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Dollies for the *Duce*: the politics of playtime in Fascist Italy

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ABSTRACT

To foreground this study of early childhood play under Italian Fascism, this article opens by exploring the relationship between Fascism and youth culture in the broad terms of dictatorial governance and gendered approaches to the citizenry. Fascist demographic policy and projects centres this inquiry. First, legislation shows how low birthrates provided as a primary catalyst for the regime's obsession with the rites of childhood. Then, architectural plans of nurseries and summer camps to demonstrate how Fascist youth policy took physical form. At the heart of the narrative lie three interlinked case studies of interwar toys. Moving the Balilla baby dolls to miniature muskets and pistols, I show how these toys prompted forms of play that were specific to life under the dictatorship. At stake in these playthings lies the Fascist pedagogy of play.

RIASSUNTO

Per mettere in primo piano questo studio sul gioco sotto il regime fascista, questo articolo traccia la relazione tra il fascismo e la cultura giovanile nel contesto del governo dittatoriale e gli approcci alla cittadinanza determinati dal genere. La politica e i progetti demografici fascisti sono al centro di questa indagine. In primo luogo, la legislazione mostra come il tasso di natalità costituisce il principale catalizzatore dell'ossessione del regime per i riti dell'infanzia. Poi, i progetti architettonici per gli asili nido e i centri estivi dimostrano come la politica giovanile fascista prende forma. Al centro di questo studio abbiamo tre casi interconnessi che esplorano i giocattoli tra le due guerre. Dalle bambole Balilla ai moschetti e pistole in miniatura, vediamo che i giocattoli hanno stimolato modo di giocare che parlano direttamente alla vita sotto la dittatura. In gioco in questi giocattoli c'è la pedagogia fascista.

KEYWORDS Fascism; toys; games; childhood; Opera Nazionale per la Protezione della Maternità ed Infanzia (ONMI); Balilla

PAROLE CHIAVE Fascismo; giocattolo; giochi; infanzia; ONMI; Balilla

Gift-giving marked the Catholic holiday of the Epiphany, celebrated just after Christmas, on 6 January. Parents would tell their children that La Befana, a kindly old woman, would slide down the chimney to deliver toys and sweets to well-behaved children. Naughty ones would find only lumps of coal or sticks in their socks. In parallel with Saint Nicolas with his fireside snack of cookies and milk, Italian families would pour a small glass of wine for La Befana. But through

schools, social groups, and the church, Italian women took on the work of the mythic Befana. They managed the public-facing version of this holiday by soliciting donations from private companies to source holiday gifts for needy children. At its core, the holiday was female-centric and charity-driven, in that it emphasized Italian women's ability to provide for others' children. But in 1928, Benito Mussolini's regime inaugurated a new holiday: la Befana Fascista, what we might think of as Fascist Christmas. Instead of the grandmotherly Befana, children were now told that Christmas presents came from il Duce. Partito Nazionale Fascista (PNF) secretary Augusto Turato repurposed the traditional winter holiday to showcase the good works of Fascist social organizations. Although the Fascist regime often curated mass events, like demonstrations and rallies, Befana fascista was unique in that it pushed parents and children to participate in the public politics of together, in a family unit. Donations took place at children's schools and at the factories where parents worked, and in public piazzas as well, where the events resembled political rallies for tots.

Toys were the first step used by the dictatorship to secure the consent of the working-class. This group included mothers, who the regime needed to birth more Italians for the national demographic push, and children, who were seen as potential future Fascists. Scholars of the Fascist period from the United States and Great Britain have ably investigated Fascist education of children and their mothers through the cultural vein of historical inquiry. Foundational scholarship from De Grazia (1993) and Koon (1985), as well as recent work from McLean (2018) has demonstrated how Fascist reforms to the Italian educational system aligned public schools and *colonie* (summer camps) with regime dictates. In parallel with these studies, Horn's legislative analysis (1994) and Ipsen's statistical research (1996) have revealed the broader structures of Fascist power within which Italian families lived their lives. Because Fascist children's toys sit at the nexus of party, play, and puericulture, such materials are uniquely positioned to interweave these historiographic threads.¹

To do so, this article engages with this rich vein of Italian research and archives that explore the peninsula's history of toys and games. It draws from comprehensive catalogues curated by Linfante and Bertola (2013) and Covato and Ulivieri (2001) as well as Italian studies squarely focused on Fascist period toys, from scholars like Maria Pia Musso (*Il gioco e il fascismo*, 2005). I contribute to these previous studies by taking Emilio Gentile's dual theories of *la sacralizzazione della politica* (1993) and *fascismo di pietra* (2007) and shifting their focus, turning away from Fascist Blackshirts in public piazzas and towards Balilla baby dolls in private nurseries. Here too, Fascism was set into stone and politics were sacralized but through the domestic spaces and objects that made up a small child's world. This builds on Gentile's contention that sacralized politics take the form of political religion in totalitarian contexts. Once established, they work through the aesthetics of power by leveraging the architecture of common spaces towards political purpose.

This article aims to make the politics of playtime visible by tracing the enmeshment of Fascist government and the Italian toy industry. It follows Fascist baby dolls from their production in the Lenci and Furga factories to their distribution to the needy children of Dopolavoristi at La Befana Fascista.² In the process, it also excavates the former production sites of Fascist period industry. The majority of the dolls studied here come from the Associazione Gruppo del Giocattolo Storico. Many of these museums evoke the geopolitics of urban industry under Fascism, in that they rest on the foundations of former toy and doll factories located in the exurban peripheries of northern industrial cities. The Museo del Giocattolo e del Bambino with its two seats in Cormano and Stefano Lodigiano, are on the periphery of Milan, and the Museo del Giocattolo in Canneto sull'Oglio, is in the outskirts of Mantua. Other sites, like the Archivio Lenci, formerly housed in Turin, now travel as part of specialty exhibits. The most recent exposition of Lenci dolls was held by a ceramic museum rather than a toy museum, the Museo della Ceramica di Mondovi in 2018. Doll materials matter as much as their design and use from the perspective of industrial production.

Fascism's politics of autarky shaped Italian industry through the promotion and protection of domestic materials, methods, and products. But autarky also encompassed company sponsorship of Fascist demographic projects. Taken to the logical extreme, pronatalism, the bearing of numerous children, could be considered a form of autarkic production. It aimed to make more and better Italian children. Major companies, both in the toy industry and outside of it, scrambled to answer the regime's twinned calls for autarky and pronatalism. Perugia added nursing rooms to their factories, and iconic Italian fruits, like Sicilian oranges, to their chocolate bars. Pirelli produced rubber tires, but also added toys like bouncing balls to their product lines, as illustrated by Leonetto Cappiello's luminous *pugno nell'occhio* advertisement (figure 1). This article approaches Italian toy production under Fascism as one part of the regime's broader push for autarkic production – of both Italian children and their toys. Because Italian industry, including the toy industry, expanded during the *ventennio*, the regime's push for autarkic production became part the bureaucratic sediment.

Playtime's purpose was a hotly debated topic among Fascist-period teachers, physicians, and government functionaries. These debates had their origins in early twentieth-century studies of puericulture. Founding foremother Maria Montessori, the first woman to graduate in medicine from La Sapienza in Rome in 1896, launched the modern Italian conversation around children's play. She characterized playtime as children's first step towards learning the rules for adult life with her revolutionary 1909 publication, *Il metodo della pedagogia scientifica*. In contrast with pre-modern edicts, Montessori considered children to be 'complete beings' ('essere complete') who were capable of creative and moral



Figure 1. Poster for Pirelli rubber balls for play. Designed by Leonardo Cappiello. Printed in Milan, Lugano. c. 1920s (Archivio Storico, La Fondazione Pirelli, Milan, Italy).

thought. She worked with the Mantovese toy company Bassoli & figli di Gonzago to craft pedagogical toys. Colorful blocks and cylinders aimed to develop abstract spatial reasoning. Soft fabric swatches with buttons, laces, and hooks taught physical skills. By the early 1920s, Montessori's experiments in toy design animated classrooms at the Casa dei Bambini in the Roman neighbourhood of San Lorenzo. Newly translated ideas imported from American home economics further developed what Montessori had started. In 1923, another doctor, Maria Diez Gasca, translated American home economics pioneer Christine Frederick's *The New Housekeeping: Efficiency Studies in Home Management* (1923) into Italian as *La casa moderna: Come risparmiare tempo, fatica e denaro* (1933).³ Managing young children, whether in schools or homes, was to be guided by hygiene and the medical sciences.

Interwar puericulture experts, including many Fascist government functionaries who did not consider themselves to be followers of the Montessori method or the American Home Economics movement, began to experiment with nursery and toy designs to miniaturize the adult world. This common approach to toy-making was directed to a new psychological goal: to allow children to freely select their own activities, thereby making their first step towards independence from adults. This method was not just old, it was ancient, as F. Valeri Malaguzzi, an Italian toy expert of the Fascist period, approvingly noted in 1926. Roman toys, according to his citation of Pliny, supported gendered play. Toys trained for children for their future adult roles, with ivory and terra cotta dolls for girls and tiny swords and shields for boys.⁴ These ancient playthings would not have been out of place during the dictatorship. By the 1930s, that shape of that world was increasingly dictated by the Fascist party. Just as Fascist education could be summarized by the period slogan *libro e moschetto, fascista perfetto*, so too did an emphasis on physical preparation for future pronatalist and military fitness shape the nursery. Endocrinologist Nicola Pende published influential studies advocating for gendered playtime inflected by his eugenic beliefs.⁵ Opera Nazionale per la Protezione della Maternità ed Infanzia (ONMI) president Attilio LoMonaco-Aprile took a similar tact by financing filmic propaganda like *Alle Madri d'Italia* and *Quando la Culla è Vuota*. In didactic films and newsreels, girls from ages four to sixteen play-acted hygienic motherhood. Dolls and miniature weapons prepared children for the traditional gender roles espoused by the Fascist regime, and provided early training for future mothers and soldiers, the citizens of a populous, militarized Italy who would march as one.

Under Fascism, gender-appropriate play did not simply mean repeating the mothering dolls and battling with paper soldiers as parents would have done in the past. Rather, it meant creating a version of the adult world that was not only miniaturized, but Fascistized. Little girls would still play with baby dolls, but in ways that guided them towards the demographic goals of totalitarian politics, like hyper-productive and hygienic mothering for the betterment of the race. It was not only a question of content, but approach. To these new games, new binaries were added. Playtime ought to be outdoors, not indoors. Children should play in groups, not alone. Minister of Education Giuseppe Bottai even asked elementary school teachers to create activities to transform reading from a solitary, interior activity to collective one. Only group work, Bottai claimed, could effectively 'transmit a fascist education' (Ferris 2017, 189). Finally and most importantly, adults were to organize children's games and then keep close watch over them. We might think of this collection of binary oppositions as a single drive to militarize children's bodies, preparing them for war. Once deployed through consumer culture like toys, these ideological stances came to life as Fascism's politics of playtime. At stake in the definition lies the interconnection of apparently

separate Fascist projects, like raising the Italian birthrate and favouring domestic industry. Toys bring these goals together, under the aegis of autarkic production.

First steps: the making of Balilla, Colonie, and Fascist children's spaces

In the 1920s and 1930s, many Italian citizens spent their first years of life in nurseries operated publicly by the ONMI, or privately by the Catholic church. Later, at school, the Ministero per l'Istruzione Pubblica dictated what children read, wrote, and learned. Educational reform was among the first issues on Mussolini's docket when he consolidated power in 1922. Giovanni Gentile, Sicilian philosopher turned fascist ideologue, served as Mussolini's first Minister of Public Education from 1922 to 1924. As De Grazia notes, Gentile had two goals: 'to inculcate Italian youth with the ideology of the fascist state and to select and promote only the elite so as not to overload the market for intellectual labor' (1993, 156–158).

To control children's leisure time, a then-new concept as many children worked alongside their parents in fields or in factories, the regime introduced the Opera Nazionale Balilla (O.N.B.). Balilla was to children what Dopolavoro was to their parents: an organization for afternoons and weekends that dictated how children should spend their free time. Founded as the *Avanguardie giovanili fasciste* (A.G.F.), the group was renamed Balilla in 1926. The name paid homage to the Genovese boy hero who threw a stone at the invading army in 1746, touching off the anti-Austrian revolt. A popular hero of Italian Fascist children's culture, Balilla starred in the popular song, 'Fischia il sasso'. The chorus exulted, 'Fischia il sasso/il nome squilla/ del ragazzo di Portoria/ e l'intrepido Balilla' (Gibelli 2002, 110). Originally an exclusively male state entity, Balilla's 1926 formation under the Ministry of Public Instruction (later, in 1929, renamed the Ministry of National Education) emphasized scouting in general, broken down into a roster of outdoor physical activities taught through paramilitary organization.⁶

On the newly introduced *Sabato Fascista*, boys put on the Balilla uniforms and gathered to participate in mass martial formations. Playing at soldiers, they even got to borrow working guns for the exercise, although they had to return them at the end of the day (Gibelli 2002, 112). In 1929, Balilla expanded to include girls as well. Girls ages eight to fourteen joined the *Piccole Italiane*; fourteen to eighteen year olds joined the *Giovani Italiane*. These age divisions mirrored the boys' groups, with younger boys joining the Balilla, and teenagers joining the *Avanguardisti*. In 1933, the regime encouraged even younger children to join, with the creation of the *Figli di Lupa* for children aged six to eight. Enrollment rose rapidly: Balilla numbered 406,000 boys in 1927 and 536,000 in 1934. In 1929, the first year that girls were permitted join, the *Piccole Italiane* enrolled 364,000

new members. Soon, the female group's enrollment outpaced their male counterparts. By 1934, the Piccole Italiane numbered 1,637,000. In all, 4,300,000 children in total were involved in the overarching Balilla group in 1934. Soon after, enrollment rose again. But this time, the rise was due to obligation rather than popularity. State-enforced enrollment in Balilla began in 1937. According to state records, roughly half of the Italian population aged six to eighteen were enrolled that year (ISTAT 1938, 1939). To found the O.N.B., the state merged a huge number of preexisting youth groups, bringing them together as a single cohesive entity under Fascist state control. Balilla, and later the Gioventù Italiana del Littorio (G.I.L.), offered afterschool and Saturday activities like sports, gymnastics, military drills to school children between the ages of eight and fourteen.

But their most popular offerings were the holiday excursions to the sea or in the mountains, where they would stay in *colonie*, which functioned as Fascist summer camps (figures 2 and 3). Children of industrial workers could visit these residential seats for month-long excursions to experience outdoor living. Urban alternatives for fresh air existed too. Children who remained in the city could attend a *scuola all'aperto* (an outdoor school). In Rome, the Alessio college provided lessons on sunny verandas for kids (figures 4 and 5). In Milan, the ex-Trotter park provided a school site, as well as ample space for recreation and play in between lessons (figure 6). Across these different



Figure 2. 'Entrata della colonia; un cartello reca la scritta "Fascio primogenito – GIL Milano; una responsabile della colonia accompagna i bambini su un ponte, sullo sfondo dei Dolomiti," Entrance to the summer camp, a sign shows the writing "Firstborn fascio – GIL Milan;" a summer camp manager accompanies the children on a bridge, against the background of the Dolomites.' August 1941 (Archivio Luce: Foto Attualità/Vigo di Fassa (Dolomiti): Photo Code A00134699).



Figure 3. 'Bambini marciano davanti all'edificio della colonia; si legge la scritta "Duce"; campo lungo, "Children march in front of a summer camp building, bearing the writing 'Leader'"; August 1941 (Archivio Luce: Foto Attualità/Vigo di Fassa (Dolomiti): Photo Code A00134704).



Figure 4. 'I bambini della scuola Sant'Alessio sventolano delle banderini in occasione dei festeggiamenti per la Befana,' 'Children at the St. Alessio school wave their little flags for the Befana celebrations.' February 2, 1931 (Archivio Luce: Foto Attualità/Befana alla Scuola all'aperto S. Alessio. Photo Code A00027124).



Figure 5. 'Persone elegantemente vestite distribuiscono i doni della Befana ai bambini della scuola Sant'Alessio seduti all'aperto ai loro tavolinetti,' 'Elegantly dressed people distribute gifts for Befana to children of the Saint Alessio school seated outside at their little tables.' February 2, 1931 (Archivio Luce: Foto Attualità/Befana alla Scuola all'aperto S. Alessio. Photo Code A00027125).



Figure 6. 'Mussolini, accompagnato da personalità, visita una scuola all'aperto della Casa del Sole nel parco ex-Trotter di Milano,' 'Mussolini, accompanied by personnel, visits the outdoor school of the House of the Sun in the ex-Trotter park of Milan.' May 23, 1930 (Archivio Luce: Foto Attualità – Viaggio di S.E. Mussolini a Milano – Visita alla Casa del Sole. Photo Code: A00021228).

spaces, the Fascist party conscripted children's play by providing parents with a babysitter: that is, state officials who supervised children's play, but who also changed it by asking them to don military uniforms and to march in time.

Outdoor exercise was the regime's preferred prescription for strengthening young bodies. Activities mimicked military drills, teaching obedience through coordinated mass movements. As an added benefit for the regime, these exercises also provided photo opportunities for Mussolini to visually suggest that the Fascist regime was winning the Battle for Numbers, with parades of young Italians already dressed for future wars.

To set policy into stone, provincial branches of the Partito Nazionale Fascista began to assume managerial and financial control over these recreational sites. They were managed by Fascist education functionaries like Giuno Salvi, the Parliament Deputy for the Regio Commissario dell'Ente Nazionale per l'Educazione Fisica. Salvi and other functionaries like him published essays dictating how children ought to spend school recess, supposedly their free time. In an essay entitled *Rapporti dell'educazione fisica con la preparazione militare*, he figured gym class as a means towards national preparedness for war (Salvi 1926, 12). Games for children in the Balilla provided as the first step in a developmental sequence leading to physically fit adults, enrolled in Dopolavoro and ready for Fascist occupation abroad (Salvi, 1926, 25). In addition to explicitly Fascist groups, teachers, writers, and architects brought related ideas of visual order as a means to infant health to bear on the nurseries and classrooms where children spent their time. This group included puericulture specialists like Maria Diez Gasca⁷ and her husband Enrico Gasca,⁸ along with educators and home economics experts like Caronia as well as bureaucrats working for the Ministry of Education. Wittingly or not, this group translated the state's Battle for Numbers into practical tips for nursery design.⁹

Two general principles, rationalism and hygiene, guided refurbishments to public institutions and private homes. Advancements in the understanding of germs and microbes coupled with a vogue in eugenics, prompting many European interwar governments to leverage cleanliness as a weapon in the fight against childhood mortality. Medicine was transformed from a repressive practice to a prophylactic one, aiming to stop disease before it started.

Rationalism, a new building style, promised an architectural solution to the regime's demographic problems. It heralded utility, not ornamentation. Linear geometry ruled with grids and rectangles, prompting organized behaviour. Form inevitably followed function. Architects like Gio Ponti, leader of Milanese Neoclassical Novecento group, and Piero Bottoni, a frequent contributor to *Casabella* and *Domus* (of which Ponti was the editor) heralded rationalism for its salubrious effects on the body. For this reason, new mass nurseries and summer camps were built in Rationalist style. Rationalist architecture also

entered family homes, especially in the functional rooms that made houses run, like kitchens and bathrooms. Applied to the nursery, Rationalism promised to turn this workaday room into a tiny factory for producing better Italian bodies.

Designers believed that picking hygienic construction materials was the first step to building healthier nurseries. Unlike wood, lab-made materials like linoleum or factory-produced tile made floors easy to wash. They also silenced the stomping and thumping of energetic play. Aluminum cribs repelled dust. Both aluminum and linoleum were autarchic materials, synthesized in modern Italian factories. A nursery furnished with these materials would have evoked many different Fascist aspirations – not just hygiene, but also modernity, and even patriotism.

Fabric selection mattered as much as picking the right materials for the nursery's floors and walls. Dark bedsheets and plush rugs were both unwelcome in Fascist nurseries. They hid unsanitary soil and stains, allowing unhealthy conditions to go unmarked. As a rule, materials to avoid included dark and heavy fabrics. A vogue for light colors (daffodil yellow, seafoam green, or robin's egg blue) that visibly revealed stains and spots swept the nation's nurseries. But taken in sum, the aesthetic effect of such a space would have felt antiseptic, like a medical clinic – hard, bright, and empty. An ideal Fascist nursery aimed to prompt energetic infant movement, not cuddling and snuggling.

Fascist period hygienic measures for children often meant replicating the outdoors, indoors. Italian urbanists believed that the free flow of air, light, and space provided an architectural equivalent for preventative medicine. Sunlight supposedly inhibited tuberculosis, along with a host of other diseases and social ailments ranging from truancy to drunkenness. (Horn 1994, 123) Translated into practical terms by childcare experts like Caronia, this meant that an ideal infant's nursery ought to be, 'very bright, preferably with exposure to the south or southeast, with a large window, and if possible, a countertop right beneath it' (figure 7; Caronia 1936, 25). Large windows provided ample light as a prophylactic measure, to warm potentially deadly chills and dry out the lungs before a cough could catch. When natural light was not available, experts in the then-new science of home economics recommended placing large, electric lamps at the centre of a room as a 'modern and rational' solution to the problem of darkness (Keinz Cattaneo 1938, 31).

Large windows were said to promote infant health by regulating air flow and temperature. Fresh breezes swept away sickness: stale air flowed out, and fresh air flowed in, blowing away the harmful buildup of dust from wood stoves. Heat and humidity were attendant concerns, with an ideal temperature range prescribed for proper infant care. A hygienic nursery was to be warm but not hot, between seventeen to eighteen degrees Celsius for newborns, and fourteen to sixteen degrees for toddlers (Keinz Cattaneo 1938, 33).

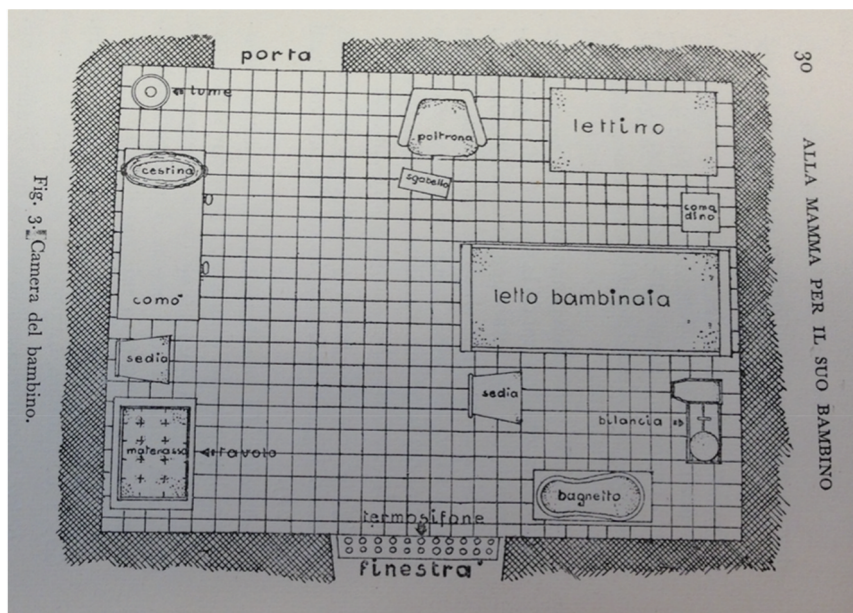


Figure 7. 'Fig. 3 Camera del bambino,' 'Fig. 3 Baby's room,' in Caronia, 1936.

Open floor plans were another sign of hygienic architecture. Empty space for infant bodies to crawl, wriggle, and bounce meant more opportunities muscular development, with experts universally recommending increases to nursery square footage. An ideal space measured 4.5×3.5 meters by length and height (Caronia 1936, 32). The furniture in the baby's room had to be simple, practical, and easily washable. Nothing more than a bed, a chest of drawers (figure 8, figure 9), a bath set on a stand (figure 10), and a scale were required in the most functional of rooms, although a bed and bedside table, plus a few chairs, could be added if one hired a wetnurse.

In general, ornamentation of the nursery was decried as old-fashioned or sentimental, if not expressly unhygienic. Excessive décor was hardly befitting of a robust, Fascist baby. Caronia even accused tacky wallpaper of provoking nightmares in sensitive children (Caronia 1936)

Si possono tappezzare le pareti con carta da parato a disegni semplice e graziosi (largi tralci di fiori, bambini, animali), evitando sempre i disegni troppo complicati e specialmente i grotteschi, in modo che, quando il bambino comincia a capire quel che vede, non si abitui a visioni di cattivo gusto e non corrispondenti alla realtà. Inoltre i disegni grotteschi possono eccitare bambini soverchiamente nervosa e dar loro sogni agitate a sogni paurosi.

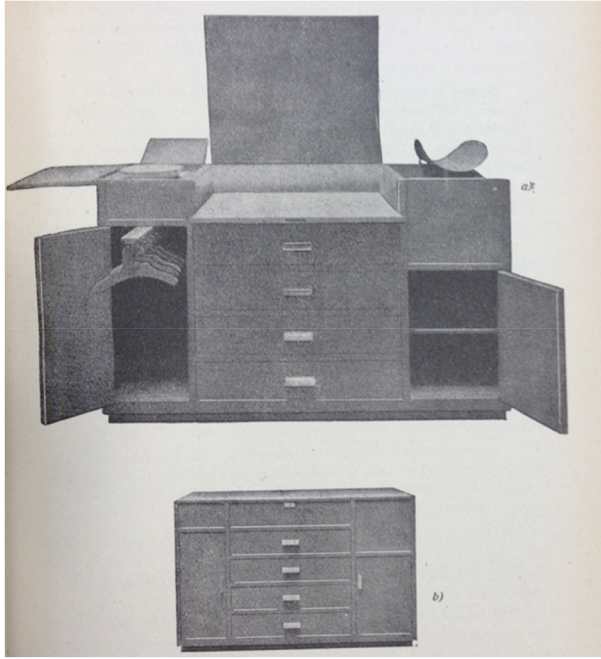


Figure 8. 'Armadio speciale per il bambino con tavolo e accessori per la toeletta a) aperto b) chiuso,' 'Special drawers for children with table and bathtime accessories, a) open b) closed,' (Caronia 1936).

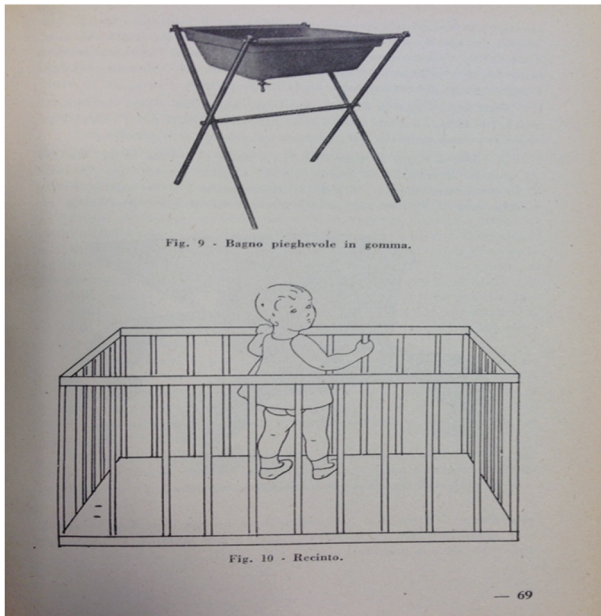


Figure 9. 'Bagno pieghevole in gomma,' 'Fig 9 Collapsible rubber bath,' in Caronia, 1936.



Figure 10. 'Fig. 39 Il Nido d'Infanzia di un grande stabilimento italiano (Soc. An. Venchi-Unica),' 'Fig. 39 The Nursery of a Large Italian Company' (Venchi chocolates) in Enrico Gasca, *Nel bambino salviamo la razza: norme di puericoltura demografica per le scuole Femminili di secondo grado*. Turin: G.B. Paravia, 1939.

You can cover the walls with wallpaper with simple and gracious designs (large shoots of flowers, babies, animals), always overly complicated designs and especially grotesques, so that when the infant begins to understand what it sees, it doesn't get used to visions of bad taste that do not correspond to reality. Additionally, grotesque designs can excite overly nervous children and give them an agitated sleep of fearful dreams.

As this citation shows, children's bodies were considered to be porous, absorbing qualities from the spaces they inhabited. This was a primary concern for infant bodies, seen as the most inchoate. It became less important as children grew. For this reason, puericulture experts took pains to separate children into groups hierarchical groups.

Different ages and genders were believed to benefit from different types of play, as well as different toys and games. Diez Gasca believed that children aged one to five needed some movement. They should throw rocks and balls, rock themselves, back and forth, play with sand, earth, and mud, and dig and fill holes. From ages five to eight, children needed even more activity. At the same time, new styles of games should emerge, like the imitation of doll play and the collection of common objects. After the eighth year, the sexes should be divided. Girls should imitate mothering and domesticity. Boys were expected to become more violent, fighting their first mock battles. With this influential developmental schema in mind, Diez Gasca asserted that

toys ideally ought to represent real world objects to which children could then attribute different uses and meanings (Diez Gasca and Nobile-Ventura 1925).

Taken together, these philosophies of play led to room designs that cleared clutter, making more space for physical games with multiple children. Open space also made the room easier for adults to supervise. This aesthetic was used to encourage forms of play that were visually orderly, like marching in formation. But more broadly, the goal of Rationalist structures was to promote highly industrious human activity within them, an objective that dovetailed with the regime's dreams of hyper-productive factories, manned by devoted labourers who worked with the speed and precision of machines.

In these new spaces, children's free time changed in two ways: instead of playing independently or in small groups, crowds and masses were the rule, and second, it placed under (adult, Fascist) observation. Whereas childcare manuals in 1900s to 1910s focused mainly on keeping children dressed and fed, near-constant adult surveillance of the nursery emerged as a feature of playtime under Fascism. This idea was already being applied in Fascist urbanism at the level of the piazza, in the erection of the Fascist New Towns in the Pontine Marshes. In Sabaudia and Aprilia, central towers created panopticons, as in prisons. New Towns had no trees or shrubbery, that is, they had no spaces for clandestine activity. Here, we see this same scrutiny applied to the level of a single house, in the nursery.

Surveillance mattered most in new institutional settings for childcare, like the ONMI nurseries, *colonie*, and *scuole all'aperto* that served dozens of toddlers at a time. Private businesses added massive nurseries to their factories. Mothers who worked the factory lines would leave their children in the morning, then pick them up again after work at night. Fred W. Taylor's scientific management had recently come into vogue in Italy, leading to increased factory oversight. At the same time, factory nurseries came to resemble tiny assembly lines. Rigid rows and open space meant that it was immediate visually apparent when a child was not where they were supposed to be, as in the Venchi chocolate factory nursery (figure 10). New objects became standard furniture in the nursery, like clocks and scales. Suddenly, daily activities like eating, sleeping, and playing could be measure and assessed for their contributions to daily productivity. Technologies of quantification regulated the new Fascist nursery, allowing caretakers to track infant progress towards an ideal physical development.

Rally in the nursery: Fascist baby dolls at the national trade shows

This next section turns to the Fascist period toy industry to examine how Balilla and Piccola Italiana dolls brought the Fascist politics of playtime to life. I situate this close study of toy design within the broader context of factory production

and holiday distribution. Specifically, I examine how Furga and Lenci doll manufacturers both abetted and ran afoul of the Fascist party's contradictory demands to the Italian toy industry: that it be autarchic and hyper-productive in its operations, but also socially conservative in its designs.

When Risorgimento statesman Massimo D'Azeglio mused that Italy had been made, but it remained to make the Italians, he might have drawn faith from the nationalizing spirit of his contemporary Luigi Furga, a nobleman from Canneto sull'Oglio near Mantua. Furga used his patrimony to build a toy company. Furga's first Italian doll and the D'Azeglio's newly unified nation practically shared a birthday. In 1870, he produced what industrial magnates at the time called 'the national doll'. (Linfante and Bertola 2013, 271). The story of the Furga company was itself one of nationalizing the regional. Furga adopted the Venetian art of papier-mâché mask making for Carnival, then set it towards the more profitable business of doll making by substituting plaster. He refined the materials over the years, always with an eye towards keeping costs low.

During the Fascist years, many leading entrepreneurs realized that they could use the regime's passion for autarky as a patriotic justification for using waste materials in industrial production. According to company legend, chocolatier Luisa Spagnoli scooped her hand along the edge of an assembly line, then rolled the hot clump of cocoa into a ball, and finally topped it with a hazelnut to create Perugina's famous Bacio. Her innovation crafted luxury from leftovers. Furga took a similar approach, substituting the more expensive bisque ceramic doll heads of the early 1920s with a new mixture that the company would continue to use throughout the 1930s: leftovers from cotton production, wood shavings, and dirt from Vincenzo, all held together by a sticky mix of linseed oil, glue, tar (Ercolano 2017, 207). With wartime scarcity, the materials grew poorer still during the 1940s.¹⁰ These were the ingredients that made up Furga's *Giovani Italiane del littorio* doll, one of many Fascist toys produced in Italy throughout the interwar period and into the early years of World War II (figure 11).

Among these dolls, the *Bambole balilla* (a boy and girl pair) made by the Lenci doll company was particularly celebrated by the regime (figure 12; Ercolano 2017, 204). Like the Furga doll company, the Lenci doll company rose in Italy's industrial north, with the original workshop built by Elena König Scavini and her husband Enrico Scavini in Turin in 1918. Elena baptized the company, using her German childhood nickname, *Lenchen*, shorted to 'Lenci' on her return to Italy as an adolescent. Journalist Ugo Ojetto then offered Lenci a company motto in an acrostic, '*Ludus Est Nobis Costanter Industria*', 'Playtime is our job'.

If Furga's byword was 'affordable', then Lenci's was 'collectable'. Daughters and mothers alike coveted Lenci dolls as both playthings and collectors' items. All Lenci dolls shared a characteristic expression: the eyes look sideways, making the dolls appear sullen, distracted, and lonely depending on



Figure 11. Photograph of artisanal doll production at Furga, late 1940s. (Museo del Giocattolo, Canneto sull'Oglio, Italy).

one's point of view. Each doll had the word 'Lenci' stamped into the felt of the foot for easy identification. In contrast to Furga's dolls, made of hard papier-mâché and breakable bisque ceramic, Lenci dolls were soft and cuddly, more fun for children to play with. They were made of woollen felt, and they came with little wooden accessories. As with Furga, the Lenci company produced dolls differently over the arc of the Fascist period the 1920s. Today, collectors seek out dolls produced during the 'Early Lenci Period', that is, dolls made under Elena Scavini's helm as the creative director of the Lenci Company, from 1918 and 1938. Elena Scavini's leadership led the Lenci Company through their years of peak quality production, including during the 1933–1938 period when the Scavini family ceased to hold full financial control of their enterprise.

During this peak period, Elena Scavini commissioned up-and-coming artists to design her dolls. Ceramacist Lino Berzoini got his start by painting doll faces for Lenci before accepting Fascist party commissions to design decorative plates and bowls as prizes for prolific mothers (Garvin 2022). Graphic designer Marcello Dudovich made sixty sketches for Lenci between



Figure 12. Giovane italiana del littorio doll, c. 1930. (Museo del Giocattolo e del Bambino, Cormano, Milan, Italy).

1923 and 1931 before designing posters for new Fascist holidays like the Giornata della Madre e dell Fanciullo (figure 13). Dudovich's felt dolls for Lenci were exquisitely rendered. They came with little wooden accessories and sometimes even pets, like Maria Teresa and her French bulldog, Mozart, produced as part of the 'Lady' series from 1930 to 1931 (figure 14).¹¹ It is not surprising that key artists accepted commissions from both the Lenci doll company and the Fascist regime. Rather, what is interesting here is the consistency with which these artists like Dudovich and Berzoini centred childhood as a theme across private and public commissions, interweaving themes of autarchic and pronatalist productivity in the process.

National trade shows tied together the Fascist party's dreams for increased domestic production of Italian toys and Italian children. The famous Fiera di Milano had a regular Mostra del Giocattolo sponsored by the Fascist Ministry of Education and promoted in *Famiglia Fascista* by journalists like Giuseppe



Figure 13. 'Giornata della Madre e del Fanciullo,' 'Day of the Mother and the Child' ONMI propaganda poster. Marcello Dudovich. December 1937 (Collezione Salce, Treviso, Italy).



Figure 14. Artist's study for Lenci Company by Marcello Dudovich. Tempera and charcoal on paper. 20.86 by 15.74 inches. c. 1930. 'Maria Teresa e Mozart.' Lenci Production Catalogue number: 1069/3. From left: before restoration, post restoration, 2019 promotional postcard for the Maria Teresa doll and Mozart French bulldog (Archivio Lenci, Turin, Italy).

Rasi.¹² The Mostra della Scuola Materna, a pronatalist exhibit, sat directly beside it. Fascist party officials and royals would gather to coo over the perfection of the baby dolls and toy trains, all proudly made in Italy. The Prince of Piemonte was overhead admiring the perfection of Industria Nazionale Giocattoli Automatici Padova (INGAP) 'Littorina' model toy train. But it is the Fascist party's jubilant reception for Lenci at the trade fairs, and their enthusiasm for the Giovane Italiane and Balilla dolls in particular, that best clarifies connection between pronatalism and domestic toy production. The regime lauded Lenci first and foremost for being an autarkic toy factory, producing high-quality Italian dolls that could compete against German and French dolls on the international market (Ercolano 2017, 208). At the third Biennale di Monza, 1927, Mussolini himself complimented Elena Lenci for 'italico valore', the 'Italic value' of her Turinese doll production (Linfante and Bertola 2013, 41). Even at large trade shows dedicated to Fascist baby dolls, like the annual Mostra Nazionale di Bambole held at the Federazione dei Fasci di Lucca on 6 January 1937, Lenci's Giovane Italiane and Balilla dolls stood out (figure 15, figure 16, figure 17). The Giovane Italiana and Balilla set was heralded as the 'giocattolo nazionale', the so-called 'national toy' (Tosa 1993, 82) for the pro-Fascist messaging that these dolls sent to little girls. In Musso's words, playing with these dolls taught Italian girls how to be 'buone madri e ottime massaie', 'good mothers, and better countrywomen' (Musso 2005 217–218). This was not simply the mothering doll play of years past. These dolls encouraged mothering doll play that the Italian nation first, and Italian children second.

Turning to the design of the Balilla and Piccola Italiana dolls as a group, we see certain commonalities emerge. The Piccola Italiana doll's eyes were often pale blue, green, or grey. Her hair was painted into a strawberry blonde bob, or curled in pale brown ringlets at her ears. Her black cap matched her black skirt. Her little brother, a Figlio di Lupa or Balilla doll, was often sold along with her, as part of a matching set (figure 11). His Balilla uniform included the eponymous Black Shirt (*camicia nera*) of the Fascist party, a blue kerchief knotted at the neck, grey-green pants and socks, a belt tied with a black *fascio*, and a black fez (*copricapo*). Their uniforms were paramilitary, like the squad and legion structure of the groups themselves. Worn by real children as well as dolls, these outfits conferred uniformity but also signified distinction and rank. To play with either of these dolls, a child would have raised the right arm – often the only one that moved – to give the Fascist salute (figure 10).

Balilla and Piccola Italiana dolls were designed to play-act support for Benito Mussolini and the Fascist dictatorship. To imagine – then to reenact and thereby domesticate – parades, rallies, and *sagre*, Fascist-period toys like this Giovane Italiana doll prompted Italian children towards behaviours designed to teach them how to be good Fascist citizens. Of course, children's accounts for how they actually played with dolls reveals very different kinds



Figure 15. Piccola Italiana and Balilla doll set, produced by Lenci doll company, c. 1930. (Museo del Giocattolo e del Bambino, Cormano, Milan, Italy).

of play. Laura Faggioli, born in Bologna in 1930, recalled her interwar playtime with 'semi-nude' paper dolls as being 'sadistic'. Moreover, she extended that play to ceramic store-bought dolls. One had a voice programmed to say 'mama', which she destroyed in her quest to 'find out where the voice came from'.¹³

As the Giovane Italiana and Figlio di Lupa doll sets suggests, Fascist period doll play promoted two ends. First, the two ceramic dolls fused the public and private spheres of life, pushing politics into playrooms. Posing the dolls encouraged children to play-act the proper dress and physical movements to indicate consent at a Fascist rally. Because the dolls' right arms were straight while the left arms were slightly bent, they appear more natural when raised in the Fascist salute than when they are posed with both arms are down, at rest. In other words, doll postures figured Fascist stances as normal, and anything else as a deviation from that norm. Second, ceramic doll play taught ideal Fascist motherhood. Because of the assumed maternal



Figure 16. Doll, 'Giovane Italiana' (Libro e Moschetto: Mostra viruale permanente di oggetti, libri, ed immagini del ventennio fascista, Curiosità: Articolo 1002).

relationship between a girl and her doll, miniature uniforms naturalized the idea that, once they girl had children of her own, they – like the doll – would be expected to wear the *camicia nera* of the Fascist party.¹⁴

Cigarettes and banana skirts: female gender roles and Fascist period doll production

Although the Fascist party celebrated Lenci's Bambole Balilla, they objected to other Lenci dolls that provided alternative models for how to be a woman. When the Fascist Party disapproved of a Lenci doll design, they tried to cancel its production. Contemporaneously with Giovane Italiane and Balilla doll production, a very different doll modelling a modern approach to gender



Figure 17. Doll, 'Figlio della lupa' (Libro e Moschetto: Mostra viruale permanente di oggetti, libri, ed immagini del ventennio fascista, Curiosità: Articolo 1003).

roles was flying off the shelves: the *maschieta*, a female doll who wore masculine clothing. A prototypical *donna-crisi*, her noteworthy accessory was a cigarette, jauntily stitched into the corner of her mouth (Ercolano 2017, 208). Lenci had made provocative dolls before, most notably a Josephine Baker doll who arrived with her arms aloft in mid-twirl, the better to reveal her bare fabric breasts, with a pink nipple stitched onto each. The doll wore Baker's famous banana skirt (Linfante and Bertola 2013, 39). Only the *maschietta* doll that worried the regime, and they demanded that Lenci immediately halt her production (Capuano 2011 71). A compromise emerged: Lenci would continue to make the *maschietta*, but for export only. After all, she was quite popular in the United States. To make up for the dip in domestic dolls, Lenci agreed to increase production of the Balilla dolls for

Italian distribution. The parable of Lenci's *maschietta* and Josephine Baker dolls reveals a fine line in Fascist period gender pedagogy: the party preferred nudity to cross-dressing.

The Lenci company's epilogue was in many ways a legacy of Fascism and World War II. In 1933, financial insolvency forced the Scavinis to sell two-thirds of their company, with 33% to the Bassoli Company, who provided woollen felt to make the dolls, and another 33% to the banker brothers Flavio and Pilade Gardella, who offered a critical cash infusion. In 1937, the company was going strong, with over three-hundred workers working the assembly lines, but the good times did not last. The Gardella brothers assumed control over manufacturing, and the company at large from 1939 to 1944. At this point, dolls disappeared as the materials and the assembly lines were turned towards the production of wartime necessities. Instead of Giovane Italiana skirts, the woollen felt was sewn into blankets, military uniforms, and gas masks. A bombing raid finally destroyed the central Lenci factory in 1943. All early doll molds, including the ones used to make the Balilla and the Piccola Italiana doll heads, were lost.

La Befana Fascista: Benito Mussolini as Father Christmas

Fascist baby dolls travelled from toy factories in northern industrial centres like Turin and Mantua to reach children across the Italian peninsula through regime-appropriated holidays, like La Befana Fascista. Instead of La Befana's sack, Christmas toys came from 'il pacco del Duce', 'the package from the Leader'. These boxes and sacks were filled with delights (fruits, sweets, dolls, toy guns) and necessities (clothes, shoes). In Rome in 1941, the standard *pacco* for a student attending the Scuola Mazzini contained a closet full of clothes, all used but in good condition: two girls' overcoats, two pairs of trousers, a jacket, a pair of shoes, two aprons, two shirts, two jackets, and a shirt. One imagines that such a gift was aimed to delight working-class mothers more than their children. By contrast, children at the Scuola De Amicis must have jumped for joy when they opened their *pacchi*, containing toys, bags of cookies and candies, books, and woollen socks. The packages program was wildly popular, and, according to a 1933 article *Almanacco della Donna Italiana*, it grew every year. In 1930, the Fasciste Femminile distributed 600,000 *pacchi*. Two years later, that number more than doubled, with 1,243,351 *pacchi* distributed in 1932 (Alferazzi 1933, 55).

To get their *pacco*, families performed a public ceremony of political allegiance. Roman salutes of greeting and goodbye bookended the transfer of the *pacco*. Both the parent and the child had come to the donation point together, ensuring that this ritual could not stay the private act of a child who wanted a toy, or a parent who just wanted to give them one. Instead, it was witnessed and participated in as part of a shared family outing. Watching

LUCE newsreels dedicated to La Befana Fascista, it seems as though there is more military action in these Christmassy shops than there is at the rallies. Little wonder that, when people were asked which political party they supported, a common joke of the period was to answer 'PNF ... per necessità familiari'. 'Partito Nazionale Fascista ... for family needs'.

In print, magazine headlines announced the holiday's arrival, 'Balocchi, dolci e divise: Si prepara la befana fascista', 'Toys, sweets, and uniforms: Getting Ready for Fascist Befana' (*Il Corriere della Sera Padana*, January 2, 1935). This headline captures the holiday's inherent *quid pro quo*: if you wear a Fascist uniform, then you can receive a toy or sweet. Only Fascist groups could distribute the toys, and only children with Fascist parents were entitled to receive one.¹⁵ Following national orders from P.N.F. offices, local Fasciste feminine groups took over for the local gentry. They now pushed local industries to donate gifts (Graziani 2018, 2), and distribute the toys themselves. With the advent of the Befana Fascista, not all poor children received a gift as they would have in years past. Now, poor children also had to have parents who were affiliated with the Fascist party, or better, who had made sacrifices on its behalf. At the Scuola Cantù in Rome, each *pacco* contained a note explaining the purpose of the gift:

Le alunne che hanno i babbi o i fratelli richiamati ricevono un pacchetto di frutta e dolci offerta da tutti i compagni in occasione della Befana, che ha voluto quest'anno ricordare in particolar modo i bimbi che hanno i loro cari lontani per adempiere al loro dovere di soldati e di difensori della Patria. (Graziani 2018, 2)

The pupils who have fathers or siblings recalled receive a package of fruit and sweets offered by all the companions on the occasion of the Befana, which this year wanted to remember in particular the children who have their loved ones far away to fulfill their duty of soldiers and defenders of the Fatherland.

The Epiphany marked the first day of an annual program of pre-winter aid to appease the Italian working class. But the Befana Fascista was designed to connect with the children of the working-class, as Gentile has noted. Annual gift-giving aimed to make poor children, especially those who had been orphaned by Fascist imperial wars abroad, feel as though they had a caring parent in the Fascist state ('attraverso il sorriso di un dono gentile, l'affettuosa premura della Patria fascista', 'through the smile of a kind gift, the affectionate care of the Fascist fatherland' (Gentile 1993, 175). What had been a religious holiday became a political one.

La Befana del Duce was not the only child-oriented holiday that brought politics into the Christmas season's Catholic religious traditions. In 1933, the Giornata della Madre e del Fanciullo was inaugurated for 24 December in honour of the Virgin Mary's labour pains. As shown by Dudovich's aforementioned 1937 poster publicizing this new holiday, mothers and children, the centrepieces of these demographic designs, stood at the centre of the

regime's bid to create goodwill through charitable gift-giving to the masses. With its lines of happy shoppers resembling parades, the holiday offered a visually spectacular backdrop to showcase Fascism's supposed generosity to the poor. It created the appearance of mass consent among Italian families. In some ways, the idea derived from Ancient Rome: the Fascist regime took the mass appeasement strategy of bread and circuses, replacing them with a politicized holiday centred on toys and sweets.

From the late 1920s to the early 1930s, the promotional focus of *La Befana Fascista* shifted away from the regime's masses of female volunteers and towards powerful individuals who used the event to advertise their benevolence. Donna Rachele Mussolini and Princess Maria of Piedmont annually distributed gifts at *La Befana Fascista* starting in 1932.¹⁶ They were later joined by Achille Starace and Prince Umberto and Maria Josè of Belgium.¹⁷ Although the *Fasciste Femminili* first inherited the *Befana's* gift-giving role, they were increasingly swept aside by the wealthier wives of Fascist officials, and finally by those officials and the Duce himself, as the holiday came to focus on the cult of personality around Benito Mussolini.¹⁸ After a particularly well-attended event in Milan in 1931, where uniformed Fascist soldiers distributed gifts to children, the holiday was renamed *la Befana del Duce*. In 1934, Achille Starace replaced Turati as the P.N.F. secretary, and reoriented the holiday once again, as *il Natale del Duce*, the Leader's Christmas. By moving gift giving from *La Befana* to the *Fasciste Femminili* to *il Duce*, the event gradually eclipsed women, even Fascist ones, from this important event. Moreover, it obscured the financial muscle of toy companies and the pivotal role that they played in these political events. Private industries, not government groups, donated the toys that Benito Mussolini and the Fascist regime took credit for providing.

At these Fascist events, toys helped to create the appearance of mass consent. We see this demonstrated by director Arturo Gemmiti's 1935 newsreel '*La Befana fascista*'. Here, Gemmiti frames the toys in ways that suggest organized crowds. Dolls sit in gridded displays of a hundred identical fellows, or they slide off assembly lines, one after another. Mass-production is apparent everywhere. The toys are identical, interchangeable, and they number in the thousands. Herds of rocking horses, squadrons of tin airplanes, and everywhere, armies Fascist baby dolls, with their right arms raised in the Roman salute (figure 18). In a newsreel that lasts for less than two minutes, the omnipresence of the Roman salute is striking, with at least six arms raised for each doll or soldier that changes hands. The cashiers are Fascist foot-soldiers, dressed in uniform to greet the holiday crowds. *La Befana Fascista*, and the *Balilla* baby dolls it provided, realized a huge number of Fascist objectives: it made use of children's needs and wants to prompt public performance of obeisance to the regime, taking authority away from the Catholic Church and the family, and instead placing it with the Fascist state. Put telegraphically, it militarized the Italian Christmas shopping experience.

This article has investigated Fascism's politics of playtime as incarnated by places like seaside *colonie*, objects like Balilla baby dolls, and events like the Befana Fascista.

Analysis of Fascist period childcare booklets reveals that play was meant to be orderly and adult-drive, public and in groups. Fascist officials like Minister of Education Giuseppe Bottai took notes from apolitical puericulture experts like Maria Diez Gasca, translating these abstract ideas into the physical architecture and layout of children's nurseries. Toy companies, like the Furga and Lenci doll companies, went further still, in their creation of Fascist baby dolls, the Balilla and Piccola Italiana heralded by the regime at trade shows like the Fiera di Milano. Here, I differentiate between common forms of play that evoke childhood preparation for traditional gender roles, like doll play for future mothers and mock battles for future soldiers, and specifically Fascist forms of play. Dolls designed to provoke these forms of play prepared little girls not just to be mothers, but to be Fascist mothers: the dolls arrived in uniform, meant to reenact the public rallies where these uniforms were worn: at Fascist rallies celebrating prolific mothers, at Saturday Balilla games where children practiced their marksmanship with tiny Balilla guns, miniaturizations of the Italian army's 1891 model, that shot real bullets. At this nexus of play, with toys distributed through new Fascist



Figure 18. Film still of 'La Befana fascista.' Dir. Arturo Gemiti. January 1935. Duration: 00:01:10. Film code: Giornale Luce B0606, B060603.

holidays that seized on Catholic traditions of charitable gift-giving and turned their benefits towards the state, we see revealed the broader economic structures underpinning youth-centred propaganda for Fascist government projects. The *pacchi del duce* rewarded children for their parents' allegiance to Fascism. By observing the Befana Fascista, with the ritualistic Roman salute bookending the transfer of the toy to the child, the *pacchi del duce* rewarded children for their parents' good political behaviour, by providing them with a toy donated by Italian industry. It was how the Piccola Italiana doll got into a child's hands.

Notes

1. In some ways, this approach is akin to Ruth Ben-Ghiat's work with feature films, newsreels, and magazines (*Fascist Modernities, Italian Fascism's Empire Cinema*), and Kate Ferris' (2017) research on children's cartoons.
2. Invented by the P.N.F. secretary in 1928, the Befana Fascista repackaged the Epiphany, a Catholic holiday, as a Fascist one, substituting the Fasciste Femminili, and later the Duce himself, as the cultural figure in charge of distributing toys to needy children.
3. An industrialist's daughter who trained as a doctor, Diez Gasca introduced massaismo to Italy at the Fourth International Congress of Home Economics in Rome in 1927.
4. F. Valeri Malaguzzi's phrasing shows that Romanità, the Fascist passion for Ancient Rome as a model for Fascist society, touched even toy-making, 'gli antichi, nella loro saggezza, avevano intuito che i giocattoli sono pei fanciulli oggetti di prima necessità' (Malaguzzi, 1926, 43).
5. Both his medical studies and his popular articles in *La Difesa della Razza* and *L'Economia Italiana* claimed to link adult impotence to insufficient virility in men and femininity in women. Playtime emphasizing appropriate gender behaviour could stop what Pende termed 'endocrinological abnormalities' before they began. For a comparative example of a medical study and a popular article see Pende (1933).
6. Italian scouting predated Fascism. To the Pope's consternation, Mussolini disbanded the Catholic scouts group – then 26,000 boys – prior to starting the Balilla (Kertzer 2014).
7. Diez-Gasca was an author and a teacher of home economics. She wrote a number of textbooks for home economics courses in public schools, including her 1930 magnum opus, *Le donne e la casa*. Additionally, *Le scuole di educazione e di economia domestica in Italia e all'estero, a cura di un comitato promotore per le scuole operaie femminili di educazione e di economia domestica nelle fabbriche* focused on the role and teaching of home economics in the larger context of Italian industry.
8. Diez Gasca served as the Vice Director General of the Istituto per le Madri e i Lattanti in Turin, and also taught infant hygiene and puericulture at the Scuola Magistrale di Torino. He authored a number of puericulture textbooks for use by students and administrators alike, including *Dalla Scuola alla Madre: Lezioni di Igiene infantile e di Puericoltura ad uso delle scuole magistrali di tutti i gradi, delle scuole femminili, delle scuole di puericoltura e per le giovani madri*. Turin: G.B. Paravia, 1938; *La Scuola, La Casa, La Culla: Norme elementari di igiene e*

puericoltura per le Scuole Medie Femminili di primo grado. Turin: G.B. Paravia, 1939, *Nel bambino salviamo la razza: norme di puericoltura demografica per le scuole Femminili di secondo grado*. Turin: G.B. Paravia, 1939.

9. See, for example "Le Scuole all'aperto in Italia" (1940, 40), and "La città della infanzia," Mostra Nazionale di Colonie Estive e dell'Assistenza all'Infanzia, p.4. Rome, June-September 1937.
10. Beretta notes that, by the 1940s, Furga doll materials could include the following 'colaggio con cartapesta, cartapesta con lenzuolino vinilico imbottito di kapok, colaggio con stoffa ed altri ancora. Il riciclaggio di materiali differenti ed il loro accoppiamento era abbastanza comune' (Beretta, "Furga" [web archive](#)).
11. Figure references doll n. 1069/3 of dolls 951-2000, from the 1930-1931 Lenci catalogue.
12. See "Echi della Fiera di Milano," *Famiglia Fascista*, Giuseppe Rasi in *Famiglia Fascista* (1932).
13. Laura Faggioli was the daughter of a Fascist official in Bologna, a predominantly Communist city. Here, she describes her schooling up to fourth grade, her sojourn to Monzuno during wartime, and her work as a seamstress thereafter. The majority of her testimony concerns her childhood memories, including the paper doll play described here (17) and the disassembly of the voiced doll (36) (Faggioli 1997).
14. Pretending to mother this doll would meant that a little girl would have temporarily imagined herself to be older than the doll. Doll play typically occurred during the Piccola Italiana age bracket of eight to fourteen years, but this doll wears the uniform of the Giovane Italiana, limited to ages fourteen to eighteen.
15. An Archivio LUCE newreel gives a sense of the different Fascist groups who were included in these exchanges, both in the giving and receiving of toys. "Un giorno di festa per l'infanzia a Roma. La distribuzione della Befana ai figli dei dipendenti di varie Amministrazioni. Alla Corte dei Conti alla presenza di S.E. Gasperini. Al Dopolavoro del Governatorato alla presenza di S.A.R. la Principessa Maria. Alla "Croce Rossa" alla presenza del Senatore Cremonesi. Alla "Caserma Mussolini". Al "Dopolavoro Ferroviario." Alla "Società Immobiliare" alla presenza di S.A.R. la Principessa Maria." January 1934. Film code B039703.
16. See Archivio LUCE newsreels, "Roma. La befana offerta dall'I.C.E. a 1000 balilla e piccole italiane. Donna Rachele Mussolini distribuisce i doni." January 15, 1932. Film code B003507 and "Roma. La S.A.R. la principessa Maria distribuisce la befana ai soldati del Presidio." January 15, 1932. Film code B003607.
17. See Archivio LUCE newsreels, "Befana fascista festeggiata da Starace," January 1933. Film code A090901, and "Napoli. La festa della epifania a Napoli. Distribuzione di doni ai bimbi alla presenza della LL.AA.RR. i principi di Piemonte." January 1934. Film code B039805.
18. At one such showy event in the Barberini cinema hall of the Ministry of Popular Culture, LUCE director Alfieri handed out over 600 *pacchi del Duce* to children alongside the Cabinet Head, General Directors, and Ministry functionaries. Wives of noted administrators, like Undersecretary Bastianini helped as well, along with a Committee of Patronesses (Comitato di Patronesse) and the Dopolavoro group of the Minsitry of Foreign Affairs. ("La Befana fascista a Roma." Directed by Basilio Franchina. Rome. January 11, 1939. Film code: Giornale Luce B/B1442, B144208.)

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