

## FINAL DRAFT

### Article title

The management and memory of Fascist monumental art in postwar and contemporary Italy: the case of Luigi Montanarini's *Apotheosis of Fascism*

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### Abstract

In postwar Germany, the Allies and the German authorities moved quickly and systematically to destroy or physically remove all traces of Nazi art. No such process occurred in postwar Italy. This meant that hundreds of ideologically inspired statues, mosaics, murals and other artefacts survived into the republican period. This article uses Luigi Montanarini's mural, the *Apotheosis of Fascism*, as a case study to examine the management, meaning and memory of Fascist monumental art (and, more broadly, Fascist monumental architecture) in postwar and contemporary Italy. To date, memory studies of Fascism have largely overlooked the artistic and architectural legacies of the dictatorship. This article helps to address this historiographical lacuna and speaks to current debates and controversies in Italy surrounding the meaning and significance of historic Fascism.

**Keywords** Fascism, monumental art, Luigi Montanarini, Apotheosis of Fascism, Rome, memory, difficult heritage

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## The management and memory of Fascist monumental art in postwar and contemporary Italy: the case of Luigi Montanarini's *Apotheosis of Fascism*

On 14 December 2014, the Italian prime minister Matteo Renzi announced Rome's bid to host the 2024 Olympics. He did so in the Aula Magna of the headquarters of the Italian National Olympic Committee (CONI) at the Foro Italico in Rome, the location of Italy's last Games in 1960 and still the country's premiere sporting venue. Renzi addressed the assembled audience of sports stars, administrators and journalists while standing in front of a 110m<sup>2</sup> mural, the *Apotheosis of Fascism* (figure 1). The mural, painted in 1942 by the Florentine-born artist Luigi Montanarini, depicts Mussolini as a Christ- or emperor-like figure surrounded by his admiring disciples, the Fascist *gerarchi*.<sup>1</sup> Standing to Mussolini's immediate left as we look at the painting is Galeazzo Ciano, the Duce's son-in-law and foreign minister (1936-1943). Next to Ciano, we find two of the *quadrumvirs* from the 1922 March on Rome: the very recognisable moustache of Cesare Maria de Vecchi and the grey-bearded and gloved Emilio de Bono. Renato Ricci, the former head of the one-time umbrella organisation for Fascist youth, the Opera Nazionale Balilla (ONB), is visible between Ciano and De Vecchi. To Mussolini's right are the two other *quadrumvirs* from 1922: the black-shirted, bespectacled Michele Bianchi (d. 1930), and the black-booted figure of Italo Balbo (d. 1940). On the far right stands Giuseppe Bottai. Beneath Mussolini, the Italian masses – workers, peasants, soldiers, women, Fascist youth and militia – crowd in around the giant marble altar on which the Duce stands, their arms raised. Symbols of Fascist power and its Roman ancestry abound. Communism, shown as a warrior with serpent's hair, lies dead at the feet of Fascism. Italian warplanes fill the sky and warships the sea as a winged Victory wielding a *gladius* and holding a laurel wreath heralds the return of the Roman Empire. A banner displaying the Roman eagle hangs from the front of Mussolini's altar. The altar itself resembles a Roman capital.

Insert figure 1 here

Figure 1: The *Apotheosis of Fascism*. (Photograph courtesy of Sophie Hay.)

Renzi's announcement naturally attracted considerable media attention in Italy, as well as a great deal of criticism.<sup>2</sup> None of the mainstream media coverage, however, mentioned the *Apotheosis*, still less questioned whether it was wise or appropriate for an Italian prime minister to declare Rome's Olympic candidacy against the backdrop of such an ideologically charged example of Fascist propaganda. From the media's perspective, there was nothing new or unusual about the scene: the Aula Magna was a regular venue for major sporting presentations, promotions and awards ceremonies; Renzi's predecessors Mario Monti, Silvio Berlusconi, Romano Prodi and Massimo D'Alema had all attended such events and been photographed in front of the mural. (Renzi himself was there in December 2014 ostensibly as guest of honour at the prestigious *collare d'oro al merito sportivo* awards ceremony.) And yet, as one blogger commented in January 2015, after the Italian press had published pre-Six Nations publicity pictures of the national rugby squad framed by the *Apotheosis*, 'Can you imagine what would happen in Germany ... if the national football team and world champions were photographed in front of a propaganda image of Hitler and National Socialism? Impossible, right? Yet in Italy it happens' (Miele 2015).

This article uses the *Apotheosis* as a case study to examine the management, meaning and memory of Fascist monumental art (and, more broadly, Fascist monumental architecture) in postwar and contemporary Italy. How a particular society deals with its 'difficult heritage', that is with sites, buildings, monuments and artefacts 'that are historically important but

heavily burdened by their past' (Burström and Gelderblom 2011, 267), can tell us a great deal about how that society has internalized and understood that past. As we shall see, the history of the *Apotheosis*, an example of difficult heritage if ever there was one, is both revealing and surprising in this regard, and speaks directly to current debates and concerns regarding the trivialization of the Fascist past and the public rehabilitation of Fascism during the Berlusconi era (Serenelli 2013, 158).

In recent decades, historians have shown an intense interest in the Fascist 'cultural revolution' and the importance assigned by the regime to art, architecture and aesthetics in its efforts to transform Italian society (see, for example, Adamson 2001; Ben-Ghiat 2005; Berezin 1997; Braun 2000; Falasca-Zamponi 1997; Gentile 1996, 2007; Golan 2009; Kallis 2014; Lazzaro and Crum 2005; Marcello and Glynn 2015; Nicoloso 2008; Schnapp 1996; Stone 1993, 1997, 1998). A vast literature meanwhile exists on the many and diverse art movements and leading artists of the inter-war period.<sup>3</sup> In contrast, historians have paid scant attention to the post-regime 'afterlives' of Fascist art or architecture, despite the enormous number of Fascist sites, buildings, symbols, statues, mosaics and murals that survived into the postwar, post-Fascist era. This is particularly surprising when one considers the attention paid by historians of memory in recent years to the ways in which Italians have remembered, interpreted, embraced, confronted, forgotten and negotiated Fascism since 1945. There are some notable exceptions. Tim Benton has analysed the 'material memories' of Fascism and heritage and regime change (Benton 1999, 2010). Vittorio Vidotto has explored the transformation of the Foro Italico in the early postwar period (Vidotto 2004). Joshua Arthurs has examined the 'heritagization' of Fascist monuments and the lasting influence of 'Mussolini's Rome' on the Italian capital (Arthurs 2010, 2014). Gerald Steinacher has investigated the 'divided memory' of Fascist-era monuments in Bolzano in South Tyrol (Steinacher 2013). Joshua Samuels has written on the contemporary memory and meaning of Fascist agricultural centres (*borghi*) in Sicily. Closest to this study are the recent trio of papers by Simona Storchi, Eugene Pooley and Giuliana Pieri on the destiny of Mussolini-inspired artworks in the aftermath of the dictatorship (Gundle *et al.*, 2013). In general, though, memory studies of the Fascist era have tended to focus on postwar memorials and commemorations (Foot 2009), Nazi massacres (Pezzino 2012; Portelli 2003; Rovatti 2004), or the Resistance (Cooke 2011; Pezzino 2005). It is revealing that John Foot's acclaimed 2009 study of Italy's divided memory from the First World War to the murder of Aldo Moro in 1978 devotes only two pages to the issue of Fascist monuments, sites and symbols (Foot 2009). This article helps to address this historiographical lacuna. It is divided into four sections. In the first section, we examine the early history of the *Apotheosis* within the context of the construction, expansion and growing political importance of the Foro Mussolini (as the Foro Italico was originally known) in the 1930s. In section two, we explore the early postwar history of the *Apotheosis* as part of a broader discussion of the ways in which Italian (and Allied) authorities approached the problem of monumental Fascist art (and architecture) after the fall of Mussolini. In section three, we analyse the circumstances surrounding the 'discovery' of the *Apotheosis* in the mid-1990s. In the final section, we consider the merits of and risks associated with the preservation of Fascist monumental art and architecture in contemporary Italy.

### **The *Apotheosis of Fascism*: origins and context**

The history of the *Apotheosis* is inextricably intertwined with that of the Foro Mussolini/Foro Italico. The Foro Mussolini began life in the late 1920s as the brainchild of ONB chief Renato Ricci. Ricci's initial (and self-confessedly 'modest') idea when construction work began in 1927 was 'to build a new venue for a modern school of physical education teachers, with a stadium attached for the exercises of the students' (Pica 1937, 5).<sup>4</sup> The project,

however, quickly grew in scale and ambition. By the time Mussolini inaugurated the first completed block of works in November 1932, at the end of the celebrations marking the Fascist *decennale*, the new 'Foro Mussolini' boasted not only an Accademia di Educazione Fisica and stadium (the Stadio dei Marmi), but also a partially constructed Olympic stadium in waiting (the Stadio dei Cipressi), and, at the entrance to the complex, an 18 metres high obelisk dedicated to Mussolini, *dux*. In addition, the Academy building ('Palazzo H' on account of its distinctive shape) doubled as the new national headquarters of the ONB. It was from these offices that Ricci presided over 'the spectacular symbolic inflation of the Foro Mussolini' (Kallis 2014, 168) in the early to mid-1930s. When Mussolini inaugurated the second block of works in May 1937, part of the first anniversary celebrations of the 'foundation of empire' in Ethiopia, the original 'Foro sportivo' had become the largest and most politically significant of all of Fascism's many interventions in the Roman urban landscape, a 'monumental representational space befitting the importance of the 'third Rome'' (Kallis 2014, 165).<sup>5</sup>

The defining feature of the expanded Foro was the immense (18,500m<sup>2</sup>) Piazzale dell'Impero, linking the obelisk at the entrance to the Foro to the equally monumental Fontana della Sfera, situated in front of the much-enlarged (and still growing) Stadio dei Cipressi. Imposing marble blocks stood along both sides of the central rectangle of the piazzale, inscribed with key dates from Fascism's history beginning with the foundation of Mussolini's newspaper *Il Popolo d'Italia* in November 1914 and concluding with the proclamation of empire in May 1936. Classically inspired mosaics covered 7500m<sup>2</sup> of the piazzale's surface. These mixed mythical, ancient, sporting and very modern political themes: Mars, Hercules, Romulus and Remus, the Tiber personified, Augustus, the Muses, athletic contests, as well as 'scenes from Fascist life' (Pica 1937, 88) including the much-trumpeted Fascist corporations and, very prominently, the recent conquest of Ethiopia. The mosaics also incorporated numerous Fascist slogans: 'molti nemici, molto onore'; 'me ne frego'; 'credere, obbedire, combattere'; 'Duce, Duce, Duce' (repeated along the length of the central rectangle); 'Duce a noi' (circling the Fontana della Sfera).

Further, still more ambitious, developments were planned for the Foro. By 1937, work had already started on an 80 metres high 'Statue of Fascism', loosely based on Mussolini (Pica 1937, 265-266; Gentile 2007, 104-106). (Work stopped 'temporarily' on the statue during the period of economic sanctions following the invasion of Ethiopia and never resumed.) The Foro's chief architect from 1935, Luigi Moretti, had also drafted plans for a vast arena, the Arengo della Nazione or Piazza delle Adunate, in which Mussolini would address the Italian masses. With a capacity of 400,000 people (Pica 1937, 93), the Arengo would surpass the Nazi rally grounds at Nuremberg. (The Arengo too was never realized. In late 1937, the ONB was dissolved and replaced by a new umbrella organisation for Fascist youth, the Gioventù Italiana del Littorio (GIL), under the direct control of the Fascist party. Soon after, the party secretary and head of GIL, Achille Starace, announced that the party's new national headquarters would be built on the land earmarked for the arena. A further change followed in 1940, when the still to be completed building was redesignated as the future home of the Italian Foreign Ministry [Vidotto 2004, 115].)

The comparison to Nuremberg is apposite; even without the Arengo, the Foro Mussolini in the mid-late 1930s served similar purposes. It was here that many of the major Party rallies took place (for example, the main ceremony commemorating the anniversary of the March on Rome in October 1937 was held at the Foro, not in Piazza Venezia as had previously been the case). It was here too that the dictatorship routinely brought important foreign guests in order to highlight the vigour, ambition and achievements of the regime: Himmler in 1936; Goering in 1937; Hitler most famously in 1938; Neville Chamberlain in 1939. The Foro Mussolini was also like Nuremberg in another important way: it was built

with posterity in mind. In the words of Renato Ricci, the site would ‘immortalize through the ages the memory of the new Fascist civilisation’ and its leader Mussolini (Pica 1937, 6). Just as millions of tourists now journeyed to Rome to marvel at its ancient monuments, testaments to the power and might of the ‘first Rome’, so in centuries to come they would stand in awe in front of the monumental ruins of the ‘third Rome’. The Foro Mussolini would speak as loudly to the achievements of Fascism as the Foro Romano spoke to the glories of Ancient Rome.<sup>6</sup>

The Foro Mussolini represented the integration of architecture and art in the service of Fascism on a vast and unprecedented scale (Cristallini 2005, 215, 222; Gentile 2007, 103). Since the establishment of the dictatorship in 1925, the regime had displayed a lively interest in the arts, including architecture, anxious to overcome its ‘anti-culture’ reputation and secure the support – or at least the acquiescence – of Italy’s artistic community (Braun 2002; Kallis 2014; Stone 1998). Fascist patronage and regulation of the arts, though, were more than simply propaganda or consensus-building exercises (although they were certainly both of these). The visual arts and architecture were assigned important educative and mythopoeic functions. As the Minister of Popular Culture Dino Alfieri declared in 1939: ‘Art must be, in these times of noticeable social betterment, art for the people and by the people: such art as shall exalt the people and which the people, advancing towards higher aims, will understand’ (Flint 1980, 50). The communicative power of art and architecture had been amply demonstrated by the spectacular popular and critical success of the ‘pivotal exhibition of Italy’s Fascist decades’ (Schnapp 2005, 228), the *Mostra della Rivoluzione Fascista*. Held in the Palazzo delle Esposizioni in Rome, the nineteenth-century venue had been transformed into a ‘didactic and emotional, populist and “sacred”, ephemeral and timeless’ Fascist *heterotopia* – a perfect and meticulously arranged ‘other space’ (Kallis 2014, 198) – through the efforts of a group of artists and architects including Mario Sironi and Giuseppe Terragni.<sup>7</sup> At the Foro Mussolini, Moretti and Ricci were ‘completely convinced of the persuasive capacity of a colloquial art, communicable concepts, all relating to *romanità*, that had their reference points in history books, as well as in the great didactic exhibitions dedicated to the masses’ (Greco 2005, 190). Aside from the mosaics of the Piazzale dell’Impero, the Foro boasted dozens of sculptures, most famously the sixty statues surrounding the Stadio dei Marmi. It also contained many other large-scale artworks, Angelo Canevari’s mural mosaics in the Palazzo delle Terme, on the opposite side of the piazzale to Palazzo H, and on the exterior of the Moretti-designed Casa delle Armi (Fencing Academy, 1936), probably the best known and certainly the most photographed examples. As chief architect, Moretti demonstrated a marked preference for relatively young and unknown artists and sculptors (Greco 2005, 190). Among Moretti’s ‘inner circle’ – Canevari, Achille Capizzano, Giulio Rosso and Aroldo Bellini – only Rosso (b. 1897) was born before 1900 (Moretti himself was born in 1907).<sup>8</sup> By coincidence or design, Moretti’s approach chimed with the regime’s own turn to a new generation of Italian artists from the mid-1930s as it sought to breathe life into the faltering Fascist ‘revolution’ (Stone 1998, 196-197). By 1940, young artists were the main beneficiaries of state and party patronage. As Marla Stone (1998, 215) has pointed out, this was a very different situation to a decade earlier, when older establishment figures such as Sironi dominated.<sup>9</sup>

Luigi Montanarini was one such youthful beneficiary. Born in 1906, by the early 1940s Montanarini was still building his reputation as an artist – he only held his first solo exhibition in Rome in 1937 – but he was clearly talented: in 1932, his work *Uomo e donna sul limitare della loro casa* had won best painting in the prestigious Pensionato Artistico Nazionale. (It was this award that had first brought Montanarini to Rome in 1933.) Personal contacts, though, seem likely to have played an important part in his securing the *Apotheosis* commission at the Foro Mussolini in 1942.<sup>10</sup> Montanarini was not only a friend of Angelo

Canevari, Moretti's most trusted collaborator at the Foro Mussolini (Cristallini 2005, 225-226; Fonti 2009, 130), but also an acquaintance of Moretti himself (*Il Messaggero*, August 3, 1997).

The choice of Montanarini represented something of a gamble on Moretti's part. As far as we can ascertain, this was Montanarini's first state-funded commission and he had no experience of monumental muralism, the Sironi-inspired 'avant-garde answer to a politically committed art' in 1930s Italy (Braun 2002, 208).<sup>11</sup> The *Apotheosis* was also no minor commission. The Foro Mussolini was an enormously important site. Palazzo H, as the Foro's first structure and home of the Academy, was its most important building (Ponzio 2015, 64, 164). The grandiose (500m<sup>2</sup>) Aula Magna, as a major conference and presentation venue, was the most important room in the palazzo. And, in the most important room of the most important building at what at the time was one of the most important Fascist sites in Rome (and by extension Italy), the *Apotheosis* would occupy the most important wall, behind the dais for speakers and honoured guests. (The *Apotheosis* was not the only monumental mural commissioned for the Aula Magna. For the opposite wall, Moretti chose Canevari to paint the equally imposing – but positionally less significant – *Storia di Roma*, depicting the foundation and development of Rome. Canevari used the opportunity to pay homage to his patron, portraying Moretti in the mural as a Roman emperor [Fonti 2009, 124; Greco 2005, 190]).<sup>12</sup>

The significance of the commission does not seem to have been lost on Montanarini. 'In the course of the work I felt alarmed', the artist recalled in an interview in 1997, a few months before his death. 'I felt an enormous responsibility. I had too much direct knowledge of the political environment not to feel this pressure on me' (Poto 1998, 59). Correspondence from 1942 between Montanarini and his great friend the sculptor Ado Furlan suggests that Montanarini struggled to accomplish the task. In a letter dated July/August 1942, Furlan wrote to him, 'The wall of the Foro isn't the Russian front! Climb up the scaffold and break through.'<sup>13</sup> Montanarini subsequently set himself a deadline of the end of September to complete the mural ('I must and I want to finish the work at the Foro', he confided to Furlan in late August).<sup>14</sup> Montanarini later recalled working 'day and night' for a month to get the job done (Poto, 1998, 59).<sup>15</sup> According to Montanarini, the mural's title and the leading Fascist personalities depicted in it were Moretti's decision, set out in the original commission (Poto 1998, 59).

Why Montanarini accepted, or perhaps sought, the commission is easy to explain. Up until late 1942, the GIL was a generous patron of the arts and we know from Montanarini's correspondence with Furlan that he received an initial payment of 4000 lire for the mural.<sup>16</sup> It also helped that Montanarini, in his own words, 'believed in Fascism' (Poto 1998, 59). That Montanarini supported the regime hardly made him unique among Italian artists of the time. Although Italian art historians have often been reluctant to acknowledge the links between artists and the dictatorship – Pieri (2013, 235) writes of 'the postwar strategy of oblivion of the cult of the dictator and the art that originated around it' – the reality was that for the majority of the dictatorship, 'the Italian avant-garde and the Fascist regime enjoyed a pragmatic, if often collusive, relationship of mutual tolerance and support' (Braun 1988, 132).<sup>17</sup>

### **The *Apotheosis* after Fascism, 1944-1951**

The *Apotheosis* survived the brief flurry of iconoclasm that accompanied the fall of Mussolini in 1943, when crowds particularly targeted images and statues of the fallen dictator (Arthurs, 2014, 287; Storchi, 2013, 202). It also survived the Allied occupation following the liberation of Rome in June 1944, when the Foro Italico – hastily renamed in 1943 – functioned as a US army rest centre. The Aula Magna became the officers' lounge with the *Apotheosis* initially

...serving as an incongruous backdrop to a music stage (see figure 2). The survival of the mural – and, indeed, of all the overtly Fascist elements of the Foro Italico, which remained an American base until 1948 – contrasts with the situation in occupied Germany after 1945, where ‘[T]he Western Allies eradicated “Nazi art” and excluded all military subjects or themes that could have military and/or chauvinist symbolism from pictorial representation’ (Goldstein 2000).<sup>18</sup> The only change made to Mussolini’s obelisk was the addition of a ‘US Army Rest Center’ sign at its base.<sup>19</sup> Other than a new name (Viale del Foro Italico) and some damage caused to its mosaics by American army trucks, the militaristic and hyper-Fascist Piazzale dell’Impero was left untouched. Rather than dwell on or address the site’s obvious Fascist heritage, the American administrators chose instead to focus on the exceptional leisure opportunities it offered to service personnel on leave. A 1945 brochure on the ‘Foro d’Italia’ rest centre, for example, drew soldiers’ attention to ‘the beautiful buildings and well planned grounds’ of the ‘Mussolini Forum’, promising that ‘The soldier on rest will find every comfort and facility. Writing rooms, an information desk, snack bars, movies, theatre, gymnasium, swimming pool, gardens and tennis courts all combine to make the soldiers’ leave a happy and a memorable one’ (US Army Rest Center 1945, 1). The printed instructions given to new arrivals at the rest centre referred only to ‘the unusual facilities’ at the disposal of visiting personnel.<sup>20</sup> Echoing its original purpose, over the summer of 1945 the Foro Italico even served as an elite sports school for trainee US army instructors and coaches.<sup>21</sup>

Insert figure 2 here

Figure 2: The *Apotheosis of Fascism* c. 1944. (United States Army Rest Center. Foro d’Italia, Roma [1945].)

After the last American soldiers left in 1948, ownership of the site reverted to the Italian government in the shape of Gioventù Italiana (GI). Established in 1944, the GI was tasked with the reallocation of the responsibilities and properties of the defunct GIL. The return of the Foro Italico to Italian control, however, did not bring with it a discernible change in approach to the Foro’s difficult heritage: the fate of its Fascist artefacts was left to one side. Instead, the question that occupied the GI (and its critics on the Italian left, who charged it with acting in the interests of the DC and the Catholic Church rather than Italian youth) was how best to use the Foro’s existing facilities to help ease the chronic shortage of school buildings and sporting amenities in the city.

The US army’s readiness to ignore the material remains of Fascism at the Foro Italico (and more broadly across Allied-controlled Italy) must be seen in the context of the continuing military campaign in Italy and the wider struggle to defeat Germany in Europe, and, connected to this, the Allies’ willingness to entrust ‘defascistization’ measures to the Italian government. This included handing over responsibility for the removal of Fascist monuments and art works to the Italians. Thus, in May 1944, the Allied Control Commission Weekly Bulletin was able to report that ‘The Ministry of Public Instruction ... has been given not only a new name but a new and delicate assignment: it will distinguish between the good and bad in the public monuments of Fascism. The unaesthetic will be destroyed, the better specimens removed to museums, where presumably they will do no harm.’<sup>22</sup> In July, the education minister, the historian Ernesto de Ruggiero, proposed the creation of an inter-ministerial commission to oversee the removal of ‘monuments of Fascists and works of art that celebrate, through their content, the ideas and aims of Fascism.’<sup>23</sup> A few weeks later, at the beginning of August, the prime minister’s office issued instructions to prefects to take immediate steps to get rid of all remaining visual references to the old regime.<sup>24</sup> Several

factors, however, prevented the implementation of a comprehensive or consistent policy of removal. First, monuments and artworks dedicated to the regime were often embedded in the walls of buildings; to remove them without damaging the host building would be a time-consuming, expensive and, perhaps, impossible task. Second, whereas in the case of privately owned buildings removal costs could be passed on to the building's owners, the municipal authorities would be liable in the case of the hundreds of public buildings requiring intervention. Nor would the task be limited to mosaics, sculptures, reliefs and murals but would also have to include the removal of the symbols, inscriptions and insignia of the regime (for example, the omnipresent *fascio littorio*). For local governments in cash-strapped, war-torn Italy, this was never going to be a priority. Third, the Allies themselves were a problem: Allied-occupied sites such as the Foro Italico were beyond the reach of the Italian authorities. A report from December 1944 by the special commissioner in charge of the unfinished 'model' Fascist suburb of EUR in Rome demonstrates the difficulties faced by local officials. 'Some symbols and signs in the EUR zone have already been removed or covered, while 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.'<sup>25</sup>

After the war, in an era of reconstruction and against the backdrop of deepening Cold War tensions in Italy, the ruling Christian Democrat party (DC) showed little interest in maintaining, still less intensifying, the policy. Beyond the expense involved, there was little to be gained politically from such activity: any attempt to destroy or substantially degrade the physical remains of Fascism, either at the Foro Italico or elsewhere, would have resonated more with Communist and Socialist voters than the DC's own constituency. Besides, one could argue that de-Fascistization was implicit in the early postwar re-purposing, renovation and appropriation of the many structures and spaces created by the dictatorship (Arthurs 2014, 289; Vidotto 2004, 115). For example, at the Foro Italico, dozens of classrooms were set up in its numerous buildings; the swimming pool (reportedly left by the Americans 'in a state of real devastation' [*L'Unità*, June 5, 1948]) was restored, upgraded and re-opened to the public; and families were housed in the site's two large *Foresterie* (hostels). At the same time, the Foro Italico very quickly became Rome's primary entertainment and sporting venue, hosting a wide range of events in the late 1940s and early 1950s including boxing title fights, international tennis competitions, rodeos, chariot races, circuses, Miss University 1948, the Harlem Globetrotters and Holiday on Ice. The Foro's status as Italy's pre-eminent sporting centre was confirmed in January 1950 with the announcement that Rome would bid to host the 1960 Olympics. Building works to turn the Stadio Olimpico into an 80,000-capacity venue commenced at the end of 1950, followed soon after by CONI's relocation to the Foro (Palazzo H) in 1951. The new stadium was inaugurated in 1953 and the Games were awarded to Rome in 1955.

The Catholic Church and the Italian Communist Party (PCI) were also quick to appropriate the Foro after the Americans had moved out, both eager to put their own stamp on the site – and to prove their superiority. So it was that in mid-September 1948, 500 priests distributed Holy Communion at High Mass at the Foro Italico as part of a series of events to celebrate the thirtieth anniversary of the girls' organisation of Catholic Action. (While aeroplanes dropped pro-Catholic leaflets on the crowds, Communists staged a counter demonstration on the streets outside [*Advocate* [Melbourne], September 16, 1948]). A fortnight later, an estimated 500,000 Communists from all over Italy descended on the Foro to celebrate the first public appearance of party leader Palmiro Togliatti since the attempt on his life in July. 'The Stadio dei Marmi was never so red', reported Italo Calvino in *L'Unità*, the official newspaper of the PCI; 'The stadium and the vast playing field were a single expanse of heads and flags. Clusters of people climbed up on the strong statues of athletes



and from one of those marble heads, displaying the rhetorical arrogance of the ventennio, raised a red flag' (*L'Unità*, September 28, 1948). Another report noted how the parade of thousands of 'beautiful girls' (that is, young female Communist party activists), through the streets of Rome to the Foro Italico had managed to 'erase the rather ugly memory of another parade of other girls', a clear reference to the recent Catholic demonstration in the city (*L'Unità*, September 28, 1948). As it turned out, the Church won this particular battle. Thanks to its very close connections to the ruling DC coalition, the Vatican was able to lease the 'spacious and light' lodgings available at the Foro Italico to house pilgrims visiting the city during the Holy Year of 1950, much to the chagrin of the Communist press (*L'Unità*, February 7, 1950). The lodgings included Palazzo H, leased and converted into a hotel by a company led by the influential lay Catholic Luigi Gedda. The hotel failed in early 1951, leaving GI to shoulder losses estimated at 200 million lire.<sup>26</sup>

What of the *Apotheosis*? Of all the Foro Italico's many celebrative monuments to Mussolini and Fascism, this was the one item to be censored in the early postwar period: the mural was covered over. Newspaper reports from the mid-1990s dated its 'disappearance' to the arrival of the Americans in mid-1944 (*La Repubblica*, February 28, 1998). Montanarini, however, claimed that he and Moretti had covered the work after the fall of the regime to preserve it from damage and vandalism (*Il Messaggero*, August 3, 1997; Poto 1998, 59). The photographic evidence in figure 2 indicates that, in this instance at least, Montanarini's memory had failed him; it also suggests a later date than 1944, possibly – but not definitely – during the American occupation of the Foro. Certainly, the mural was covered by the time that the Aula Magna hosted the November 1951 summit of NATO foreign ministers in what amounted to a further act of appropriation of Fascist space. As *Newsweek* reported to its readers:

It was a merry prank of history that the North Atlantic Allies this week were meeting amid the trappings of a bygone totalitarianism to speed up the democratic world's defences against the all-too-current Communist totalitarianism.

The scene was the Foro Italico in Rome, originally named the Foro Mussolini, which was built by Il Duce as a monument to himself and to Fascist youth ... Two concessions were made to the changed times. The Fascist murals in the assembly hall were painted over or covered up with pale green drapes. The many bad statues of Italian youths were discretely covered with fig leaves – added by the pious Christian Democrat government for the 1950 Holy Year. (*Newsweek*, December 3, 1951, 30)

The *Newsweek* report was not quite accurate. 'Pale green drapes' concealed the *Apotheosis*. The other major 'Fascist mural' in the room, however, remained on display (*Illustrated London News*, December 1, 1951, 88). Indeed, in a reversal of the room's usual orientation, the main platform at the summit was positioned beneath Canevari's imposing *Storia di Roma*, described by *Newsweek* as 'a mural of the glorious growth of Rome' (*Newsweek*, December 3, 1951, 30) but in fact directly inspired by the core Fascist concept of *romanità* and one of many similarly-themed Fascist murals, frescoes and mosaics found across Rome and the country.

Canevari's mural survived uncovered after the war because it could be easily recast in apolitical, neutral terms, as just one of many historical-pictorial representations of Rome's quasi-mythical ancient origins. In contrast, Montanarini's mural, self-evidently, could not be 'read' as anything other than a 'Fascist mural'. Moreover, unlike the other irredeemably Fascist aspects of the Foro Italico, such as the Obelisco Mussolini and the Piazzale dell'Impero, the much smaller and far less well-known *Apotheosis* could be hidden quickly and easily, at a minimal cost, without exciting public opinion. The fate of the *Apotheosis*, it

seems, was determined as much by its size, location and lack of notoriety as by its 'Fascistness'.<sup>27</sup>

While the censorship of the *Apotheosis* was unusual in the context of the Foro Italico, its concealment was a common solution to the problem of Fascist mural art after the war: rather than being removed, offending items were often simply masked, usually by wallpaper, a cloth or a curtain.<sup>28</sup> Sometimes the covering was used in the manner of a fig leaf to hide specific parts of a painting. This was the case with Giulio Bargellini's large fresco (1925-1929) in the Sala delle Riunioni of the Ministero di Grazia e Giustizia in Rome. The fresco, which portrayed 'the history of all Italian military glories', was partially censored in the wake of the liberation of Rome by the Minister of Justice, Umberto Tupini: only those sections depicting the March on Rome and the creation of the Fascist militia were covered with a curtain.<sup>29</sup> Complete concealment was more usual. Immediately after the war, for example, Sironi's giant mural *L'Italia tra le Arti e le Scienze* (1935) in the rectorate at Sapienza University, which included an enormous *fascio littorio* and a triumphal arch featuring Mussolini on horseback, was initially hidden under a thick layer of paper glued directly onto the surface of the painting (*Il Giornale d'Italia*, September 28, 2015). In the Casa Madre dei Mutilati e della Vedove di Guerra in Rome, two further frescoes by Sironi, *Rex Imperator* and *Dux* (1936-1939), were both covered in 1946 (Pooley 2013, 216). Similarly, in the Palazzo delle Corporazione (now the seat of the Ministry of Economic Development) Arnaldo Carpanetti's 92m<sup>2</sup> triptych depicting squadristi raids, Mussolini addressing workers in Dalmine, 1919, and the 'realisation of the promise' (c. 1932), was concealed under decorative panels after the war (Borsi, Morolli and Fonti 1986, 7, 122-123, 202). Nor did murals always have to be explicitly Fascist in their content to be suppressed. Thus, Achille Funi's unfinished *Tutte le strade conducono a Roma* (1943) in the Palazzo dei Congressi at EUR, which depicted a colossal Goddess of Rome (*dea Roma*) and scenes from Greek and Roman mythology, was covered for the 1953 Mostra dell'Agricoltura with six plywood panels featuring paintings by Gino Severini (Golan 2009, 220).

Postwar censorship of monumental Fascist art took a variety of forms besides concealment. In some instances, such as in the case of the bronze equestrian statue of Mussolini at the Bologna football stadium, artefacts were removed and destroyed. (A crowd had attacked and badly damaged the statue in July 1943, leaving just the horse and Mussolini's legs. After much discussion and delay, the horse was eventually pulled down in 1947. The bronze was then reused to make two statues of partisans [Storchi 2013, 203]). In other cases, works were physically removed but not destroyed. This was the fate, for example, of Arturo Dazzi's seven and a half metres high statue *Era Fascista* (1932) in Brescia. The statue, the centrepiece of the recently constructed Piazza della Vittoria in the heart of the city, was taken down and hidden in a council warehouse in late 1945 after anti-Fascists attempted to blow it up.<sup>30</sup> Adaptation was another approach. In EUR, Italo Griselli's the *Genius of Fascism* (1939/40), a statue of a young man making the Fascist salute, was rebranded as the 'Genius of Sport' thanks to the addition of a pair of ancient Roman boxing gloves. Similarly, Sironi's *L'Italia tra le Arti e le Scienze* was uncovered and 'restored' in 1950 by Carlo Siviero during which process all Fascist references were removed. Some artists even self-censored their own earlier, Fascist, works: Pieri gives the example of the Umbrian Futurist painter Gerardo Dottori who after the war removed Mussolini from his 'huge fresco' *La luce dell'antica madre* (1937) at the Università per Stranieri in Perugia (Pieri 2013, 231).

### **The *Apotheosis*, 1950s-1990s**

CONI, which took over the management of the Foro Italico sporting facilities in late 1952, soon replaced the drapes hiding the *Apotheosis*: photographs of committee meetings and

sporting presentations from later in the decade show the mural covered by a neat, tight-fitting, cloth.<sup>31</sup> A new cloth displaying the Olympic rings was added in the 1970s. Otherwise, the *Apotheosis* remained hidden and ignored until early 1996, when the Superintendent for Environmental and Architectural Heritage in Rome, Francesco Zurli, ordered CONI immediately to uncover, restore and display the mural as part of a general renovation of the Aula Magna's original art works.<sup>32</sup>

Zurli's demand for the 'return' of the *Apotheosis* did not find favour with the Italian press. In a highly critical article in *La Repubblica*, Aligi Pontani suggested that 'someone predisposed to nostalgia' must have solicited the intervention by the Ministry of Cultural and Environmental Heritage; it was enough to look at photographs of the mural to understand why CONI had hidden it for so long (*La Repubblica*, February 28, 1996). *La Stampa* meanwhile reported that CONI President Mario Pescante was 'justifiably embarrassed' by Zurli's directive, which would mean that Mussolini would soon 'return to dominate' the Aula Magna (*La Stampa*, February 28, 1996). According to the *Corriere della Sera*, Pescante's 'very courteous' response to Zurli's demand had included photographs of the mural, 'in case [the ministry] had forgotten what it looks like' (*Corriere della Sera*, February 28, 1996). 'If it happens', Pescante told journalists, 'you know that the initiative isn't ours' (*La Stampa*, February 28, 1996).

National elections and a change of government in May 1996, combined with Pescante's opposition to the project, delayed the implementation of the ministry's initiative. In December 1996, Zurli wrote again to CONI, requesting that it draw up plans for the full restoration of the Aula Magna to its original state, the *Apotheosis* included. In a subsequent press conference, a smiling Pescante once again made clear his unease: 'We have received the letter which ... orders the restoration of the celebratory fresco of one of the few empires that Italy has had. We will do it. But I will want government representatives beside me [when it is uncovered]' (*La Stampa*, February 28, 1997). Further procrastination by the CONI president delayed matters for several more months until the mural was finally revealed to print and television news in early August 1997 – its unveiling even attracting the attention of the controversial art critic-cum-political polemicist Vittorio Sgarbi ('It isn't art', Sgarbi complained, 'it lacks the sense of proportion' [Poto 1998, 58]). Scientific analysis of the mural's condition began soon after. The restoration of the *Apotheosis*, at a cost to CONI of 136,910,950 lire (approximately £44,000), was eventually completed in 2000.<sup>33</sup> The mural has been on permanent display ever since.

Pontani's concern that 'nostalgia' for Mussolini and Fascism lay behind the decision to restore and display the *Apotheosis* is understandable when we consider the political-cultural context of the mid-nineties. The disintegration of the Italian 'first republic' following the end of the Cold War and the 'Tangentopoli' corruption scandals of the early 1990s broke the broad if sometimes fragile 'anti-Fascist' consensus which had characterized Italian political and intellectual debate since the end of the Second World War. In particular, the collapse of the PCI and the rise of the 'new right' led by Silvio Berlusconi and the neo-Fascist Gianfranco Fini produced or at least facilitated new 'neo-patriotic' readings of the dictatorship, which combined positive reappraisals of Fascism with trenchant attacks on the 'national' credentials of the anti-Fascist Resistance (Carter 2010, 181-183).<sup>34</sup> What makes the restoration – one might say the *rehabilitation* – of the *Apotheosis* so interesting, however, is that it was *not* influenced by the anti-anti-Fascist 'turn'. Instead, we must place Zurli's intervention within the context of growing critical interest in the Foro Italico complex as an important example of inter-war Italian modernism, the Foro's recently acquired status as a protected 'heritage' site, and the desire of the post-Communist Italian left for Italians properly to 'come to terms' with Fascism.

For decades after 1945, Italian architects and historians showed little or no interest in the Fascist-inspired architecture of the twenties and thirties. Architects who had supported the regime were, for obvious reasons, not keen to draw attention to the fact after the war. Exponents of postwar modernism readily turned a blind eye to the stylistic continuities between Fascist modernist architecture and their own work, or claimed that the regime had in fact ‘persecuted’ the interwar modernist movement; interwar Italian architecture was duly written off as ‘ugly and Fascist’ (Maulsby 2014, 33; Kirk 2005, 140; *New York Times*, July 12, 2002). This began to change in the 1980s. For a new generation of architectural historians, interwar architecture had remained for too long tainted by its association with the dictatorship: the time had come to judge it on its considerable architectural merits, not the politics of the age (Portoghesi 1987, 10). The time had also come to act. The postwar repurposing of former Fascist party buildings (for example, the ubiquitous Case del Fascio and Case del Balilla/Case GIL) had frequently involved radical – and rarely sympathetic – structural changes to the original design. Many key examples of Fascist era architecture had also suffered from years of neglect, leaving them in parlous condition. If nothing were done to preserve and restore such buildings, so their admirers warned, an important part of Italy’s twentieth-century architectural history and heritage would soon be lost.

No site was thought to be more important or more at risk than the Foro Italico. On the one hand, its supporters claimed, the complex was an exceptional example of twentieth-century urban planning and landscape design, containing individual instances of architectural brilliance (notably Moretti’s Casa delle Armi) and a remarkable number and variety of artistic works. On the other hand, the new ‘crown of thorns’ roof of the Olympic stadium, added in readiness for the 1990 World Cup, threatened the architectural and environmental harmony of the entire site, while individual buildings – the Casa delle Armi a case in point – bore the scars of both aggressive remodelling and abandonment (Comitato dei Monumenti Moderni 1990, 14-18; *L’Unità*, May 22, 1990). As for the statues and mosaics of the Foro, these were in a dreadful state: in 1988, an estimated 40 per cent of the mosaic tiles of the ex-Piazzale dell’Impero were either loose or missing, with stolen tiles fetching up to 50,000 lire as souvenirs (*L’Unità*, May 6, 1988).

Coinciding with this new critical sensibility, the Ministry for Cultural Heritage began to take an active interest in the condition of the Foro Italico in the late 1980s (Marchetti 2004, 133-147). This culminated in a ministerial *decreto di vincolo* (31 January 1989) under law 1089/39 on ‘The Protection of Items of Historical and Artistic Interest’, which placed most of the complex under protective measures and gave the ministry the authority to direct CONI to undertake or at least pay for restoration works.<sup>35</sup> The first such CONI-funded project – a reconstruction of some of the damaged mosaics of the Piazzale dell’Impero – began the same year. Further projects followed in the 1990s including, in 1996-1997, the restoration of the algae- and lichen-ridden statues surrounding the Stadio dei Marmi and the Stadio del Tennis. Zurli’s demand in 1996 that CONI uncover and restore the *Apotheosis* as part of the restoration of the Aula Magna was indicative of the ministry’s broader commitment to the general restoration and conservation of the Foro Italico.<sup>36</sup>

Zurli’s instructions to CONI in January and December 1996 spanned two different governments, neither of the ‘new right’. Zurli sent his initial directive during the caretaker administration of Lamberto Dini. The former head of the Bank of Italy, Dini had resigned as prime minister of Italy’s first ‘government of experts’ in January 1996 after a year in office but remained acting premier until elections in May. The minister for Cultural Heritage, January 1995-May 1996, was the highly respected art historian and former Superintendent of Artistic and Historical Heritage in Florence, Antonio Paolucci. Like all his cabinet colleagues, Paolucci was a technocrat and non-parliamentarian. Zurli’s second letter to CONI had the blessing of Walter Veltroni, the new minister for Cultural Heritage and deputy prime

minister in Romano Prodi's centre-left Olive Tree coalition government from May 1996 to October 1998. A former Communist deputy and editor-in-chief of *L'Unità*, Veltroni possessed impeccable anti-Fascist credentials.<sup>37</sup> 'I wasn't susceptible to nostalgia [regarding the *Apotheosis*]', Veltroni recalled several years later in an interview with *La Stampa*, but 'I was minister of culture ... and I had a duty to safeguard heritage'. More importantly, the hidden mural was, in Veltroni's opinion, symptomatic of Italy's long-standing refusal to face up to Fascism: if Italians were ever properly to 'come to terms' with the Fascist past they literally had to confront it; the physical traces of the *ventennio* could no longer be taboo.

We turned the page on Fascism without having metabolized and understood it. Therefore, we continue to hide the physical traces of the *ventennio* ... History consigns its products, its works of art, and its architecture to posterity because they carry the consciousness and memory of their civilisation. It seems to me absurd that we continue to hide a *ventennio* that is a tragic part of our history ... Looking after the symbols and places of Fascism demythologizes it ... Removing the symbols of [past] errors is the best way to repeat them ... To condemn [Fascism] we need to understand, historicize and rationalize it, not remove it. Otherwise, the horrors return. (*La Stampa*, 23 March 2013)<sup>38</sup>

### **The *Apotheosis* today: helping Italians to 'face up' to Fascism?**

Neo-Fascists, predictably, have praised the restored mural as a 'marvellous', 'truly beautiful' and 'magnificent' picture.<sup>39</sup> Others have criticized its display. In recent years, the Italian Monitoring Centre on Racism and Anti-Racism in Football (ORAC) has repeatedly called on CONI to re-cover the *Apotheosis* as an important 'symbolic gesture' of its support for anti-racism in sport. ORAC's director Mauro Valeri argues that CONI's refusal to do so – and its refusal also to house a permanent exhibition on the racial discrimination perpetrated by Fascism against Italian athletes as demanded by ORAC – is indicative of a 'retro culture' of racism that permeates the highest levels of Italian sport (*Avvenire*, 20 July, 2013; *Lettera43*, 29 July, 2014; *Sportallaroveschia*, 31 January, 2015). From a very different perspective, in July 2013 the President of the South Tyrolean Homeland Federation, Roland Lang, wrote an open letter to the International Olympic Committee to complain of the 'deplorable conduct' of CONI in displaying such a work of Fascist propaganda:

Thank God, today it is unthinkable that a German Olympic Committee could meet in a National Socialist hall of honour in front of an enormous picture of Hitler ... In Italy, evidently things are different. So, as a South Tyrolean and member of an ethnic group that suffered so much because of Fascism, I appeal, also in the name of my many fellow citizens to you ... so that you may push CONI to modify its behaviour and choose another seat for the association.<sup>40</sup>

Valeri and Lang's interventions, however, are the exceptions to the rule. The *Apotheosis* has generated very little public interest or discussion in Italy since the initial controversy of the mid-1990s, as the example in our introduction amply demonstrates. An obvious – but incomplete – explanation for this is that the *Apotheosis* remains largely unknown, despite its high-profile location. Until Palazzo H's inclusion in the Fondo Ambiente Italiano's 'Spring Days' in March 2015, an annual event when many usually inaccessible sites are opened to the public, few 'ordinary' Italians had ever seen the mural *in situ*.<sup>41</sup> Even the former prime minister Mario Monti was apparently unaware of its existence before he attended the 2012 *collare d'oro* awards ceremony held, as usual, in the Aula Magna (*Primato*, April 2012, 4).

The silence surrounding the *Apotheosis*, however, is not unique to the mural. Other ideologically inspired artistic works from the Fascist period have been restored in Italy since

the *Apotheosis* in the mid-1990s including, in Rome, Sironi's *L'Italia tra le Arti e le Scienze*, currently under restoration at Sapienza University. The same is true of a number of landmark Fascist-era buildings, the 'Square Colosseum' at EUR the most recent and best-known Roman example. In most cases, the act of recovery or restoration has proved uncontroversial, involving very little debate regarding the merits, necessity or purpose of the exercise. There has also been very little discussion about how to present these newly revealed or restored material remains of Fascism to the public.<sup>42</sup> In the absence of such a conversation, the overwhelming majority of restorations have been 'normalized', that is, re-integrated into the cityscape without commemoration or mediation, rather than 'critically preserved', that is, presented in such a way that their original Fascist meaning and significance is neutralized, transformed or contextualized.<sup>43</sup> This has been the case with all the restorations at the Foro Italico, including that of the *Apotheosis*.

The passing of time obviously plays an important role in how Italians today think about or interact with the physical reminders of the dictatorship (if they think about them at all). It is over seventy years since the death of Mussolini, and nearly a century since the birth of the Fascist movement in Milan in 1919. Preservationists, then, have time on their side when they argue that the *ventennio* is no longer politics but history. The de-polarisation of the Italian political system following the dissolution of the Communist PCI in 1989 and the neo-Fascist Movimento Sociale Italiano (MSI) in 1995 would also appear to point in the direction of historicization, suggesting monuments such as the *Apotheosis* can now be seen simply as artefacts, objects of cultural or historical interest shorn of their earlier political potency. As the former prime minister (and ex-Communist) Massimo d'Alema is reputed to have said when seeing the mural for the first time: 'No problem, it is art and history' (*Il Tempo*, November 4, 2013). Italians moreover have also become accustomed in recent years to seeing celebratory images of Mussolini and Fascism, in contrast to the situation that prevailed from the end of the war until the late 1990s when 'portraits of Mussolini ... completely disappeared from the critical radar' (Pieri 2013, 228). The first major postwar exhibition of *Mussoliniana* in Italy took place only in 1997 – and predictably created a 'huge furor' in the domestic press (Pieri 2013, 229). Since then, as Pieri notes, 'objects and images of Fascism and its leader have turned again into commodities that sell', while previously hidden collections of *Mussoliniana* 'have become more visible', thanks to the internet and initiatives such as the Mussolini exhibition at the MAGI '900 museum near Bologna. With familiarity, it seems, has grown acceptance (Pieri 2013, 235-236).

There are, nonetheless, risks attached to what we might call 'uncritical preservation' (restoration + normalization), not least the danger that restored artworks and monuments will once again connect at 'some deep instinctual level' with present day audiences just as they 'spoke' (or were meant to 'speak') to Italians during the dictatorship (Macdonald 2006, 16). For some observers, this is exactly what *has* happened in Italy. Arthurs, for example, has been highly critical of the 'heritagizing' [of] fascism's monumental remains', which, in his opinion, 'offers uncritical legitimation and the valorization of a deeply troubling past', and 'creates a space – both discursive ... and physical – for the re-emergence of illiberal, xenophobic and nihilistic currents in Italian society' (Arthurs 2010, 124-125). Similarly, the American architectural historian Max Page has recently written of a 'deafening – and troubling – silence' around Fascist architecture, which, he argues, plays into the hands of the 'resurgent right' in Italy (*Boston Globe*, July 13, 2014).<sup>44</sup>

Uncritical preservation may lead to 'inappropriate identification' (Macdonald 2006, 16), but it does not have to. As Gavriel Rosenfeld has shown in the case of Munich, while the uncritical preservation of a number of Nazi-era buildings in the 1970s 'might have suggested an apologetic view towards the Nazi past', it actually played a crucial role in maintaining the uncomfortable memory of the Third Reich in the city at a time when many such buildings

were being demolished (Rosenfeld 2000, 262-263). The inherent risks of uncritical preservation were also minimized in this instance because West German society was beginning to 'face up' to the country's Nazi past (Macdonald 2006, 18).<sup>45</sup> This, however, is a very different situation to that in present day Italy where neo-patriotic, 'anti-anti-fascist' interpretations of the *ventennio* have strengthened considerably since the 1990s. The consequences of this have been the construction of a new popular memory of Fascism as 'relatively benign' (Evans 2013, 6), and the rehabilitation and even the *commemoration* of former Fascists, the construction in 2012 of a mausoleum in Affile, Lazio, to the Fascist military leader and alleged war criminal Rodolfo Graziani but the most egregious example. Indeed, as Samuels has recently observed, in today's Italy:

[Fascism's] memory and material remains are rarely understood in exclusively negative terms. The buildings and monuments are permitted to have artistic or architectonic merit in a way that is simply not possible in the case of works by Albert Speer ... there is a palpable nostalgia for the past that is not poisoned by the politics of the period ... 'coming to terms with the past' ... [is] something of a national obsession in Germany. This simply has not been the case in Italy. (Samuels 2015, 114-115)

In this context, it is very difficult to see how the uncritical preservation of Fascist monumental artworks such as the *Apotheosis*, or important Fascist sites such as the Foro Italico, might help Italians properly to 'metabolize and understand' Fascism as Veltroni hoped they would.<sup>46</sup>

## Notes

- 1 The composition of the mural is strikingly similar to the frieze on the north-eastern face of the Arch of Constantine depicting the emperor addressing Roman citizens in the Forum and to Giotto's depiction of Christ and his disciples in the fresco *The Last Judgement* in the Arena Chapel in Padua. See: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arch\\_of\\_Constantine#/media/File:Arch\\_of\\_Constantine\\_forum\\_frieze.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arch_of_Constantine#/media/File:Arch_of_Constantine_forum_frieze.jpg); <http://www.artbible.info/art/large/398.html>
- 2 See, for example, the criticisms in *La Repubblica*, December 15, 2014, [http://www.repubblica.it/politica/2014/12/15/news/olimpiadi\\_2014\\_salvini\\_candidare\\_roma\\_follia-102953129](http://www.repubblica.it/politica/2014/12/15/news/olimpiadi_2014_salvini_candidare_roma_follia-102953129)
- 3 For a useful English-language overview of the visual arts under Fascism, see Braun (2002).
- 4 On the role of the Foro Mussolini in the training of elite Fascist youth see Ponzio (2015).
- 5 On the development of the Foro Mussolini see Gentile (2007, 97-106) and D'Amelio (2009), as well as the edited works by Caporilli and Simeoni (1990), the Comitato dei monumenti moderni (1990), Pirani and Simonetta (1998) and Santuccio (2005).
- 6 To help later generations of visitors to understand the 'new Fascist civilisation' of the 1930s, a metal box containing a Latin codex dedicated to the genius of Mussolini and the glories of Fascism was buried under the Mussolini obelisk to await excavation in the distant future (Lamers and Reitz-Joosse, 2016).
- 7 There is a considerable literature on the 1932 exhibition. See, for example, Schnapp (1992, 2005), Stone (1993) and Kallis (2015).
- 8 Canevari was born in 1901, Capizzano in 1907, and Bellini in 1902. This is not to suggest that Moretti *never* used older and/or established artists. For example, the highly acclaimed artist Gino Severini (b. 1883) was in his fifties when Moretti commissioned him to design several of the mosaics for the Piazzale dell'Impero as well as the interior of

- Mussolini's private gymnasium in the Palazzo delle Terme. For more on Severini's work at the Foro Italico see Pirani and Tozzi (1998).
- 9 State patronage of younger artists grew markedly in the second half of the 1930s, heralded at the Venice biennale in 1936 where for the first time competition rules required entrants to be under 35 years of age. Exhibitors at the biennale were also forbidden from competing, a move designed to encourage entries from artistic newcomers (Stone 1998, 224-225).
  - 10 Speaking in 1997, Montanarini remembered painting the *Apotheosis* shortly before the outbreak of the Second World War (*Il Messaggero*, August 3, 1997). The few secondary sources that mention the *Apotheosis* suggest the mid-late thirties (e.g. Pooley 2013, 215). Montanarini's own correspondence confirms that he actually painted the mural in 1942 (see notes 13 and 14 below).
  - 11 In his hugely influential 'Manifesto of Muralism' (1933), Sironi argued that:  
Art assumes a social function in the Fascist state ... Mural painting is social painting par excellence. It works upon the popular imagination more directly than any other form of painting, while directly inspiring the decorative arts ... [T]he mural technique itself dictates decisive and virile execution ... A "Fascist style" will arise out of mural painting; a style in which our new civilisation will recognize its likeness ... art will succeed in impressing a new shape upon the popular spirit. (In Schnapp 2005, 238-239)  
On muralism under Fascism see Golan (2009); on muralism in Rome during the *ventennio* see Cecchini (2006).
  - 12 Other than his works in the Palazzo delle Terme, the Casa delle Armi, and the Aula Magna of the Accademia, Canevari also contributed mosaics to the Piazzale dell'Impero. Canevari continued his collaboration with Moretti after the war, designing the covers of the first three issues of Moretti's new art-architecture journal, *Spazio*, in 1950.
  - 13 Ado Furlan to Luigi Montanarini, July/August 1942 (Furlan and Griggio 2006, 153).
  - 14 Luigi Montanarini to Ado Furlan, 25 August 1942 (Furlan and Griggio 2006, 163).
  - 15 Montanarini's haste is apparent in the top and bottom thirds of the painting. According to a report on the condition of the mural prepared by the *Soprintendenza per i beni ambientale e architettonici* in March 1998, 'la pittura risulta molto leggera, stesa velocemente e, ad esempio nel piedistallo, si possono ancora notare diversi particolari in grafite, quasi si volesse sostituire il disegno alla tempera'. Report by Simonetta Antellini, 30 March 1998, included in 'Deliberazione della giunta esecutiva, comitato olimpico nazionale italiano', n. 1333, 12 October 1998. Archivio CONI, Rome. Montanarini himself expressed dissatisfaction with the mural: 'If I could go back and redo it, I would improve the workmanship', he told one interviewer in 1997 (Poto 1998, 59).
  - 16 Ado Furlan to Luigi Montanarini, July/August 1942 (Furlan and Griggio 2006, 153). The GIL's purse strings only tightened towards the end of 1942: in mid-October, Furlan wrote to his wife Ester of new restrictions on the funding of 'non-essential' works at the Foro, such as paintings and sculptures. Furlan admitted that he now did not know when he would be paid in full for his recent sculpture at the Foro, *il Cinghiale* (wild boar). Ado Furlan to Ester Furlan, 16 October 1942 (Furlan and Griggio 2005, 288-290).
  - 17 In common with most of his peers in the interwar Italian avant-garde, Montanarini's involvement with Fascism in the 1930s did not have a detrimental effect on his postwar artistic career. Montanarini exhibited no less than seven times at the Venice Biennale, the first time in 1940. In 1958, the organising committee gave him his own exhibition room, an honour that it bestowed on him again in 1982. Montanarini exhibited on five occasions at the Rome Quadriennale, the first in 1939, the last in 1973. He was given his own exhibition room in 1960. His commissioned works ranged from mosaics at the Italian Foreign Ministry in Palazzo Farnesina and windows in the Palazzo della Giustizia (both



in Rome) to frescoes in the basilica of Santa Rita Da Cascia in Umbria. Montanarini was not only a successful artist, he was also a highly regarded art teacher, a career which began in 1936 and culminated with his appointment as director of the *Accademia di Belle Arti di Roma* in 1965, a little over thirty years after he had first studied there. Montanarini died in Rome in January 1998.

- 18 Goldstein writes that ‘thousands of paintings were destroyed’ by the Allies in occupied Germany. A further ‘8,722 were shipped to military deposits in the United States’.
- 19 Several studies claim that the presence of American troops at the Foro Italico actually saved the obelisk from destruction by local Romans (Caporilli and Simeoni 1990, 265; Painter 2005, 153; Gentile 2007, 257).
- 20 Rome rest center memorandum, n.d. Burdell S. "Bud" Winter Papers, TMD79, 10th Mountain Division Collection, Denver Public Library.
- 21 For details of the US army’s ‘Central Sports School’ at the Foro Italico see <https://www.oberheide.org/hargiss/1945%20US%20Army/365/Central%20Sports%20School.htm>.
- 22 Allied Control Commission Weekly Bulletin, no.8, 21-27 May 1944, p.1. The authors would like to thank Dr Joshua Arthurs for this information.
- 23 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.
- 24 PCM to all ministries and prefects, 1 August 1944, ACS, PCM, 1944-1947, fascicolo 1.7, n. 11240, sottofasc. 2.
- 25 Commissario straordinario, Ente autonomo esposizione universale di Roma, to PCM, 5 December 1944, ACS, PCM, 1944-1947, fascicolo 1.7, n. 11240, sottofasc. 2.
- 26 Senato della repubblica, discussioni, 607<sup>a</sup> seduta, legislatura 17, December 6, 1957, 25352-25353. Accessed 11 May 2015.  
<http://www.senato.it/service/PDF/PDFServer/BGT/473467.pdf>
- 27 Further half-hearted attempts were made in the 1950s and early 1960s to attenuate the original political character of the Foro Italico. In 1954, Moretti’s shrine (sacrario) to the fallen of the Fascist revolution (1941), located in the Foresteria Nord, was replaced by the library of the Scuola Centrale Tributaria. In 1960, just prior to the opening of the Olympic Games in Rome, two of the mosaics along the Viale del Foro Italico were removed and new inscriptions were added to three of the unused marble blocks. The inscriptions marked the fall of Fascism, the referendum on the republic, and the new republican constitution. The order of the original blocks was also changed. The first block, commemorating the creation of the *Popolo d’Italia* (Mussolini’s newspaper) in 1914 was moved back two places so that it now sat out of chronological sequence behind those marking Italy’s entry in World War One (1915) and later victory at Vittorio Veneto (1918). The dozens of statues of muscular young athletes such as those surrounding the Stadio dei Marmi went untouched. As with Canevari’s mural in the Aula Magna, the statues – conceived as monumental projections of Fascist power, virility, masculinity and ‘Romanness’ – were quickly depoliticised after the war precisely because of their universal and timeless classicism. For more on the 1960 modifications see Vidotto (2004) and Martin (2017). The modern allure of the ‘eternal and absolute’ statues of the Stadio dei Marmi is brilliantly captured in Giorgio Armani’s introduction to George Mott’s *Foro Italico* (2003).
- 28 In its instructions to ministries and prefects for the removal of Fascist symbols (1 August 1944) the prime minister’s office had countenanced cloaking in cases where ‘removal may cause significant disfigurement to the building’. PCM to all ministries and prefects, 1 August 1944, ACS, PCM, 1944-1947, fascicolo 1.7, n. 11240, sottofasc. 2.

- 29 The lawyer and socialist deputy Federico Comandini gave the example during a 1959 parliamentary debate concerning the appropriateness of the Foro Italico as a venue for the 1960 Olympics. *Atti parlamentare, camera dei deputati, III legislatura, October 6, 1959, 10617.*
- 30 For other examples of removal, see Pieri (2013, 230-231).
- 31 See, for example, photographs of the Aula Magna from November 20, 1958. Accessed 13 December 2015.  
<http://www.archivioluca.com/archivio/jsp/schede/schedaFoto.jsp?db=fotograficoVEDO&section=/&physDoc=5311&theTerm=Riunione+del+Consiglio+Nazionale+al+Foro+Italico&qrid=3se640464e8e33a0&findCine=true&findFoto=true>
- 32 Zurli gave CONI sixty days to remove the cloth covering the *Apotheosis* (*La Repubblica*, February 29, 1996).
- 33 ‘Deliberazione della giunta esecutiva, comitato olimpico nazionale italiano’, n. 629, 21 June 2000. Archivio CONI, Rome.
- 34 An important marker of this trend was Renzo de Felice’s *Rosso e Nero* (1995), in which the veteran biographer of Mussolini portrayed the Duce’s decision to lead the Nazi-dominated Italian Social Republic (RSI, September 1943-May 1945) as a selfless act of patriotism, designed to save occupied northern Italy from the same fate as Poland. In De Felice’s opinion, similar ideas of national honour explained why so many ‘ordinary’ Italians also took up arms for the Nazi-Fascist RSI against the Allies and the decidedly unpatriotic (because Communist-dominated) Italian partisan movement. The success of De Felice’s account – the initial print run of 30,000 copies of *Rosso e Nero* sold out in just two days – demonstrated the strength of the emerging ‘anti-anti-Fascist’ consensus in Italy.
- 35 For law 1089/39 to apply, either the author of the work had to be dead or the work itself had to be more than 50 years old. By 1989, this included the Stadio dei Marmi, Palazzo H, Piazzale dell’Impero, the Casa delle Armi, the Stadio della Racchetta, Forestiera Sud and the Palazzo delle Terme. The 1989 decree did not apply to the Stadio Olimpico, completed in the 1950s.
- 36 Restoration works at the Foro Italico in the 1990s mirrored similar initiatives at Rome’s other major Fascist-era sites, ‘La Sapienza’ university campus and EUR. For details, see Zurli (1996) and Garella (2004). In Zurli’s opinion, the three ‘monumental complexes’ (Foro Italico, Sapienza and EUR) were important modern ‘‘additions’ to the ancient city and integral elements of its history’, and needed to be treated as such (Zurli 1996, 25).
- 37 For an example of Veltroni’s deeply held anti-Fascist views, see his resignation letter from the Committee for the Museum of the Shoah in 2008 in protest at the ‘double judgement on Fascism’ offered by the Alleanza Nazionale mayor of Rome (and chair of the museum committee), Gianni Alemanno (*La Repubblica*, September 8, 2008).
- 38 We should see Veltroni’s action regarding the *Apotheosis* as a practical expression of Luciano Violante’s inaugural address as President of the Chamber of Deputies in May 1996 in which the former Communist deputy and magistrate asked rhetorically:  
If today’s Italy should begin to reflect upon yesterday’s defeated; not because they were right, but because we must make the effort to understand ... This effort, at a distance of half a century, would help us to grasp the complexity of our country, to construct the liberation as a shared value of all Italians, to determine the boundaries of a political system in which it is recognized, for the simple and fundamental fact of living in this country, to fight for its future, to love it, to want it to be more prosperous and peaceful. All legitimate distinctions and conflicts can then take place within that commonly shared system. (Camera dei deputati, 9 May 1996. In Lichtner 2013, 20)

- 39 The quotes are taken from the (now defunct) online forum of the Cultura Fascista website, [culturafascista.com/forum/archive/index.php/thread-1808.html](http://culturafascista.com/forum/archive/index.php/thread-1808.html) (accessed 8 August 2015), and from *L'ultima Ribattuta*, 30 January 2015.
- 40 Roland Lang to the International Olympic Committee, 5 July 2013. Accessed 4 February 2015. <http://www.welschtirol.eu/lapoteosi-di-mussolini-nella-sede-del-coni>
- 41 The Aula Magna was opened to the public for a second time in May 2016 as part of Open House Roma. <http://www.openhouseroma.org/2016/programma>
- 42 There are exceptions: see, for example, the long-running dispute in Brescia concerning the fate of Dazzi's *Era Fascista* ([www.ilbigio.it](http://www.ilbigio.it)). Predictably, the question of what to do with Fascist era monuments also continues to excite passions in ethnically divided South Tyrol (Steinacher 2013).
- 43 On 'normalization' and 'critical preservation', see Gavriel D. Rosenfeld's groundbreaking study of Nazi architecture in postwar Munich (Rosenfeld 2000) and Rosenfeld and Jaskot's edited volume, *Beyond Berlin: Twelve German Cities Confront the Nazi Past* (2008).
- 44 Arthurs and Page have both suggested ways in which sites such as the Foro Italico might be critically preserved. Arthurs writes, 'At the very least, inserting some form of explanation – as through labelling, panels or museum display – might have the salutary effect of mediating between fascist iconography and its contemporary audience. It might also strengthen the didactic value of these sites in both historical and aesthetic terms, and provide a meaningful justification for their preservation' (Arthurs 2010, 125). Page's 2015 exhibition at the American Academy in Rome, 'Dislodging the Silence: Public Art Intervening in Mussolini's Foro Italico', featured proposals by Italian artists for 'public art interventions' at the Foro designed to confront the 'reality of the fascist ideology' at the complex (<http://www.aarome.org/event/cinque-mostre-2015>). The concerns voiced by Arthurs and Page regarding the uncritical preservation of Fascist sites and buildings echo those of the Italian architectural historian Paolo Nicoloso (Nicoloso 2008).
- 45 As Rosenfeld notes (2000, 263), the uncritical preservation of Nazi-era buildings in Munich in the 1970s also left open 'the option of critical preservation' later on. This has happened in recent years. Since 2006, the City of Munich has provided a self-guided history trail on the theme of 'National Socialism in Munich'. The trail identifies former Nazi buildings (e.g. the Führerbau, Hitler's office building, now the Munich conservatoire) and sites where important Nazi buildings and monuments once stood (e.g. the 'Brown House' on Brienner Strasse, the headquarters of the NSDAP from 1931; and the Temples of Honour on the Königsplatz, dedicated to the 'martyrs' of the failed 1923 Beer Hall Putsch). In 2015, after many years of debate, controversy and delay, the Munich Documentation Centre for the History of National Socialism opened, built on the former site of the Brown House. The walking tour pamphlet is available at <https://www.muenchen.de/rathaus/Stadtverwaltung/Kulturreferat/Stadtgeschichte/ThemenGeschichtspfade/National-Socialism.html>. For discussion of the long-running saga of the Munich Documentation Centre, see Rosenfeld (2008, 2015). A significant impetus for the Munich Documentation Centre came from the success of the Documentation Centre of the Reich Party Rally Grounds at Nuremberg, which opened in 2001. Sharon Macdonald describes the Nuremberg Centre, constructed inside one corner of the monumental Kongresshalle, as a 'glass and steel stake through the heart of Nazi architecture' (Macdonald 2006, 15). The postwar history of the Nuremberg rally grounds is well covered by Macdonald (2006, 2009) and Jaskot (2008).
- 46 As Giacomo Lichtner has pointed out in relation to Violante's 1996 speech referenced above (n. 27), while 'a noble speech, the Speaker's words nevertheless placed on the

political and cultural agenda an item [the meaning and memory of Fascism] over which the Left had already lost control' (Lichtner 2013, 21).

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