

“What Shall We Do With It Now?”: The Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana and the Difficult Heritage of Fascism

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This article uses the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana (PdCI) in the Rome suburb of EUR as a case study to explore how Italians have negotiated the “difficult heritage” of Fascism since 1945. Following Sharon Macdonald, the paper understands the term difficult heritage to refer to a historically significant past that remains materially visible through sites, buildings, artworks, monuments and other artefacts, but which is difficult to reconcile with “a positive, self-affirming contemporary identity”. The paper employs a biographical approach to reveal and analyse the post-Fascist “lives” of the PdCI, one of the most recognisable — and, in recent decades, most admired — examples of Fascist monumental architecture in Italy. With reference also to other examples of difficult Fascist heritage in Italy, and to sites associated with the difficult heritage of Nazism in Germany, the paper offers new insights into how Italy has confronted its Fascist past and places the Italian experience of difficult heritage within the broader international context.

Introduction

Everywhere you look in Italy, you’re confronted by history.

Roman amphitheatres sit alongside renaissance cathedrals, medieval castles dot the countryside. But no piece of history stands as jarring as the thousands of fascist-era buildings and monuments scattered across the peninsula, many still adorned with fascist insignia.

Sean Mantesso¹

What role do the material remains of a “history that hurts” play in shaping or repressing memory, in sustaining or fragmenting collective identities, in perpetuating or challenging certain behaviours and ways of thinking? Are communities best served by destroying the physical reminders of a discredited past or does destruction indicate an unhealthy readiness to forget that past? If kept, what (if anything) should be done with such reminders? Should they be left alone, restored, moved, modified or historicised in some way? These questions are central to what Sharon Macdonald has termed “difficult heritage”, that is, how a society negotiates the physical reminders of a historically significant but heavily burdened past.² They also lie at the heart of the contemporary global “monuments debate” that erupted in the wake of the 2017 Charlottesville riots.

This paper uses the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana (PdCI) in the Rome suburb of EUR— one of the most recognisable, and, in recent decades, most admired, examples of Fascist

¹ Sean Mantesso, “The Ghost of Benito Mussolini Lingers as Far-Right Popularity Surges in Italy”, *ABC News*, 26 May 2019.

² Sharon Macdonald, *Difficult Heritage: Negotiating the Nazi Past in Nuremberg and Beyond* (Abingdon, 2009).

monumental architecture in Italy — as a case study to explore how Italians have negotiated the difficult heritage of Fascism since the fall of Mussolini. With reference also to other examples of difficult Fascist heritage in Italy, and to sites associated with the difficult heritage of Nazism in Germany, the paper offers new insights into how Italy has confronted its Fascist past and places the Italian experience of difficult heritage within the broader international context.

The case of Italy is particularly important in the context of the theme of this special issue. In recent years, it has become commonplace for historians to talk of the trivialisation of the Fascist past and the public rehabilitation of Fascism (and individual Fascists) in Italy. In the search for guilty parties, the finger of blame has been pointed squarely at the Italian “new right”, particularly Forza Italia, the (now defunct) Alleanza Nazionale, and the Lega Nord (now known simply as the Lega). The late British historian of Italy Christopher Duggan put it this way in 2015:

The widely acknowledged absence in Italy of any systematic reckoning with its Fascist past has become increasingly apparent in the last twenty years. The end of the so-called First Republic in the early 1990s and the dominant role assumed by Silvio Berlusconi and his right-wing coalition allies (including neo- or ‘post’-Fascists) in Italian politics from 1994 to 2011 [has] resulted in an often-aggressive process of delegitimation of anti-Fascism (at the ethical heart of which was the role of the Resistance in 1943-45) and a politically and culturally driven programme to rehabilitate Fascism.³

It is against this background that Anglophone historians (and journalists such as Melburnian Sean Mantesso, quoted at the beginning of this article⁴) have often problematised Italy’s difficult Fascist heritage. Despite the popular iconoclasm that greeted Mussolini’s fall from power in Italy in July 1943 and subsequent attempts by the Allies and the Italian government to “defascistise” Italy, 1944-46, thousands of ideologically inspired monumental buildings, statues, mosaics, murals and other artefacts survived into the post-war republican period. Their survival is seen as “the product of a halting and incomplete transition from dictatorship to democracy”.⁵ Meanwhile, the “uncritical preservation” of Fascist heritage in recent decades, whereby artworks and architecture once closely identified with the regime have been restored and re-integrated into the Italian urban landscape without commemoration or mediation, is interpreted as evidence of Italians’ on-going failure to “face up to” the Fascist past, and part of the new right’s efforts to rehabilitate the regime. Thus, for example, the architectural historian Max Page has identified a “deafening — and troubling silence” around surviving Fascist architecture, which he connects to the “newfound power of the right wing”.⁶ Joshua Arthurs meanwhile has argued that “‘heritagizing’ fascism’s monumental remains offers uncritical legitimation and the valorization of a deeply troubling past. More profoundly, it creates a space — both discursive, and [...] physical — for the re-emergence of illiberal, xenophobic and nihilistic currents in Italian society.”⁷ (Arthurs’ essay tellingly

³ The quote is taken from Christopher Duggan’s AHRC 2015 grant application for the proposed project “Remembering and Forgetting Fascism in Contemporary Italy, 1945-2015”. I was to be one of the co-investigators on the proposal. The application was withdrawn following Professor Duggan’s death in late 2015.

⁴ Other journalistic examples include Ed Smith, “The Fascist Architecture Still Hosting Italy’s Sporting events”, *New Statesman*, 12 April 2016; and Andrew Medichini and Beatrice Larco, “Fascist Legacy Endures in Rome’s Architecture”, *AP News*, 23 May 2019.

⁵ Joshua Arthurs, “‘Voleva essa Cesare, mori Vespasiano.’ The Afterlives of Mussolini’s Rome”, *Civiltà Romana*, Vol. 1 (2014), p.286.

⁶ Max Page, “The Roman Architecture of Mussolini. Still Standing”, *Boston Globe*, 13 July 2014.

appears in the edited volume *Italy Today: The Sick Man of Europe*, “an innovative collection that aims to highlight the current ‘crisis’ of the country through an analysis of several ‘dark shadows’ of contemporary Italian society”).⁸ In a similar vein, John David Rhodes has written of a “creeping and creepy rehabilitation of Fascist art and architecture”, while Anna Bull and David Clarke worry that “busts and paintings of Mussolini survive unscathed to this day as they are considered artistic objects or reminders of the country’s history. Yet, disturbingly, many architectural sites or monuments are not historicised and visitors may well come away with an uncritical if not outright positive view of the regime.”⁹ Perhaps the best-known interpretation along these lines is that by Ruth Ben-Ghiat in an article in the *New Yorker* in October 2017, published under the heading: “Why are so many Fascist monuments still standing in Italy?”. Despite the title, Ben-Ghiat’s purpose was not so much to explain the survival of hundreds of Fascist sites, buildings, symbols, statues, mosaics and murals in Italy as to raise concerns as to their influence on Italian political culture. The Italian right’s “rehabilitation” of Fascism in the mid-1990s, she argued, had been “aided by an existing network of [Fascist] pilgrimage sites and monuments”. In the noughties, “as Berlusconi cycled in and out of office”, “preservationists of all political stripes [had] forged alliances with the empowered right to save the Fascist monuments”. The continuing, largely unquestioned, and rarely contextualised presence of restored Fascist heritage in Italy amounted to an open goal for the contemporary far right, allowing it to “harness the ugly ideology [of Fascism] while everyone else becomes inured”.¹⁰ In a subsequent interview with the Italian online magazine *Submarine*, Ben-Ghiat expanded on her arguments: to ignore the ideological origins and symbolism of Fascist art and architecture was to legitimise “monuments to Fascist violence”, and “encourage a vision of Fascism as something non-violent”, at the expense of anti-Fascism and democracy. The violent character of Fascism, she stressed, “always has to be kept in mind”.¹¹

In both her *New Yorker* article and *Submarine* interview, Ben-Ghiat highlighted the PdCI at EUR as a particularly egregious example of the dangerous Italian tendency to aestheticise rather than historicise Fascist monuments.

In the late nineteen-thirties, as Benito Mussolini was preparing to host the 1942 World’s Fair, in Rome, he oversaw the construction of a new neighborhood, Esposizione Universale Roma [EUR], in the southwest of the city, to showcase Italy’s renewed imperial grandeur. The centerpiece of the district was the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana, a sleek rectangular marvel with a façade of abstract arches and rows of neoclassical statues lining its base. In the end, the fair was cancelled because of the war, but the palazzo, known as the Square

⁷ Joshua Arthurs “Fascism as ‘Heritage’ in Contemporary Italy”, in Andrea Mammone and Giuseppe A. Veltri, eds, *Italy Today: The Sick Man of Europe* (Abingdon, 2010), pp.124-5.

⁸ Sleeve notes, Mammone and Veltri, *Italy Today*.

⁹ John David Rhodes, “The Eclipse of Space: Rome’s EUR from Rossellini to Antonioni”, in John David Rhodes and Elena Gorfinkel, eds, *Taking Place: Location and the Moving Image* (Minnesota, 2011), n.42, p.54 (see also p.48); Anna Bull and David Clarke, “From Antagonistic to Agnostic Memory: Should the Statues Fall?”, *The Policy Space*, 24 May 2017, <<https://www.thepolicyspace.com.au/2017/24/195-from-antagonistic-to-agnostic-memory-should-the-statues-fall>>.

¹⁰ Ruth Ben-Ghiat, “Why Are So Many Fascist Monuments Still Standing in Italy?”, *New Yorker*, 5 October 2017, <<https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/why-are-so-many-fascist-monuments-still-standing-in-italy>>.

¹¹ “Perché ci sono ancora così tanti monumenti fascisti in Italia? Intervista con Ruth Ben-Ghiat, l’autrice dell’editoriale del New Yorker”, *Submarine*, 10 October 2017. <<https://thesubmarine.it/2017/10/10/ruth-ben-ghiat-intervista/>>.

Colosseum, still stands in Rome today, its exterior engraved with a phrase from Mussolini's speech, in 1935, announcing the invasion of Ethiopia, in which he described Italians as 'a people of poets, artists, heroes, saints, thinkers, scientists, navigators, and transmigrants.' The invasion, and the bloody occupation that followed, would later lead to war-crimes charges against the Italian government. The building is, in other words, a relic of abhorrent Fascist aggression. Yet, far from being shunned, it is celebrated in Italy as a modernist icon. In 2004, the state recognized the palazzo as a site of "cultural interest." In 2010, a partial restoration was completed, and five years later the fashion house Fendi moved its global headquarters there.¹²

The building is beautiful, and I am not saying that it must be demolished. But think about its history, its context and what it can symbolise. Fendi organises exhibitions dedicated to Italian culture on the ground floor. In the publicity for one of these it says that the exhibition is a homage to Italian genius. They use the same words used by the Fascists, in the same place. There is no historical sensibility to the language, gestures, and uses of the monuments.¹³

The "problem" of Fascist heritage in contemporary Italy is very much a foreign concern. This much is clear from the Italian responses to Ben-Ghiat's 2017 *New Yorker* article, which was savaged on Italian social media and criticised by respected historians, including Emilio Gentile, in the Italian press, with Ben-Ghiat variously accused of "journalistic populism", "cultural racism" and cultural terrorism.¹⁴ The outcry undoubtedly owed something to a characteristic common to most nations: a sensitivity to external criticism. It also stemmed from a widespread (and curious) misreading of Ben-Ghiat's arguments; critics accused Ben-Ghiat of advocating the destruction of Fascist buildings and monuments whereas Ben-Ghiat had only called for their historicisation. The responses, however, also revealed genuine incomprehension: Didn't Ben-Ghiat know that Italians had long since stopped thinking (and worrying) about the politics of "Fascist" art and architecture? What was wrong in acknowledging the contribution of Fascist artists and architects to twentieth-century Italian art and urban design? And why on earth would anyone think that the monumental remains of the regime possessed the power to contaminate and undermine post-war Italian democracy? Emilio Gentile's sarcastic rejoinder best captured the prevailing mood:

A spectre haunts Italy's fragile democracy. It isn't organised crime [...] It isn't the chronic deficiency of the ruling class. It isn't the corruption within every level of the political class. It isn't the growing wealth of the few and the growing poverty of the many. Nor is it the corruption that proliferates as cancerous cells in [...] a state and a nation that no longer wants to be a state or a nation. It isn't even the migrant invasion [...] It is a spectre more horrible and terrible [...] It is the spectre of Fascist

¹² Ben-Ghiat, "Fascist Monuments".

¹³ *Submarine*, "Intervista".

¹⁴ Fulvio Irace, "Il populismo giornalistico che ignora i capolavori dell'architettura fascista", *Il Sole 24 Ore*, 9 October 2017, <<https://www.ilssole24ore.com/art/il-populismo-giornalistico-che-ignora-capolavori-dell-architettura-fascista-AENr8VhC>>; Marco Ventura, "Il razzismo culturale americano non capisce i nostri monumenti", *Il Messaggero*, 9 October 2017, <https://www.ilmessaggero.it/primopiano/esteri/razzismo_culturale_americano_non_capisce_nostri_monumenti-3289172.html>; Carlo Franza, *blog.ilgiornale.it*, "Ruth Ben-Ghiat ebrea americana dell'Università di New York si scaglia contro il Fascismo in maniera non scientifica, ma con una visione monolitica, aprioristica e atemporale", 12 October 2017, <<http://blog.ilgiornale.it/franza/2017/10/12/ruth-ben-ghiat-ebrea-americana-delluniversita-di-new-york-si-scaglia-contro-il-fascismo-in-maniera-non-scientifica-ma-con-una-visione-monolitica-aprioristica-e-atemporale/>>.

monumentality [...] [that] continues to spread its pestilential poison, menacing the democratic health of the population.¹⁵

Italy undoubtedly has a “problem” in how it engages with its Fascist past. As Tobias Jones points out, “Italy never had, like Nazi Germany, a ‘denazification’ of public life. Instead of a process of education and reflection, everything was really swept under the carpet.”¹⁶ Consequently, there has always been a residual nostalgia around the Fascist era, a reluctance to acknowledge Italian war crimes committed in Ethiopia and Libya or to recognise Italy’s role as an aggressor and ally of Nazi Germany in the Second World War, and an unwillingness to accept the part played by “ordinary” Italians in the tracking down, deportation and murder of 6,000 Italian Jews. There is also today a political readiness to distinguish between “bad” and “good” aspects of Fascism (yes, Mussolini introduced race laws and fought alongside Hitler but at least he got things done).¹⁷ Silvio Berlusconi has certainly done much to encourage the idea of a relatively benign dictatorship: one need only think of his 2003 comment that “Mussolini never killed anyone”, or his declaration on Holocaust Memorial Day in 2013 that, the 1938 Racial Laws aside, Mussolini “in so many other ways did well”. The question here, though, is whether Italy’s “problem” with Fascism explains its approach to Fascist heritage. Firstly, does post-war Italy’s slow, partial and ineffective programme of defascistisation explain why so many Fascist buildings and artworks survived the fall of Fascism? Secondly, does the current Italian ambivalence towards “historic Fascism”, encouraged by Berlusconi and his allies, explain why the regime’s remains have come to be regarded and treated as “depoliticized aesthetic objects” to be admired and preserved? And, finally, does the “uncritical preservation” of Fascism’s material remains undermine democracy and serve the interests of the Italian far right as critics claim?

Dealing with Difficult Heritage: the PdCI

At first sight, the choice of the PdCI as a case study to investigate these questions may seem perverse. The post-war “rescue” of the “square colosseum” and the restoration or completion of the other monumental buildings of the never-held World’s Fair, commonly referred to at the time as “E42”, was overseen by Virgilio Testa, head of Ente EUR, 1951-1971, and his chief architect, Marcello Piacentini (d. 1960). Both had strong links to Fascism. Testa had served as secretary-general of the Fascist Governorate of Rome, 1935-1944, and the National Institute of Urban Planning, 1930-1942. Piacentini’s connections to the dictatorship went far deeper. “The most prominent architect of Mussolini’s regime”,¹⁸ Piacentini was responsible for many of the most monumental and symbolically-laden urban development projects of the Fascist era, including E42. Piacentini’s role as “Mussolini’s architect” had resulted in February 1945 in a six-month suspension from public office without pay after the Italian epuration commission had found him guilty of Fascist apologetics. After lobbying by his political allies, however, this was reduced on appeal to a mere censure: Piacentini, the commission now decided, was

¹⁵ Emilio Gentile, “Demoliamo i monumenti fascisti per creare lavoro: se ascoltassimo il *New Yorker*”, *Il Sole 24 Ore*, 10 October 2017, <<https://www.ilssole24ore.com/art/cultura/2017-10-10/demoliamo-monumenti-fascisti-creare-lavoro-se-ascoltassimo-new-yorker-080921.shtml?uid=AEuFsmiC>>.

¹⁶ Quoted in Mantesso, “The Ghost of Benito Mussolini”.

¹⁷ Antonio Tajani, Forza Italia MEP, March 2019. <<https://www.politico.eu/article/antonio-tajani-european-parliament-italy-under-fire-for-benito-mussolini-comments/>>.

¹⁸ Hannah Malone, “Marcello Piacentini: A Case of Controversial Heritage”, in Håkan Hökerberg, ed., *Architecture as Propaganda in Twentieth-Century Totalitarian Regimes* (Florence, 2017), p.59.

guilty of apologism but his work had been of a “technical character”, rather than propagandistic.¹⁹ The plan for the completion of EUR from which Testa and Piacentini worked in the 1950s, which included the development of a large residential quarter, also carried strong echoes of the recent Fascist past, differing little from the plan signed by Piacentini himself in 1938. One might reasonably conclude that in these circumstances it was inevitable that EUR’s Fascist monumental quarter would survive largely intact.

If the answer to my first question seems fairly straightforward in the case of the PdCI (yes, its survival — and that of the monumental quarter of EUR — was a product of post-war Italy’s failure to defascistise), the same might be also said of my second. It was during Berlusconi’s longest government (2001-2006), formed in coalition with the neo- or “post”-Fascist Alleanza Nazionale (which had picked up nearly 4.5 million votes in the 2001 election for the Chamber of Deputies), that the majority of EUR’s Fascist-era monumental buildings including the PdCI were placed under protective measures (April 2004). Small wonder then — one might assume — that “heritagisation” has in effect meant “normalisation”.²⁰ As to my third question, it is not difficult to find examples of where the new right or its “alt-right” flankers have sought to invoke the “Fascistness” of the PdCI/EUR for political purposes. Hannah Malone has written of how, in 2013, Lotta Studentesca, the youth wing of the far-right Forza Nuova, used the PdCI in posters along with the slogan — borrowed (and mistranslated) from *Lord of the Rings* — “Non per collare, non per rovina ma per la rossa aurora” (“Not for wrath, not for ruin but for the red dawn”).²¹ Berlusconi’s 2008 election video “Meno male che Silvio c’è” (“Thank goodness for Silvio”) concludes on the steps of the PdCI with a crowd chanting “Silvio! Silvio!” in a (surely deliberate) echo of those of “Duce! Duce!” during the Fascist *ventennio*, the two decades of Fascist rule.²²

First impressions, of course, can often be misleading. If we look closely at the post-war and contemporary “lives” of the PdCI (and the monumental quarter of EUR as a whole) a more complex and complicated story emerges.

“What shall we do with it now?”

It is hard to exaggerate the importance of E42 to the Fascist dictatorship in the late 1930s. Branded as the “Olympiad of Civilization”, the exhibition — so the regime hoped — would “transform Rome into the indisputable centre of F(f)ascist [*sic*] universalism”, trumpet the genius of the Italian race now remade under Fascism, celebrate the achievements of twenty years of Fascist rule (particularly the “return” of empire), and form the basis of a permanent monumental quarter — “the new city of Mussolini”.²³ From the beginning, the PdCI was intended to be the “spiritual centre of the exhibition”.²⁴ Not only

¹⁹ Paolo Nicoloso, *Marcello Piacentini. Architettura e potere: una biografia* (Udine, 2018), pp.293-4.

²⁰ For discussion of “normalization” see Nick Carter and Simon Martin, “The Management and Memory of Fascist Monumental Art in Postwar and Contemporary Italy: The Case of Luigi Montanarini’s *Apotheosis of Fascism*”, *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, Vol. 22, 3 (2017), pp.354-5; Gavriel D. Rosenfeld, *Munich and Memory: Architecture, Monuments and the Legacy of the Third Reich* (Berkeley, 2000), ch.7.

²¹ Hannah Malone, “Legacies of Fascism: Architecture, Heritage and Memory in Contemporary Italy”, *Modern Italy*, Vol. 22, 4 (2017), p.457. The actual quote is “Now for wrath, now for ruin, and a red dawn”.

²² <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wxf-YbsSh0Y>>. Accessed 26 March 2020.

²³ Aristotle Kallis, *The Third Rome, 1922-1943: The Making of the Fascist Capital* (Houndmills, 2014), p.244; Commissariato Generale, *Esposizione Universale di Roma 1942* (Rome, 1939), p.83.

would the sixty-seven-metre high, marble-clad cube stand on one of the highest points of the 400 hectare site (located on two parallel and hitherto desolate ridges a few kilometres to the south of Rome), thus ensuring that it would “dominate all the surrounding country”, but it would also occupy a position “admirably suited for a great composition” at the western end of the exhibition’s major east-west axis.²⁵ The building itself would also host the “most significant thematic exhibition” of the entire event, the Mostra della Civiltà Italiana (Exhibition of Italian Civilisation).²⁶ This would present “the life of the country from earliest times to the Fascist Empire, document the influence of Rome in the world and extol the Italian genius [...] Every form of activity of our people, from art to science, politics to law, peace to war, will have to be represented there.”²⁷ Beginning on the top floor of the building with rooms dedicated to pre-Roman and Roman civilisation, the exhibition would culminate on the ground floor in the “Sala Mussoliniana” with a multimedia experience glorifying the Duce and the new Fascist empire in Africa, and emphasising — as the building itself was supposed to — the “severely Roman and modern” character of the regime.²⁸ As with the rest of the exhibition site, and in common with all major Fascist urban developments, art was assigned a central role in the communication of Fascist values and themes. Inside the Sala Mussoliniana, for example, visitors would be confronted by a “*great equestrian statue of the DUCE, representing the Genius of the Race and Fascism* [original in italics]”.²⁹ Outside the palazzo, classical statues depicting the Dioscuri as horsemen (a staple of ancient Roman art, symbolising military prowess) were to be placed on each corner of the surrounding piazza, while a further thirty statues — again in the classical style but symbolising the ideal of the Fascist corporate state — would be located under its arches. Completing the external decoration, a fresco cycle illustrating “the glories of our Civilisation, from origins to Fascism” (and thus anticipating the exhibition within) was planned for the walls of the ground floor arcade.³⁰

Italy’s entry into the Second World War in 1940 slowed but did not stop work at E42: only in December 1942 — by which time Italy was on the verge of defeat — did the E42 Commissioner Vittorio Cini reluctantly admit to Mussolini that construction had come to a “standstill”. By the end of 1943, following the fall of Mussolini (July), the Italian armistice with the Allies, and German occupation of Rome (both September), German troops were barracked at the site, no doubt appreciative of the fact that E42’s still largely unfinished “structures, built of concrete, travertine, and marble, and designed to last millennia, provided superb protection against [Allied] artillery and aerial bombings”.³¹ The ground floor of the PdCI served as a repair garage

²⁴ Vittorio Cini, E42 Commissioner, in *Civiltà*, April 1940, quoted in Eugenio Garin, “La civiltà italiana nel esposizione del 1942”, in Tullio Gregory and Achille Tartaro, eds, *E42. Utopia e scenario del regime*, vol. 1 (Rome, 1987), p.5.

²⁵ *Esposizione Universale*, p.50.

²⁶ Kallis, *Third Rome*, p.253.

²⁷ Emilio Cecchi, in *Civiltà*, October 1940, quoted in Giorgio Muratore, “La mostra della civiltà italiana”, in Maristella Casciato and Sergio Poretti, eds, *Il palazzo della civiltà italiana* (Milan, 2002), p.200.

²⁸ Garin, “La civiltà italiana”, pp.7, 15.

²⁹ Guido Mancini, quoted in Garin, “La civiltà italiana”, p.7. Mancini was the chair of the sub-committee responsible for the final section of the exhibition, “From the beginning of the Risorgimento to Mussolini”.

³⁰ Maria Silvia Farci, “Palazzo della civiltà italiana: decorazione”, in Maurizio Calvesi, Enrico Guidoni and Simonetta Lux, eds, *E42. Utopia e scenario del regime*, vol. 2 (Rome, 1987), p.360.

for military vehicles. The buildings were likewise used by the Allies after the liberation of Rome in June 1944. Allied troops left the quarter in September 1945.

From their arrival in Sicily (July 1943) through to the liberation of Italy (April 1945), the Allies showed little interest in the “defascistisation” of the Italian urban landscape, instead leaving it to the Italian government in the Allied-controlled “Kingdom of the South” to act. From the outset, though, the Italian authorities’ approach was shaped as much by a concern to maintain public order and aesthetic considerations as by a desire to engage fully in the symbolic politics of regime change — that is, the removal of Fascist iconography. The tone was set by the leading anti-Fascist liberal Benedetto Croce, minister without portfolio (April-July 1944), who proposed in May 1944 “that the destruction of Fascist monuments, now going on in a chaotic manner and danger of conflicts among the population, should be subject of a decree and regulated by the Minister of Education, and through him by the Fine Arts department, *so as to preserve whatever is of artistic value or importance* as well as curiosities in the way of historical documents”.³² This was quickly approved and an inter-ministerial commission established to assess cases, with the proviso that it would “take account of the political significance and artistic merit of the work [and] of the possibility or otherwise of getting rid of it or taking it away without causing too much aesthetic damage to it or the building to which it belongs”.³³ At the beginning of August, a directive from Prime Minister Bonomi to all ministries and prefects ostensibly demanding the “removal of all signs of the suppressed Fascist party”, further reinforced the impression of a government reluctant to commit to a comprehensive purge:

It appears that in some buildings, public and private, some symbols and signs still remain of the suppressed Fascist party [...].

It is necessary to avoid that the presence of such signs, plaques or inscriptions in strident contrast with the spirit of the Country, can still cause incidents, as has happened in some cases; and therefore kindly please, to the extent applicable, give timely orders so that all the symbols that have references to the old regime, are removed as soon as possible, or suitably covered in the case removal may cause significant disfigurement to the building.³⁴

Without decisive government leadership — and faced with the prospect of having to pay the substantial costs involved in removing the traces of the dictatorship from public buildings — it is perhaps not surprising that cash-strapped local authorities in Allied-occupied Italy did not make this a priority. This did not mean, however, that nothing was done: across Italy, many visible reminders of Fascism *were* removed, destroyed, concealed, or modified in some way.³⁵ As many or more, though, remained intact and untouched.

³¹ Gregory D. Malandrucchio, “A World of Difference: Fascist Culture, Labor, and Policing at the 1942 Universal Exposition of Rome”, PhD thesis, University of Chicago (2016), pp.261-2

³² Benedetto Croce, *Croce, the King and the Allies: Extracts from a Diary by Benedetto Croce, July 1943 - June 1944* (London, 2019), p.134 [emphasis added].

³³ Ministero della pubblica istruzione (MPI) to Ministero dell’interno (MI), 4 July 1944, Archivio centrale dello stato (ACS), Presidenza del consiglio dei ministri (PCM), 1944-1947, fascicolo 1.7, n. 11240, sottofasc. 2.

³⁴ PCM to all ministries and prefects, 1 August 1944, ACS, PCM, 1944-1947, fascicolo 1.7, n. 11240, sottofasc. 2.

³⁵ For examples, see Carter and Martin, “Management and Memory”, and the articles by Simona Storchi, Lucy Maulsby and Flavia Marcello in the special issue of *Modern Italy* on the difficult heritage of Fascism, Vol. 24, 2 (2019).

EUR provides examples of each approach. Following Bonomi's directive, officials from Ente EUR, the original quasi-autonomous authority still nominally responsible for the site, were instructed to identify all offending items, indicate appropriate measures to be taken and estimate the likely expenditure required for their implementation. Handwritten lists attached to copies of the instructions indicate that estimates were sought for covering the Fascist inscriptions on the PdCI and nearby Palazzo degli Uffici (PdU), as well as the monumental mosaics by Enrico Prampolini ("Corporations") and Fortunato Depero ("Arts, Crafts and Professions") at the eastern entrance to Piazza Imperiale (now Piazza Marconi). Extant symbols of the regime (e.g. Roman eagles and the ubiquitous *Fascio Littorio*) were also listed, presumably for removal.³⁶ The task was complicated, however, by the presence of the Allies: their occupation of most of EUR's completed or near-completed buildings meant these were off-limits to Ente staff. Consequently, as Leonardo Severi, the commissioner of a newly constituted Ente EUR, reported in early December 1944, while "[s]ome symbols and signs in the EUR zone have already been removed or covered [...] some inscriptions and murals nevertheless remain whose removal, beyond requiring considerable expenditure, is currently impossible because the Allied forces occupy the buildings where they exist". Severi proposed to postpone measures, while promising that these would follow "as soon as possible", but cost concerns — and lack of money — continued to be a major issue into the post-war period.³⁷ According to Di Majo and Insolera, the new Ente EUR received 143 million lire in government funds, 1945-50, out of which Severi was expected to maintain the territorial integrity of the zone, pay staff and contractors, take remedial action to counter the degradation of buildings and other works, and settle pre-existing contracts and claims.³⁸ The steps that were — and were not — taken at EUR to deal with the "symbols and signs" of Fascism suggest that cost considerations were to the fore. Where items could be easily (and thus cheaply) removed, they were. For example, a large bronze sculpture of Mussolini's head was removed from the Salone del Pubblico on the ground floor of the PdU and stored in the building's basement. (The fact that the work was not destroyed — again possibly on cost grounds — made possible its "rediscovery" in 2005). Similarly, if works could be inexpensively covered, or "defascistised" through simple adaptation, this was also done: Giorgio Quaroni's *Romanità*-infused "Foundation of Rome" mural in the PdU, which had been damaged during the war, is an example of the former, concealed in 1945 behind a plywood panel; Italo Griselli's "Genius of Fascism" statue, located outside the PdU and depicting a young man making a Fascist salute, meanwhile became "Genius of Sport" thanks to a new inscription around its base and the addition of a pair of ancient Roman boxing gloves to the statue's hands.³⁹ In contrast, where the removal or concealment of offending items was likely to be difficult and time-consuming (and therefore more expensive), no action was taken — hence the survival of the long and highly visible inscriptions (both quotes from Mussolini) on the PdCI and the PdU.

³⁶ ACS, busta 62, fascicolo 333/22.

³⁷ Commissario straordinario, Ente autonomo esposizione universale di Roma, to PCM, 5 December 1944, ACS, PCM, 1944-1947, fascicolo 1.7, n. 11240, sottofasc. 2.

³⁸ Luigi Di Majo and Italo Insolera, *L'EUR e Roma dagli anni trenta al duemila* (Bari, 1986), pp.75-6 and n. 7, p.83.

³⁹ <<https://www.eurspa.it/it/asset-property/patrimonio/arte-e-design/opere-pittoriche/fondazione-roma>>; Kallis, *Third Rome*, p. 263. Similarly, Tim Benton notes how the removal of the axe head from the *fasci* held by one statue at the PdCI was enough to ensure the statue's survival. Tim Benton, "Heritage and Changes of Regime", in Tim Benton, ed., *Understanding Heritage and Memory* (Manchester, 2010), p.157.

A far more pressing issue than the removal of Fascist iconography from the zone was the future of the site itself. Heralded only a few years earlier as the “new Rome”, by the end of the war EUR stood as an uncomfortable reminder of Fascist — and Italian — hubris; a “monument to national stupidity”, a “lifeless corpse”, “full of unfinished and absolutely useless monuments”.⁴⁰ It was no coincidence that the PdCI, the symbol of EUR, appears in the background of Roberto Rossellini’s *Rome, Open City* (1945) as “an absurd ghostly presence — something that is already obsolete”,⁴¹ while Italian resistance fighters prepare to attack a German convoy carrying prisoners. Nonetheless, the zone could not be wished away: it had already absorbed enormous amounts of money; if it were left unused, the expropriated land would have to be returned to its original owners, and the money invested would be lost completely; nor could it be sold to private investors for the same reason. But what could a half-built, monumental, isolated Fascist site, designed for an exhibition that would never be held, be used for? Moreover, if it were to be completed, who would pay for it? And who then would want to use it? These were not easy questions to answer, but the longer they remained unresolved, the more money the site absorbed and the harder it became to maintain. The interiors of buildings had inevitably been damaged by their conversion and use as barracks (and offices) during the war. Looters (including Allied soldiers) and squatters — an estimated 10,000 displaced Romans took up residence in the dilapidated *palazzi* after the Allies left — had subsequently taken their toll.⁴² Time and climate were also enemies.

If the problem of EUR could not be wished away, it could still be ignored, at least in the short term. With neither national government nor local municipality keen to take responsibility, the zone increasingly resembled a “modern Pompeii”.⁴³ Immediately after the war, the PdCI was briefly used by the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) as the location for a shoe repairs factory employing 150 workers from nearby refugee centres.⁴⁴ Otherwise, and despite several private proposals to develop the site, EUR lay fallow for the remainder of the decade and into the early 1950s, “full of weeds and solitude”.⁴⁵

It is in this context that the appointments of Testa and Piacentini as, respectively, EUR commissioner and chief architect, need to be understood. Testa was a highly experienced and capable town planner. Piacentini, precisely because of his favoured status under Fascism, had more experience of designing and delivering major urban projects than any other living Italian architect, including the recently completed Via della Conciliazione

⁴⁰ Luigi Squarzina c. 1946, quoted in Vittorio Vidotto, “Introduzione”, in Vittorio Vidotto, ed., *Esposizione Universale Roma: una città nuova dal fascismo agli anni ‘60* (Rome, 2015), p.15; *La Nuova Stampa*, 30 July 1946; Ennio Flaiano in *Risorgimento liberale* (1945) quoted in Antonella Greco, “EUR 1953. La Mostra dell’agricoltura”, *Storia dell’urbanistica*, Vol. 6 (2014), p.159.

⁴¹ Rhodes, “Eclipse of Space”, p.37.

⁴² Malandrucchio, “World of Difference”, p.262; Susan Schafer, “Rome Year Zero: Continuity in Post-World War II Architecture and Culture in Rome”, PhD thesis, New York University (2016), p.83; Virgilio Testa, *La vita di un urbanista e un capolavoro: L’EUR* (Spoleto, 1976), p.69.

⁴³ Virgilio Testa, “EUR – Roma nuova”, *Strenna dei romanisti*, 21 April 1956, p.49.

⁴⁴ *La Nuova Stampa*, 30 July 1946.

⁴⁵ *Corriere della Sera*, 28 February 1949. Several proposals to develop EUR were put forward in the late 1940s, the most serious, in 1948-49, from the Istituto città del progresso, a private consortium involving several major Italian companies including Fiat, Montecatini and Snia Viscosa. The plan – to develop EUR into a cultural hub (a “City of Progress”) – was abandoned in 1949, with the consortium citing lack of government engagement as the reason. See De Majo and Insolera, *L’EUR e Roma*, pp.76-7.

leading to St Peter's.⁴⁶ Long before their appointments, both Testa and Piacentini (the latter since the end of the war) had advocated for the completion of EUR's monumental zone (to serve as a cultural centre) and, in particular, for the construction of the residential quarter anticipated in the original plans.⁴⁷ Not only would the new satellite "park city" ease the chronic urban overcrowding and congestion problems associated with "old" Rome, but it would also allow EUR to emerge from Fascism's shadow, as a symbol of post-war recovery and renewal rather than a reminder of a shameful and traumatic past. Testa also had a plan to make the development pay for itself: the sale of expropriated land for residential development would finance the completion of the monumental zone.

"Reframing" EUR was crucial to the success of Testa's and Piacentini's plans for the quarter. Within weeks of his appointment, and a full year before Testa formally presented his new program ("A modern quarter in a modern Rome"), the *Corriere d'Informazione* was reporting enthusiastically of Testa's intention to build within ten years "a peaceful and airy model city in miniature", to rank among "the most beautiful districts in Europe":

It is pointless today to say the [original] enterprise was too ambitious and excessive. Everyone knows this. It is more useful instead to look to pull the boat from the bank. When Romans going to Ostia pass by the hill of EUR and raise their gaze to the giant cube of marble which is the so-called Palazzo della Civiltà, they ask themselves: 'What shall we do with it now? Who will live there?' [...] Certainly, it can't be left to go to ruin completely without serious losses, the more so as within a couple of years the metro built to link the distant hill of EUR and the centre of Rome will come into operation. Now it is not just about completing a costly and thankless legacy [...] [but] transforming [EUR] into one of [Rome's] new suburbs.⁴⁸

As the formal release of the plan drew closer, Testa's supporters mobilised in anticipation, noting the "enormous advantages and infinite prospects" of the proposal while simultaneously dismissing concerns over the site's Fascist origins:

The history of good human sense [...] teaches that the next generations have used without too much nose wrinkling what was left to them by preceding generations. They have finished works started under other suns and with other ideals [...] Luckily, the preconceived dislike against 'E42' which entered in many (too many!) repudiations of what was done or planned between 1922 and 1942 has now ended. And with that have finished the criminal proposals to 'sell everything' or 'liquidate everything' or assign to demolition (as one does for a ship no longer in use) the monumental works built on the ground of 'E42'.⁴⁹

Testa, too, was careful to give assurances that the "city of tomorrow" would not be overwhelmed by the monumental architecture and decoration at its core, promising to "use what's already done protecting and completing it; but our task is to give life and efficiency to a city-park. I mean to remove any decorative, representative, celebrative excess."⁵⁰

Instrumental in the successful reframing of EUR in the early 1950s was the International Exhibition of Agriculture — EA53 — held in the monumental quarter (spruced up for the occasion) from July to October 1953. The idea of Christian Democrat (DC) senator Giuseppe

⁴⁶ Work on the monumental avenue began in 1936 but was later halted by the war. Construction resumed under Piacentini's direction in 1948, concluding in 1950 to coincide with Holy Year.

⁴⁷ Greco, "EUR 1953", pp.161, p.162 n.10; De Majo and Insolera, *L'EUR e Roma*, p.79; Nicoloso, *Piacentini*, pp.306-17.

⁴⁸ *Corriere d'Informazione*, 30 April-1 May 1951.

⁴⁹ *Corriere della Sera*, 14 March 1952.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 18 March 1952.

Medici and managed independently of Ente EUR, the exhibition had almost been derailed by a financial scandal in the months preceding its inauguration. On opening, though, it was clear that the exhibition was more than a simple money-making scheme or shop window for Italian agriculture: EUR itself was on show.

Until recently it was a 'dead city' killed by the war even before beginning life, plundered after the war by hordes of raiders that stole not only mountains of marble, all the furnishings, toilets and fixtures, but even the already installed lifts. Now, behind the festive rows of flags and flagpoles at the entrance, this lifeless and solitary world appears transformed. It is fresh with water, it glows with electricity, telephones ring for the first time. They have restored the gardens and palazzi [...] cleaned the guts [...] put back the eyes in the empty eye sockets of the windows [...] Three million visitors are expected [...] The satellite city of the capital starts to feel its first beats of life.⁵¹

As Antonella Greco has observed, EA53 also expressed very different values to those of E42. In contrast to the tub-thumping nationalism that had characterised preparations for the latter, EA53 presented "the peaceful, hardworking and modest Italy of De Gasperi", with Italian and international displays ranging from textiles to fertilisers, gardening to canning, pest control to viticulture. Pleasure and leisure were also on the agenda, with entertainments including international and regional Italian food stalls and restaurants, concerts and dances, fashion shows, an agrarian-themed international film festival, a giant roller coaster, and the promise of legendary First World War pilot Mario de Bernardi launching himself from the roof of the PdCI attached only to a self-propelled flying machine (sensibly never actually attempted). The playful character of the exhibition was further communicated through its decoration: even the communist daily *L'Unità*, no admirer of the DC government, admitted that the site exuded a "certain festive atmosphere" (despite the "funereal sadness of the zone") thanks to the hundreds of colourful flags, banners, signage and artworks on display.⁵²

Over the next decade, the process of reframing EUR as Rome's most modern suburb continued apace, thanks to ongoing residential development (in the "international style" of the times), the relocation of several local and national government ministries, the zone's growing reputation as a major conference venue (including the Italian Communist Party's 1956 national congress), the completion of the metro line connecting the quarter to central Rome, and, most significantly, EUR's role as one of the two sporting "hubs" of the 1960 Rome Olympics, which entailed the construction of major new facilities including an outdoor swimming centre (*piscina delle rose*) and indoor sports arena (*palazzo dello sport*, co-designed by Piacentini). The success of EUR's "symbolic rechristening" during the 1950s is perhaps best demonstrated by its "new symbolic function as trope for Italian postwar modernization" in a host of Italian films from the late 1950s and 1960s, most memorably Fellini's 1962 *Le tentazioni del Dottor Antonio*.⁵³ As Alessandro Carrera notes, the PdCI serves as the "visual centrepiece" of *Le tentazioni*, "glowing in the background like a vertical cemetery",⁵⁴ during the film's famous dream sequence in which a giant Anita Ekberg pursues the eponymous doctor through the deserted streets of EUR at night. The role of the PdCI in this film (and others) has been much discussed by film historians but far less attention has been paid to the inverse

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 25 July 1953.

⁵² *L'Unità*, 27 July 1953.

⁵³ Rhodes, "Eclipse of Space", pp.39-40.

⁵⁴ Alessandro Carrera, *Fellini's Eternal Rome: Paganism and Christianity in the Films of Federico Fellini* (London, 2019), p.120.

relationship: the role of cinema in the “imagining” of the PdCI (and EUR more generally) for post-war Italian audiences. This, despite the fact that, since the 1950s, “EUR has been an endless source of fascination for film directors”, drawn by “the tectonics of the borough’s many buildings, and of the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana in particular, [which] offer incomparably photogenic, ready-made sets of overwhelming sculptural beauty”.⁵⁵ While the impact of film (and other visual media) on the popular imaginary of the PdCI and EUR needs further investigation, it is nonetheless clear that the process of their aestheticisation began relatively early on in the post-war period, with cinema.

Designed to be the landmark building of the E42 exhibition, the PdCI remained the symbol of the “new” EUR which began to take shape in the 1950s. The guide to the EA53 exhibition, for example, featured the PdCI on its cover (along with a spade), while a commemorative medal produced for the occasion featured *Roma Aeterna* on one side with an image of the PdCI overlaid by the inscription EA53 on the reverse.⁵⁶ The official opening of the exhibition also took place at the partially restored/ completed PdCI, with the building hosting agricultural displays on the themes of land reclamation, irrigation and land transformation, rural housing, agricultural production and agrarian credit, as well as a “restaurant-dancing” establishment.⁵⁷ Photographs from the time capture the architectonic importance of the PdCI to the exhibition, with the palazzo dramatically lit at night and its external statues — many of which had been vandalised and broken after the war — restored and returned to their former positions.⁵⁸ Less clear was the long-term future use of the building. In Testa’s 1952 proposals for the completion of the monumental quarter, the PdCI was earmarked as the new home for the national central library of Rome, at that time centrally located in the Collegio Romano. The idea, though, was criticised in the press, and eventually dropped. (Criticisms centred on the PdCI’s capacity to house the library, the high costs of relocation, and EUR’s distance from the city centre). After the closure of EA53 it took another three years before a suitable tenant was found and a further year until the building was ready for use. Susan Schafer has suggested that the PdCI’s delayed occupancy — many of the quarter’s other monumental structures were already in use by this time — was because the palazzo was EUR’s “most monumental and ‘fascist’ symbol”.⁵⁹ It is possible, though, that the delay owed more to finance than Fascism. When the idea of relocating the national library to the PdCI had been first been raised, *L’Unità* had reported that the annual lease would cost the government “several million [lire] a year (there is talk of 20 million)”, with restoration work likely to run to many millions more.⁶⁰ We know, too, that Testa was (naturally) keen to keep Ente EUR’s costs to a minimum. In the lead-up to EA53, for example, Testa had stipulated that all restoration and completion works undertaken by the event organisers in readiness for the exhibition would remain the property of Ente EUR: “magnificent business” in Greco’s view.⁶¹ After EA53 closed, it was clear that still more effort and money

⁵⁵ Carrera, *Fellini’s Eternal Rome*, p.117; Alberto Zambenedetti, “Filming in Stone: Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana and Fascist Signification in Cinema, *Annali d’Italianistica*, Vol. 28 (2010), p.15.

⁵⁶ <<https://www.ebay.it/itm/MEDAGLIA-ESPOSIZIONE-ROMA-1953-EA-53-AGRICOLTURA/254533084886?hash=item3b435aa6d6:g:00AAOSwtC5eYnx>>. Accessed 11 February 2020.

⁵⁷ Greco, “EUR 1953”, p.163, *L’Unità*, 11 August 1953.

⁵⁸ <<https://www.eurspa.it/it/asset-property/patrimonio/archivi-fotografici/archivi-storico-fotografico-e42/edifici>>. Accessed 20 January 2020.

⁵⁹ Schafer, “Rome Year Zero”, p.110.

⁶⁰ *L’Unità*, 21 May 1952.

would need to be spent on the PdCI to make it habitable and usable: sixty million lire had been spent on preparing the palazzo's lower floors for EA53, but the building's upper levels and its heating, electrical and hydraulic systems remained works in progress.⁶² In such circumstances, it was perhaps inevitable that it would take time to find a suitable — and suitably deep-pocketed and amenable — long-term tenant. When the lease of the palazzo was finally confirmed (October 1956), to a new *Ente* consisting of the Federazione Nazionale dei Cavalieri del Lavoro (FNCL, National Federation of the Knights of Labour), the Federazione dei Maestri del Lavoro d'Italia (FMIL, National Federation of the Masters of Labour of Italy) and the Associazione Nazionale Lavoratori Anziani di Azienda (ANLA, National Association of Senior Business Workers), the contract stipulated that the consortium would be responsible for the completion of all adjustment works — the FNCL allocated 100 million lire for the purpose — as well as for the upkeep of the palazzo.⁶³

Dedicated to “social harmony in business in the name of economic liberty”,⁶⁴ the incoming *Ente* brought not just a new purpose to the palazzo but also a new name: the “Palazzo della Civiltà del Lavoro” (Palace of the Civilisation of Work). The surrounding piazza and approach road were also renamed, becoming, respectively, the Quadrato della Concordia (Harmony Square) and Viale della Civiltà del Lavoro. Suitably rechristened, and in the process one step further removed from its Fascist-era origins, the monumental palazzo operated as an office block for the next four decades.⁶⁵

The early post-war life of the PdCI suggests that its survival, along with many other physical traces of Fascism at EUR (buildings, artworks, epigraphs) was less a product of Italy's “halting and incomplete transition from dictatorship to democracy” (although the presence of Piacentini is an obvious and uncomfortable example of the continuities between Fascism and the post-war Republic) and more the consequence of pragmatic concerns: of the need to “do something” with the site, to put buildings to work, to recoup (or not write off) the massive investment in the site, to realise the long-planned for expansion of Rome; and — as importantly — of a desire to move on and to create new narratives for the suburb, the city and the nation. EUR was not unique in this regard. My work on the Foro Italoico sports complex on the northern periphery of Rome, the largest and most politically significant of all of Fascism's many interventions in the Roman urban landscape prior to E42, reveals similar considerations at play there.⁶⁶ Significantly, Sharon Macdonald's study of the difficult heritage of the former Nazi rally parade grounds at Nuremberg shows almost identical decision-making processes at work in post-war (West) Germany. Here, other than the removal of Nazi symbols, the buildings and marching grounds were left intact, with local discussions firmly focused on

⁶¹ Greco, “EUR 1953”, p.162.

⁶² Cristiana Marcosano Dell'Erba, “Dalla civiltà italiana alla civiltà del lavoro”, in Casciato and Poretti, *Il palazzo della civiltà italiana*, n.19, pp.115-6.

⁶³ *Corriere della Sera*, 29 November 1957. Perhaps in recognition of the cost of the works still outstanding, and/or a sign of *Ente* EUR's desire to secure a tenant for the property, the new *Ente* “Palazzo della civiltà del lavoro” was charged a peppercorn rent for the lease of 1000 lire per annum. Dell'Erba, “Dalla civiltà italiana alla civiltà del lavoro”, p.108.

⁶⁴ *Corriere della Sera*, 29 November 1957.

⁶⁵ Sergio Poretti, “Identità e futuro di un monumento”, in Casciato and Poretti, *Il palazzo della civiltà italiana*, p.27.

⁶⁶ Carter and Martin, “Management and Memory”.

practicalities (the need to use the buildings and the site's facilities), cost (the need to "make good" on the previous investment) and the future (the need to move on). According to Macdonald:

The location of agency in swastikas or in the failings of buildings, the format of financial calculations, the self-perception of acting pragmatically, and certain understandings of temporality, were all, variously, mobilised in the negotiations and actions taken. It was such understandings and frameworks, manifest and produced by historically and socially located actors, rather than more generalised and dehistoricised psychological mechanisms of repression or notions of haunting, which provided the impetus for action.

What is also evident here is that while the Nazi past was recognised as a problematic legacy immediately after the war, the idea that Nazi buildings were a heritage that might be preserved as a means of documenting that history or educating about it was scarcely voiced in Nuremberg before the 1970s. Such suggestions as there were in the 1960s that the buildings be considered as a heritage to be preserved tended to come from those with Nazi sympathies and were usually robustly rejected by those in charge of the site's management. That some of those making such robust rejection, most notably the city's building minister, also had personal grounds not to want to be reminded about the Nazi past was surely significant to the response. But it was not the only reason.⁶⁷

If the early post-war history of the PdCI/EUR (and other Italian examples of difficult Fascist heritage such as the Foro Italico) closely mirrors that of Nazi built heritage in post-war West Germany, the same cannot be said of more recent decades. In West Germany, beginning tentatively in the 1970s, and especially in reunified Germany since the early 1990s, the physical remains of Nazism have assumed an increasingly important role in helping Germans "work through" Nazism, with many buildings and sites placed under heritage protection as "witnesses" to the country's National Socialist past. The stones, though, have not been left "to speak for themselves". As Clare Copley writes, there is now a "fairly established consensus that the material legacies of National Socialism alone [can] not provide adequate testimony of their former uses [...] [they] are deemed to require commentary to ensure that the nature and extent of their otherness is clearly understood".⁶⁸ Well-known examples of such mediation include the Nazi documentation centres in Nuremberg, Munich and Berlin, built in, or on the sites of, former Nazi buildings, and the introduction of National Socialism history "trails" in Munich, and at Tempelhof airport and the Olympic stadium in Berlin. Italy, as noted earlier, has followed a very different path. Over the past thirty years or so, buildings and sites — and artworks — closely associated with Fascism have been similarly recognised as "heritage" (i.e. of cultural, historical and/or artistic interest) and placed under protective measures, but, in sharp contrast to Germany, heritagisation has rarely been accompanied by historicisation.⁶⁹

While it is tempting to attribute this to the growing influence of the new right in Italy from the mid-1990s, and its indulgence of philo-Fascist and "anti-anti-Fascist" tendencies in Italian society and culture, the evidence points us elsewhere. In particular, we must acknowledge the

⁶⁷ Macdonald, *Negotiating the Nazi Past*, pp.77-8.

⁶⁸ Clare Copley, "'Stones do not Speak for Themselves': Disentangling Berlin's Palimpsest", *Fascism*, Vol. 8 (2019), p.248.

⁶⁹ The best-known exceptions to the rule are to be found in Forlì and Bolzano. See: Patrick Leech, "The Anxieties of Dissonant Heritage: ATRIUM and the Architectural Legacy of Regimes in Local and European Perspectives", in Hökerberg, *Architecture as Propaganda*, pp.245-60; Håkan Hökerberg, "The Monument to Victory in Bolzano: Desacralisation of a Fascist Relic", *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, Vol. 23, 8 (2017), pp.759-74; "BZ Light on Dictatorships", <www.basrelief-bolzano.com/en.html>, accessed 24 January 2019.

significant roles played by the Italian academy and the *soprintendenza* (the government agency responsible for the protection of Italy's cultural, urban and environmental heritage) in shaping the heritagisation process. For many years after 1945, interwar architecture, because of its links to Fascism, was dismissed as reactionary, regressive and unworthy of study. This began to change in the 1980s. For a new generation of architectural historians, to judge interwar architecture by the political company it kept made little sense. When assessed on its architectural merits, and considered in an international context, interwar (i.e. no longer "Fascist") Italian architecture (specifically rationalism) emerged as an important and distinctive moment in twentieth-century Italian — and western — modernism. The heritage implications of this revisionist shift were considerable: if interwar Italian architecture was of international architectural historical significance, it logically possessed heritage value. Many "Fascist" buildings were approaching the point where they could potentially be legally designated as "heritage" (fifty years after their completion), yet many (EUR a case in point) were already showing signs of age, neglect, under-utilisation, improper use, or abandonment. Some also bore the additional scars of alterations to their original layout or structure, compromising their architectural integrity. Consequently, from the late 1980s we see the emergence of a coalition of academics (architects and architectural historians) and officials from the *soprintendenza* in support of preservation and heritagisation. In the reverse of the German case, however, where it was the Nazi history attached to a site or building that was important, in Italy, only the architecture mattered. Historicisation became a moot point. As I have discussed elsewhere in relation to the Foro Italico, "Fascist" art also underwent a similar reframing exercise, with similar consequences.⁷⁰

EUR has occupied a unique position in this process. Even during its construction, the architectural merits of E42 had been the subject of bitter debate, as leading proponents of Italian rationalism lined up to criticise what they saw as Piacentini's betrayal of modernism in favour of an "empty" classical monumentalism.⁷¹ Similar criticisms (and worse) were levied at it after 1945. "It is the incarnation and symbol of a 'genre' virtually unprecedented in architectural history, the tragicomic", wrote the influential post-war architect and critic Bruno Zevi in 1959: "When conceived by Fascism in a riot of colonnades of reinforced concrete and marble that seemed made of paper mâché, it was simply comic. After the war [...] [it] became the visual document of tragedy."⁷² Against this background of longstanding critical opprobrium and ridicule, the 1987 exhibition, *E42. Utopia e scenario del regime*, held at the Archivio Centrale di Stato, EUR, stands out as being of particular historiographical importance. The first major retrospective on E42 since the war, the exhibition set out to "judge with serenity the significance and value of EUR as a page of the history of architecture and urban planning", free from ideological prejudice.⁷³ The exhibition catalogue, an enormous two-volume affair, brought together architects, architectural and art historians and conservationists in what amounted to a revisionist

⁷⁰ See Carter and Martin, "Management and Memory".

⁷¹ Giuseppe Pagano, "Occasioni perdute", *Costruzioni casabella*, n. 158, February 1941, reprinted in A. Zevi, ed., *Una guida all'architettura moderna dell' EUR* (Rome, 2008), pp.9-12. See also Kallis, *Third Rome*, pp.250-5.

⁷² Bruno Zevi, *Cronache di architettura*, Vol. 6 (Bari, 1978), p.270.

⁷³ "Who today would judge the architecture of the age of Hadrian on the basis of the political merits or generosity of this emperor [...] who would judge Michelangelo on the basis of the politics of [pope] Julius II?", asked the architect, architectural historian – and revisionist-in-chief – Paolo Portoghesi in his introduction to volume two of the exhibition catalogue. Paolo Portoghesi, "L'Eur ha cinquant'anni", in Calvesi *et al.*, *E42*, p.10.

manifesto. A glimpse of what conservation/restoration would, and (implicitly) would not entail, once buildings and artworks came of heritage age, was given by Pier Luigi Porzio of the Lazio *soprintendenza*:

Recognising the quality and dignity of the architecture [...] it is right and proper that they are applied those criteria of maintenance, conservation and restoration with the adoption of scientific methodologies that are usually considered for historic buildings [...] For many of them, restoration that is attentive to original construction techniques and materials, the removal of subsequent and inappropriate interventions [...] [and the] identification and implementation of the correct use of buildings, would guarantee the conservation of this “fragment” of architectural history undeniably full of great interest.⁷⁴

Beyond Politics?

Starting in the early 1990s, but particularly from the 2000s, many of EUR’s monumental buildings and artworks have been restored. In no case has restoration/heritagisation been accompanied by historicisation. The suburb, meanwhile, has been the subject of a sustained rebranding exercise over the same period, with the promotion of the cultural heritage of the monumental quarter a key element of this. In place of the soulless “office suburb” of the 1970s and 1980s — busy and congested by day but “ghostly and deserted” by night —⁷⁵ the intention (restated by local and national politicians of all persuasions since the 1990s) has been to transform the district into a state-of-the-art sporting, cultural and conference hub, capable of hosting major international events and attracting local and international visitors.⁷⁶ Leaving to one side the painfully slow, badly managed and still incomplete realisation of this vision, the rhetoric surrounding it has introduced, simplified and entrenched in public discourse over the past thirty years the (once) revisionist view of EUR’s historic centre as a unique example of twentieth Italian modernism and *de facto* modern architectural heritage site. In the process, the Fascist frame of reference, long ago set aside by revisionism, has been largely forgotten.

The ultimate beneficiary of this has been the PdCI. One (particularly notable) example will suffice. In October 2015, the exhibition “Una Nuova Roma. L’EUR e il Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana”, opened on the ground floor of the PdCI to coincide with the inauguration of the restored palazzo as Fendi’s new headquarters. The grand re-opening of the palazzo ended years of uncertainty, marked by multiple false dawns, as to its future use.⁷⁷ The two-page “History” given to visitors outlined the architectural rationale and purpose behind the

⁷⁴ Pier Luigi Porzio, “L’E42. Ragioni di una tutela”, in Calvesi *et al.*, *E42*, p.199. See also Gianfranco Ruggieri, “La salvaguardia del patrimonio architettonico ‘moderno’”, in *ibid.*, pp.189-90. ⁷⁵ Di Majo and Insolera, *L’EUR e Roma*, p.139; Andrea Ortoleva, “Il rilancio del Eur”, *Capitolium millennium*, Vol. 3, 6 (2005), p.30.

⁷⁶ See, for example, articles in *L’Unità*, 20 September 1995; *Corriere della Sera*, 29 May 1999, 24 December 2000; “Intervista ad Ignazio Abrigani”, *Monumentidiroma*, Vol. 2, 1-2 (2004), pp.9-11; Ortoleva, “Rilancio”.

⁷⁷ By the 1990s, the PdCI, like EUR generally, was showing signs of wear and tear and the building was progressively abandoned. “Blackened by air pollution and acid rain” [*New York Times*, 11 July 1999], by the early 2000s, only the ground floor (as garages) and first floor (as offices) were occupied [*Corriere della Sera*, 17 February 2001; Dell’Erba, “Dalla civiltà italiana alla civiltà del lavoro”, n.42, p.117]. Restoration work began in earnest at this point, with the PdCI earmarked as the location for a state-of-the-art National Museum of Sound and Image. Other projects were added to the mix over the next few years, notably a permanent “Made in Italy” exhibition designed to act as a national “shop window” for Italian products. However, when restoration works were completed in 2011 the building remained empty. Fendi agreed a fifteen-year lease in 2013. Subsequent (reversible) alterations were made to the interior before Fendi took occupancy in October 2015.

building's design and construction, its architectural significance (“a statement of magnificence and theatricality, myth and value”), and post-war uses, but avoided any reference to Fascism, Mussolini or the Second World War.⁷⁸ “This building is beyond a discussion of politics”, announced Fendi CEO Pietro Beccari on the eve of the palazzo's (and exhibition's) opening: “It is aesthetics. It is a masterpiece of architecture”; its Fascist origins, he insisted, were “a non-issue.”⁷⁹

Conclusion

In a 1996 collection of essays entitled *The Modern Architecture of Rome and Lazio, 1922-1945: Knowledge and Protection*, the art historian and *soprintendente* of the *polo museale romano*, Claudio Strinati, argued that Italians' “tolerant” attitude towards the material remains of the past, Fascism included, stemmed from the country's underlying Catholic culture:

Catholic culture is tolerant because it doesn't attribute to art that importance and determining value that ideologically committed culture attributes to it. Catholic culture well knows that the work of art has significance first for itself and only secondarily for the aim for which it has been made. Ideologically oriented cultures instead think that the artistic artefact, whatever it is, from picture to building, contains a binding significance that is a vehicle of information and conditioning of behaviours.

In reality, the artistic heritage of the 1930s and 1940s has been treated with an ideological casualness that is still connected with the great phenomenon of Catholic culture through centuries past.⁸⁰

Whatever the merits of Strinati's thesis, it is clear, if we think back to Croce's 1944 comments — made, it should be remembered, by a leading anti-Fascist intellectual at a time when the war against Fascism was still being fought in Italy — that the present-day willingness to judge and treat Fascist art and architecture on its aesthetic qualities (to “distinguish between the good and bad in the public monuments of fascism” as the Allied Control Commission Weekly Bulletin characterised it at the time)⁸¹ has deep roots.

As a historian, I am instinctively uncomfortable about the “normalising” of Fascist art and architecture in a self-professedly liberal-democratic culture. Like Ben-Ghiat, I would much prefer to problematise rather than aestheticise buildings and spaces that were designed to embody and communicate Fascist values, or function as “a kind of contrived over-representation of a perfect “new order”,⁸² in the hope (as Copley notes in the case of Berlin) of facilitating critical engagement with the period”, and “increasing public awareness of the ways that [the] regime used the built environment”.⁸³ As such, one can only applaud the initiatives in Forlì and Bolzano (and those in Germany) which aim to do precisely this.

At the same time, I am more sanguine than Ben-Ghiat and others who worry that uncritical preservation and aestheticisation plays into the hands of the far right. In the sense that heritagisation can confer a certain legitimacy on the object being heritagised, then it has the potential to do so. Far right groups will also inevitably applaud and seek

⁷⁸ For the full text (in Italian): <<https://cdn.archilovers.com/projects/f702093d-865c-4b8a-8141-79ac257b21bb.pdf>. Accessed online 4 April 2020.

⁷⁹ *Guardian*, 23 October 2015.

⁸⁰ Claudio Strinati, “Nuova attenzione al patrimonio moderno”, in Luigi Prisco, ed., *Architettura moderna a Roma e nel Lazio 1920-1945. Conoscenza e tutela* (Rome, 1996), pp.27, 28.

⁸¹ *Allied Control Commission Weekly Bulletin*, no. 8, 21-27 May 1944, p.1.

⁸² Kallis, *Third Rome*, p.244.

⁸³ Copley, “Disentangling Berlin's Palimpsest”, p.249.

to make political capital from measures that safeguard what they see as “their” heritage. Often, though, far right groups can extract as much mileage out of Fascist sites, buildings and artworks that *haven’t* been restored or preserved, “critically” or not, using their degraded condition to accuse the responsible authorities of deliberate neglect on the basis of ideological prejudice. Uncritical preservation can also work both ways, potentially rendering a site or object historically mute to the casual visitor.

In her interview with *Submarine* in 2017, Ruth Ben-Ghiat urged Italians to “think about its [the PdCI’s] history, its context and what it can symbolise”. Of course, Ben-Ghiat had in mind a very specific moment in the palazzo’s life: its extremely troubling birth. The PdCI, though, has a history, context and symbolic repertoire which extends far beyond Fascism. Built to represent and fix in the public space (and collective mind) a particular memory of Fascism, to express through its physical presence and decorative elements the political, social and cultural power of the dictatorship, it has accumulated multiple layers of meaning in the decades since: as a tragic “monument to national stupidity”, as the symbol of Italy’s post-war modernisation and democratic rebirth, and as a barometer of EUR’s fluctuating fortunes since the 1980s. Its appropriation by film makers since the 1950s and by advertisers from the 1990s has added further layers of “imagined” meaning. As we have also seen, its architectural reputation, both in Italy and overseas, has changed dramatically, further complicating matters (can Ben-Ghiat’s “monument to Fascist violence” also be an “original and engagingly rhetorical structure”?).⁸⁴ The PdCI is a “Fascist” building *but it is not only* a Fascist building. The same could be said of many other “Fascist” sites across Italy. If anglophone historians want to engage Italians in a constructive discussion of how best to deal with the difficult heritage of Fascism, they would do well to remember this.

⁸⁴ Diane Ghirardo, *Italy: Modern Architectures in History* (London, 2013), p.121.