Review of Hitler and the Power of Aesthetics

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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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When Hitler caught the doodle bug. Frederic Spotts examines the artistic impulse at the heart of Nazism in Hitler and the Power of Aesthetics. Geoffrey Wheatcroft. Sat 19 Oct 2002 00.35 BST First published on Sat 19 Oct 2002 00.35 BST. These two insights form a starting point for Frederic Spotts's remarkable new book. You may qualify "artist" with "would-be" or "talentless", or you may say, as Spotts does, that "Hitler's problem - in a way his tragedy - was that he confused aesthetic drive with aesthetic talent". But there's no escaping the central role that art played in his life, and in the political drama of National Socialism.