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Review of Hitler and the Power of Aesthetics

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Review

Author: Frederic Spotts
Title: *Hitler and the Power of Aesthetics*
Publisher: The Overlook Press
Release date: January 2003
Number of pages: 488
Features: 100 B/W and 4 color illustrations; indexed
Format: Hard cover
Price: $37.50

Unlike biographies of Adolf Hitler which focus on the ideological and humanitarian disaster wrought by his intense anti-Semitism, Spotts’ book posits that the thirteen-year nightmare of the Third Reich was just as much a result of Hitler’s artistic nature. Though other authors have touched on certain aspects of Hitler’s artistic side—Speer (*Inside the Third Reich*) on Hitler’s obsession with monumental architecture, Fest (*Hitler*) on the relationship between the dictator’s grandiosity and his love of Wagnerian opera—only Spotts has leapt with both feet into a full exploration of Der Führer as artist.

Spotts argues that it was Hitler’s aesthetic nature that compelled him to destroy society only to re-create it according to the image in his artist’s eye. All the arts felt his deadening influence, and his influence was very, very personal indeed.

While truly seminal art always envisions something new, Hitler’s art—the art of centuries past—envisioned nothing new. Modern art repelled him. Spotts makes the point visually, with numerous photographs and drawings—many by Hitler himself. Hitler used Germany and, later, Europe as his canvas to make a picture his stunted mind could understand. Spotts, with scholarship and true artistry, has exposed this picture in a book that is accessible to the average reader, but that will be of interest to academicians as well.

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In the case of Adolf Hitler, Frederic Spots’ Hitler and the Power of Aesthetics provides us with a provocative study of the Fuehrer as artist, thereby giving us a compelling perspective on why the Austrian dictator remains a captivating subject. Spotts grips the reader’s attention from the very start, introducing his topic with a photograph (one that I had never seen before) of Hitler literally on the edge of his seat, staring intently from near ground level at a very large architect’s model of Linz, the Fuehrer’s adopted home town, “as it will look after being transformed into the culture.” And indeed it is difficult to find a photograph of the dictator smiling, yet the Spotts book has at least two such images, in one of which Hitler is positively beaming.