings submitted by Soffici.

<sup>37</sup> Maccari, "Giorgio Morandi." The original text reads: "I quadri del Morandi, come le sue acqueforti, nelle quali eccelle, rivelano la bellezza e la poesia di quelle cose che per essere umili e modeste hanno bisogno di essere capite, interpretate o descritte da un artista, perchè il mondo si accorga di loro." See also Longanesi, "Giorgio Morandi." The original text reads: "I suoi oggetti casalinghi, ordinati in una semplice ed armonica composizione, fatta di leggeri, impercettibili ma acutissimi rapporti di forme, spazi e massi riescono a commuoverci più di qualunque magico, sconfinato e desolante scenario stracittadino."

<sup>38</sup> Morandi, "Autobiografia." Although this is one of the few published writings by Morandi, the literature on Morandi has chosen to ignore it, likely because it mentions Facism in a positive light. In his book about Soffici and Morandi, Cavallo mentions it and provides a facsimile but does not discuss it. The decision to align with Soffici is repeated in a later letter, see Giorgio Morandi, to Ardengo Soffici, Bologna, 3 June 1928, in Morandi, Lettere, 33. By treating each other as old friends Morandi meant using the 'tu' or informal address form instead of the formal 'lei.'

<sup>39</sup> Abramowicz, Giorgio Morandi, 125.

<sup>40</sup> Morandi, "Autobiografia." The original text reads: "Ebbi molta fede nel Fascismo fin dai primi accenni, fede che non mi venne mai meno, neppure nei giorni più grigi e tempestosi." Braun claims that the 'grayest and most tempestous days' refers to the Matteotti crisis of 1924, see "Speaking Volumes," 102.

<sup>41</sup> This initial adhesion of mine did not go beyond participating in the first show of the “Giovani Futuristi” at Sproveri’s in Rome. Morandi, “Autobiografia.” The original text reads: “Questa mia iniziale adesione non andò più oltre di una partecipazione alla prima mostra dei “Giovani Futuristi” da Sproveri a Roma.”

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. The original text reads: “...mi portarono a considerare con quanta sincerità e semplicità operarono i vecchi maestri, che costantemente alla realtà s’ispirarono.”

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. See Soffici, “Cézanne.”; and “Henri Rousseau.”

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. The original text reads: “...la loro opera ed i loro scritti hanno, a mio parere, esercitato una benefica influenza sull’indirizzo dell’arte italiana d’oggi.”

<sup>47</sup> Soffici, “Giorgio Morandi.” The original text reads: “Giorgio Morandi, pittore, incisore e disegnatore, é colui che tra i giovani artisti italiani, forse più spedito cammina precisamente sulla strada indicata.”

<sup>48</sup> Ibid. The original text reads: “...esser solo capace di ordine vero chi ha vissuto lo spirito di ribellione, è questo un buono e promettente cominciamento.”

<sup>49</sup> Ibid. The original text reads: “...un pittore di primo piano e perfettamente rappresentativo di una rinascita—della rinascita artistica particolarmente nostra.”

<sup>50</sup> Ibid. The original text reads: “Ne risulta un organismo artistico perfetto, pieno, vitale, e pertanto di natura esemplare e classica. E intendo classico all’italiana; cioè reale e ideale, oggettivo e soggettivo, e tradizionale ad un tempo.”

<sup>51</sup> Anonymous (Maccari), “Il Farnetico,” *L’Italiano* (3 June 1926), cited in Cavallo, *A Prato per vedere i Corot*, 22. The original text reads: “Mussolini ha chiamato presso di sé Soffici, Rosai, Longanesi, Maccari, Oppo, Bartoli, Morandi e ha detto loro:—tu Soffici sei incaricato di presiedere a tutte le iniziative artistiche ed edilizie del Fascismo, e sceglierai gli architetti, gli scultori e i pittori che ti dovranno aiutare [...] Tu Morandi farai i gonfaloni, gli stendardi, i gagliardetti, gli stemmi delle legioni e dei fasci.”

<sup>52</sup> Osvaldo Licini, to Giuseppe Marchiori, 3 March 1939, in *Errante erotico eretico. Gli scritti letterari e tutte le lettere*, edited by Zeno Birolli, Gino Baratta and Francesco Bartoli (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1974), 142-3. The original text reads: “Voi sapete pure che io non ho mai messo in dubbio il talento di Morandi, per quanto lo vedessi rincoglionito dall’oppio propinatogli da Soffici, Oppo e Comp., e soffriasi per quell suo camminare a ritroso, da Cézanne verso Chardin, ed oltre fino a Pompei, come comanda il ‘Cacasenno’: da ‘Poggio a Caiano’...Ecco, Marchiori, come è crollato Morandi, il campione della mediocrazia artistica e burocratica italiana; la creatura degli Oppo, Soffici, Cardarelli, Longanesi, Bartolini, di tutti i gamberi nostalgici reazionari di Strapaese.”

<sup>53</sup> 63 Del Puppo, “Classico e Italiano,” 34.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid. Del Puppo writes: “Non è esistito alcuno spazio più rappresentativo del lavoro di Morandi almeno fino alla metà degli anni trenta. Inoltre, va considerato che una lettura contenutistica, fosse anche ‘strapaesana’ era a quella data l’unica percorribile per una pittura volutamente al di fuori della storia e della retorica di un’arte nazionale. Rimaneva la cronaca, e quella caparbia e meschina del “Selvaggio” era l’unica possibile.”

<sup>55</sup> Soffici, “Semplicismi,” *Il Selvaggio* (15 March 1927). The original text reads: “giuocchi mortali, i forti licquori e gli stupefacenti.”

<sup>56</sup> Ibid. The original text reads: “...sense of discipline, clarity, equilibrium, discretion, sobriety, knowing grace.”

<sup>57</sup> See Thomas Schumacher, *The Danteum: A Study in the Architecture of Literature* (Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 1985), which analyzes the writings of Giuseppe Terragni about his architectural project, the Danteum, and their overlappings with fascist art criticism and ideology. In particular he connects the regime’s desire for colonial expansion with Dante’s profesies about the return of Roman glory. For a more general approach, see Richard Etlin, *Modernism in Italian Architecture, 1890-1940* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991).

<sup>58</sup> Morandi’s etching *Still Life with Bread Basket* was published in *Il Selvaggio* (15 January 1927).

<sup>59</sup> Morandi’s etching *Still Life with Bread and Lemon* was published in *Il Selvaggio* (7 September 1926); Drawing was published in *Il Selvaggio* (31 May 1927).

<sup>60</sup> Morandi’s *Landscape (House in Grizzana)* was published in *Il Selvaggio* (15 April 1928); Soffici’s woodcut, *Town* was published in *Il Selvaggio* (15 July 1928).

<sup>61</sup> Del Puppo, “Classico e italiano,” 36. He writes that: “Se mai è esistito un paesaggio puro ed estraneo alla retorica rurale, non è dissimile a questo.”

<sup>62</sup> In 1934, for example, Mario Tinti published the book *L’Architettura delle case coloniche in Toscana*, which was illustrated by Ottone Rosai, another young artist influenced by Soffici’s avant-gardism before turning into a strapaesano (fig. 4.25).<sup>72</sup> Mario Tinti, *L’Architettura delle case coloniche in Toscana* (Florence: Rinascimento del Libro, 1934).

<sup>63</sup> Del Puppo, “Classico e italiano,” 38-39.

<sup>64</sup> Vincenzo Cardarelli, “Soggiornio in Toscana,” in *Il sole a pico, con 10 disegni di Giorgio Morandi* (Milan: Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, 1952), 146, 147. The original text reads: “Il mio vecchio padrone di casa, il sor Ettore, marito della sora Nunziatina, era di professione scalpellino, e, naturalmente, uomo di poche lettere, ma parlava come un dio. Toscano di buona razza, si rappresentava i fatti e gli uomini della storia come se ci avesse vissuto in mezzo, con uno spirito, cioè, al tutto confidenziale. [...] Imparai dal sor Ettore a conoscere il carattere toscano e quel modo di parlare lento, energico e proprio, ch’è di certi vecchi toscani.”

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 149. The original text reads: “Che cosa sia l’arte, che cosa sia la natura, per quel tanto che ne so, credo averlo appreso lassù, nella mia solitudine di Settignano, durante una primavera.”

---

<sup>66</sup> Cardarelli, "Il Contadino," in *Il sole a picco*, 64. The original text reads: "L'ordine e l'allegria regnano in casa, sotto l'autorità d'una massaia rispettata come una regina. Sui campi comanda lui, il contadino. Tutto è a metà fra lui e il padrone, fuorchè la terra non è sua. Colono, egli è colui che abita e lavora la terra, ma non la possiede. E questo gli dà un gran senso di agio e di riposo, trattenendo le sue cupidigie. Gentilezza di costume, religione, contentezza del proprio stato, sono le sue doviziose divinità famigliari."

<sup>67</sup> Perry Willson, 10-11.

<sup>68</sup> See Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*.