THE PALAZZO DELLA CIVILTÀ ITALIANA: FROM FASCISM TO FENDI

A Thesis

Presented to

The Honors Tutorial College

Ohio University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for Graduation

from the Honors Tutorial College

with the degree of

Bachelor of Arts in Art History

by

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April 2015
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Acknowledgments

This thesis would not have been possible without the following people: Professor Kevin Haworth, my patient thesis advisor, who graciously navigated through this journey of fashion and semiotic theory with me; Dr. Rosemarie Basile, who has inspired and mentored me for the past four years, and for that I am forever grateful; Dr. Jennie Klein, my director of studies, for her advice and edits; and especially my parents, friends and family, for listening to me for two years talking about this project and staying supportive.

In addition, the support from the Honors Tutorial College and College of Fine Arts made the necessary travel possible. Dean Jeremy Webster, Assistant Dean Cary Frith, Kathy White and Margie Huber not only provided a nurturing environment, but also close friendships and constant support. I have also had very helpful readers: Dr. Maria D’Anniballe-Williams, Dr. Judith Grant, and Dr. Jakub Zdebik. Without these dedicated mentors and friends, this project would not have been completed.
The Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana, Rome, Italy. Photo by author.
Introduction

“The city, however, does not tell its past, but contains it like the lines of a hand, written in the corners of the streets, the gratings of the windows, the banisters of the steps, the antennae of the lightning rods, the poles of the flags, every segment marked in turn with scratches, indentations, scrolls.”
—Italo Calvino, Invisible Cities

In Italo Calvino’s seminal novel, Invisible Cities, a fictionalized version of the great explorer Marco Polo recounts his travels to Kublai Kahn. Due to the language barrier between the two men, Marco Polo depicts the difference between the various cities through their visual language. Although the individual cities are fictitious, the novel provides a relevant commentary on the contemporary discussion of cities and memory. Calvino explains, “A city is a combination of many things: memory, desires, signs of a language; it is a place of exchange, as any textbook of economic history will tell you—only, these exchanges are not just trade in goods, they also involve words, desires, and memories.”1 In this way, Calvino exposes the intricate nature of cities and the layers of signifiers and memory that construct them.

In Calvino’s text, Marco Polo describes the various cities in their simplest state. He compresses each city into a concise image, showing only the most striking elements of each place. Polo states, “Memory is redundant: It repeats signs so that the city can begin to exist.”2 This documentation of the cities’ respective visual language lends itself for a discussion of semiotic theory and the city. Cities are multifaceted;

they are built up layer upon layer. Each layer is equally as important as the next, presenting the city’s rich history.

In analyzing the complexity of the visuals of a city, it is imperative to attempt to acknowledge each layer individually. This form of analysis calls for a firm contextual basis, since each layer of history builds upon, or rejects, those that have come beforehand. Semiotic theorists Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson write, “Context, in other words, is a text itself, and thus consists of signs that require interpretation.”

What has been destroyed in a city is equally as important, when discussing the visual language, as what remains. The binary of absence and presence is necessary to understand when studying the semiotics of a city.

The city of Rome is built of many such layers. Over time, a cycle was created: the city was built up, pillaged, destroyed, and reborn. It is not possible to experience solely one period of Roman history, since the various periods cohabitate and borrow both architectural styles and ideologies from their predecessors. From the ancient Romans through the Fascists and on to contemporary Rome, each layer is unique yet contains elements of the past. The Fascist structures, for example, appear to be modern yet there are classical elements and ideologies embedded into the architecture.

One prominent example, and the focus of this thesis, is the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana. Built as a museum of Italian civilization that never came to fruition, the building has taken many forms without ever altering the physical space. Various tenants have used the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana, built for Rome’s EUR district

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from 1938 through 1943 under the Fascist period, over the past decades, but the structure has not been altered. It now carries the original ideologies from the Fascist period merged with those of subsequent periods.

In July of 2013, the Italian fashion brand Fendi announced that it would be leasing the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana to serve as its new international headquarters. As fully discussed in later chapters, this building was originally created to house a museum of Roman history, tracing the history of Rome from Augustus to Mussolini. Since the fall of the Fascists, the building has taken different temporary tenants as well as being in numerous films and ad campaigns. The purpose of this thesis is to contextualize Fendi’s usage of the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana within the building’s history with regards to the corporate takeover of a nationalistic site and the subsequent international media campaign.

Fendi’s plans for the site include gallery space on the ground floor, inviting the public into one of the most iconic structures from the Fascist period. Through the latest renovation of the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana, Fendi has created a new visual language for the site, ushering the building into the twenty-first century and its association with consumer culture, but, as we shall see, without completely severing the building from its Fascist association.

The hybrid of consumerism with collective memory and cultural heritage complicates and problematizes the notion of national culture. The current climate of fashion houses utilizing cultural spaces as an extension of their branding results in a loss of a public, national identity. With mass branding, Max Horkheimer and Theodor
Adorno write, “The concept of a genuine style becomes transparent in the culture industry as the aesthetic equivalent of power.”

Once capitalism becomes the driving force of culture, aesthetics lose importance to mass production, which ultimately stints cultural evolution. The growing power of the capitalist consumer structure is increasingly noticeable throughout Italy. After tourism, the fashion industry is Italy’s second highest grossing industry. In a nation like Italy that is financially unstable, the likelihood of dependency on the fashion houses to restore historic sites will only increase.

The Italian government has put forth great effort to preserve the urban past of Rome. Such preservation projects have occurred to safeguard cultural heritage and the collective memory of those who previously inhabited the space. These efforts have allowed rulers to connect to the past, creating a concrete association to their predecessors. A champion of conservation, John Ruskin writes, “To this day, the interest of their fairest cities depends, not on the richness of palaces, but on the cherished and exquisite decoration of the smallest tenements of their proud periods.”

Conservation projects of this kind create a number of legacies, including a sense of national pride.

Therefore, preservation is the result of a conscious decision by the current society to safeguard the cultural heritage. Preservation is more complicated than simply ensuring that a building remains the same; the building has been taken from

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one period to another, which alters the context of the site. Architect Rem Koolhaas writes, “To preserve an object is precisely to change it, to take it out of time.”

Through this break with history, the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana can be both canonized and renewed into a contemporary context. It maintains a reference to the past, while taking on a new identity. Since there has been a vested interest in devoting attention to the preserved structures by contemporary society, not only is the site distinguished, but the past events that occurred on the site are as well. This coexistence allows for a glorification of the past and exhibits the present’s importance in connecting to an earlier period, usually inferring a political association.

Over time, nations have increasingly conducted preservation campaigns to safeguard their cultural and natural sites. Utilizing available resources, countries set forth foundations and organizations for preservation purposes. Though these national efforts can be traced back to the eighteenth century, it was not until the mid-twentieth century that international efforts began. Expanding beyond a single nation’s budget, these efforts compile a list of sites worldwide that are deemed culturally significant or natural wonders. In 1972, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) held the “Convention Concerning the Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage.” During the conference, the process for establishing a site as a world heritage site was created. According to the conference documents, “Cultural heritage refers to monuments, groups of buildings and sites with historical,

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aesthetic, archaeological, scientific, ethnological or anthropological value.” Through an application process, countries that have already signed the charter are able to propose a list of cultural and natural heritage sites. Once a site has been identified, the site can benefit greatly from restoration funds. Designating a place as a cultural and natural heritage sites also results in an increase in tourism, aiding the local and national economy.

The UNESCO World Heritage list, which now including 1002 sites worldwide, represents the majority of the world’s most prominent sites of cultural history and natural wonders. UNESCO tends to choose sites, such as the Historic Centers of Florence and of Rome and the Piazza del Duomo in Pisa, which are widely acceptable. Without posing any challenging views on their respective nation’s history, these sites do not contest the ideologies of the current government. These sites tend to have been created centuries ago, establishing a period of time for history to analyze their significance. For example, with time the Colosseum has come to represent the glory of ancient Rome as well as the architectural advancements of the empire. The building’s purpose has been whitewashed and less emphasis remains associated with the killings that occurred within the structure. As for more recent sites on the list, such as the Sydney Opera House, they are typically chosen for their architectural importance and because they are non-controversial.

Less common on the list are locations of contested history, places that carry controversy surrounding the historical events that occurred on the site. These sites

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include Nazi concentration camps and the EUR district, which contains the building that is the focus of this study, which was commissioned by the Italian Fascists. Nations tend not to submit requests for these sites, for it calls attention to their less favored moments in their history. The EUR district has yet to be nominated for the UNESCO World Heritage list.

If UNESCO does not sponsor a cultural site, the site’s home country has to fund the upkeep and necessary renovations. In certain cases, the government will outsource to private corporations to aid in the preservation efforts. This has been evident in Italy: “But with the nation struggling with a stagnant economy and crushing public debt — Rome is flirting off and on with bankruptcy — politicians are now looking to private companies and international sources to help preserve Italy’s cultural heritage.”8 The Italian government has recently been turning to private corporations, mostly fashion houses and luxury brand companies, to assist in the preservation of their cultural heritage. I propose that through this corporate takeover, the visual language of the sites become more complicated, involving the visual language of both the Fascist past through its use of classical elements such as the arcade and the neo-classical statues, and the contemporary branding of the site by Fendi.

Within the past year, there have been numerous cases of private corporations renovating national Italian sites, including some on the UNESCO list. Projects include the cleaning of the Colosseum, sponsored by the leather goods company Tod’s, and the renovation of the Trevi Fountain by the fashion house, Fendi. This brings up many

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possible questions, including the issue of branding and cultural ownership: will these sites remain part of the Italian national identity or will they become Tod’s Colosseum and Fendi’s Trevi Fountain?

In order to conduct the necessary research to examine these questions and others relevant to this project, I traveled to Rome on two separate occasions, with a year in between. During these visits, I noted the progression of the corporate renovations as well as the media’s portrayal of the projects. I spent hours wandering around the dystopian EUR district, specifically meditating on the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana. Once back in the United States, I was able to access the library collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Museum of Modern Art for further information. My research led me to a study of semiotics with regards to architecture. I will utilize the theories of Roland Barthes and Jean Baudrillard to explain the change in meaning of the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana.

The first chapter of this project will provide necessary background information with regards to Italian Fascism and the party’s influence on aesthetic design. In order to comprehend the usage of the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana under Fendi, the original intention and ideology of the structure must be examined. Architecture designed under Italian Fascism blended totalitarianism with modernity. The buildings have survived due to their canonical importance, but have since served as a testament to one of Italy’s darkest periods of history. Using texts by Benito Mussolini and Hannah Arendt, I will explore the manifestation of politics onto the architecture of the period. Texts by
art historians and theorists such as Diane Ghirardo, Le Corbusier and Philip Johnson will also be examined.

The following chapter will investigate monuments and their place in memorialization efforts. Often times, monuments change their meaning due to the political climate or change in the historical context. Alois Riegl’s “The Modern Cult of Monuments” will be applied to the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana, investigating the change in meaning of the structure that occurs over its history. The building’s signified meaning is altered from a state of glorification of the Italian Fascist’s imperialist campaigns to a memory of the past. Semiotic theorist Roland Barthes’ writings on the creation and usage of signs explain the transformation of the site.

Finally, the third chapter will discuss Fendi’s usage of the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana and how the company utilizes the ideologies of the structure through advertisements and corporate branding. This transnational marketing campaign appropriates the building and creates a new image. I will compare reviews of Fendi’s usage of the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana and their media campaign to understand the current simulation of a fashionable structure that silences the Fascist past.

The connection between Fascism and fashion are hard to separate. Susan Sontag writes:

Fascism may be merely fashionable, and perhaps fashion with its irrepressible promiscuity of taste will save us. But the judgments of taste themselves seem less innocent. Art that seemed eminently worth defending ten years ago no longer seems defiable today, because the ethical and cultural issues it raises have become serious, even dangerous, in a way they were not then. The hard truth is that what may be acceptable in elite culture may not be acceptable in mass culture, that tastes which pose only innocuous ethical issues as the
property of a minority become corrupting when they become more established. Taste is context, and the context has changed.⁹

Context is the most important factor to this discussion. The Fascists embedded power into the building, as it served as a form of propaganda for the regime. Although the Fascists are no longer in control of either the state or the building, the structure continues to captivate its viewers. Fendi’s attraction to the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana goes past the aesthetic attraction to the sleek, modern structure. By purchasing an object from Fendi, the owner is granted an element of social power. This thesis will investigate the layers of power surrounding the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana, from its Fascist beginnings through its contemporary usage as an icon of fashion.

Chapter One

“The ideal set up by the Party was something huge, terrible and glittering—a world of steel and concrete, of monstrous machines and terrifying weapons—a nation of warriors and fanatics marching forward in perfect unity.”
—George Orwell, 1984.

In 1932, Benito Mussolini co-authored the “Foundations and Doctrine of Fascism” with Giovanni Gentile. Expressing the main tenets of the Fascist movement, the document provides a framework to understand Mussolini’s ideologies. The authors call for the utmost importance of the state and the power of the masses over the individual. As for culture, Mussolini and Gentile write, “Fascism wants man to be active and to engage in action with all his energies… hence the essential value of culture in all its forms (artistic, religious, scientific) and the tremendous importance of education.” Over the course of their relational history, the Italian people have valued their culture, especially the rich contributions to the arts that were created over centuries. The connection of the Italian people to their heritage can be seen today with the conservation campaigns of historical structures, discussed in Chapter Three. From the beginning of the Fascist movement, Mussolini, following in the tradition of those who came before him, placed a high importance on the arts.

As the regime developed, its architecture mirrored its political advances. As Mussolini transformed his government from a dictatorship to absolute totalitarianism, the architecture adapted to reflect his political and cultural agenda. Because the capital of the regime was located in Rome, the most significant vestiges of the Fascist period

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exist within the city and the surrounding areas. The architectural manifestation of Mussolini’s political campaign can be seen with the site of the Esposizione Universale di Roma (EUR), which includes the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana, the focus of this study. Decades after the fall of the regime, the architecture remains, leaving a lasting impact on the topology of the city.

**Definition of Italian Fascism**

To fully understand the architecture from the Italian Fascist period, it is helpful to explain Fascism’s relationship to culture and the movement’s differences from Nazism in this respect. Both regimes sought to control the people, or masses, through homogenizing their beliefs. Mussolini and Gentile write, “The cornerstone of fascist doctrine is its conception of the state: of the state’s essence, its functions, and its ends. For fascism the state is absolute, while individuals and groups relative. Individuals and groups are thinkable to the degree that they operate within the state.” The state operates as an absolute body, to which all others must answer. It is a top-down organization, with a select few leading and the majority following. The Fascists enlisted different techniques to gain the support of their constituents.

Utilizing mesmerizing propaganda campaigns, the Fascists were able to gather and maintain their followers. These campaigns included film reels, magazines and political rallies. The leader needs the compliance of the masses to retain control of the government, for “without the masses the leader is a nonentity.” There is a specific

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11 Mussolini and Gentile, 58.
balance of power that must be maintained. This importance of the masses recalls Nietzsche, who wrote, “A really ‘great’ success is only possible through the masses.” He explains that it is essential to keep the masses with as little power as possible, or revolution is imminent.

The Nazis operated under a model of absolute totalitarianism, including the control of thought, speech, and identity. There was a visceral sense of fear that swept through the Nazi Germany due to their ever-present policies of how to think, act, and live. The Fascists began as less of an all-encompassing agency. Hannah Arendt writes:

The Fascist movement, a ‘party above parties,’ because it claimed to represent the interest of the nation as a whole, seized the state machine, identified itself with the highest national authority, and tried to make the whole people ‘part of the state.’ It did not, however think itself ‘above the state,’ and its leaders did not conceive of themselves as ‘above the nation.’

The Fascist Party (PNF), until 1938 with the Manifesto of Race, was not a totalitarian organization. Arendt describes the early phase of Italian Fascism as “an ordinary nationalist dictatorship developed logically from a multiparty democracy.” Mussolini believed himself to be a divine ruler that would return Italy, and most specifically Rome, to its former glory. As long as Italy was progressing forward in the economic, social, and cultural realms, il Duce permitted differing bodies to exist. Just as Mussolini first permitted the existence of different cultures within Italy, varying artistic and architectural styles thrived during the initial years of Italian Fascism.

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14 Arendt, 259.
15 Ibid., 257.
The Myth of Romanità

A main tenet of Italian Fascism is the linkage of Mussolini and his followers to the glory of Ancient Rome. He viewed himself as a direct descendant of the Roman emperors who would lead his nation to greatness that would rival its past. Like the emperors, he “passed beneath temporary triumphal arches exactly in the manner of the victorious generals of antiquity or Renaissance nobles and clerics, and his visits were recorded in nearly identical fashion in newspapers and pamphlets, with detailed itineraries, names of dignitaries, and an account of each stage of the visit.”\(^{16}\) This obsession and attempted imitation of the past is referred to as Romanità.

The Fascists’ usage of Romanità was a form of propaganda. It infiltrated every aspect of society including language, urban planning, and most notably, architecture. Aesthetics hold a significant place in the spread of Romanità: “this heritage from a faraway past was promoted to support the feebleness of new regime’s ideology, to fill the void which Fascism in the end seemed to be.”\(^ {17}\) The Nazis drew a connection between the German people and the ancient Greeks, a lineage that does not exist. The Italians, on the other hand, did have the ancient Roman ancestry and the Fascists used that fact to their advantage. Through this connection to the past, the government could familiarize and normalize their policies to the masses. The people wished to return to the glory of ancient Rome and through the ideology of Romanità, the language was easily accessible to the people.


Visually, the spread of Mussolini’s *Romanità* campaign was seen across Rome. Unlike Baron von Haussmann’s renovation of Paris and Hitler’s plan for Berlin, Mussolini did not completely redesign the city. Urban scholar John Agnew writes that while the Fascists did not complete a revamp of Rome, instead, “they added another layer to the city rather than a totally new matrix for its organization.”\(^\text{18}\) This initiative to realign with Ancient Rome also worked with his plans to modernize the city. He had select buildings removed, mostly from the medieval period, to modernize the streets and piazzas. Large roads were constructed to modernize the city by adding automobile accessibility. Along the newly executed Via dell’Impero (now Via dei Fori Imperiali), Mussolini commissioned and installed four maps onto the surrounding wall of the Roman Forum that depict the growth of the Roman Empire over time. A fifth map, which has since been removed, charted the growth of the Fascist Empire.

Mussolini’s channeling of *Romanità* established a creation myth for his political takeover. Myths are a part of language, of communicating. Roland Barthes characterizes myths as usually being associated with the bourgeoisie and the political right; “the oppressed *makes* the world, he has only an active, transitive (political) language; the oppressor conserves it, his language is plenary, intransitive, gestural, theatrical: it is the Myth. The language of the former aims at transforming, the latter at eternalizing.”\(^\text{19}\) The Fascists’ myths created security and welcomed the masses into the party. These myths attracted the masses, but targeted the upper class. Although Mussolini constantly refers to the people, he most directly engages with the

bourgeoisie and then channels language to appeal to the proletariat. He needed the support of the masses, but the financial backing and political clout of the bourgeoisie.

Through the ideologies associated with Romanità, the PNF was able to utilize the people’s language and history and make their platform comfortable for the people. Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi analyzes, “If as Barthes claims, the function of mythologies is to normalize and naturalize meanings and to contain them within a space that appears permanent, then, via the myth of Rome, fascism presented its own values as inherently right and natural.”\textsuperscript{20} Mussolini was successful in naturalizing his ideals, resulting in rapid support from the people. Antonio Gramsci, a founding member of the Italian Communist Party, warned against Mussolini’s tactics, “[It does not] allow one to appreciate correctly the effort of those generations who really fought to constitute modern Italy, and lead[s] to a sort of fatalism and passive expectation of a future which would be completely predetermined by the past.”\textsuperscript{21} Over the course of the regime, the emphasis on Romanità grew, which aided in forming an official culture under the Fascist party.

**Architecture Under Hitler and Under Mussolini**

When Hitler came to power, he made a conscious effort to abolish most associations with the Weimar Republic, especially the socialist Bauhaus movement. Believing that the Germans descended from the Ancient Greeks, Hitler’s nationalized

\textsuperscript{20} Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi, *Fascist Spectacle: The Aesthetics of Power in Mussolini’s Italy*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 94.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 91.
style of architecture borrows from the Greeks as opposed to the Romans.\textsuperscript{22} Paul Ludwig Troost’s design for the Haus der Kunst (originally titled Haus der Deutschen Kunst, or, House of German Art) in Munich was the first building created under the Nazis. Built of natural stone masking a steel frame, the building is a clear example of monumental classicism. The front of the structure contains a colonnade, but unlike Greek columns, these are stripped of all decorative details.

The building served as a pure propaganda venue for the regime. The first exhibition housed in the museum was the \textit{Grosse Deutschen Kunstausstellung}, or Great German Art Exhibition. As a contrast to the \textit{Entente Kunst} (Degenerate Art) exhibition, this exhibit portrayed the proper art form under Hitler’s regime. In 1939, the building also served as a backdrop for the \textit{Tag der Deutschen Kunst} parade.\textsuperscript{23}

Compared to Germany, Italy lacked examples of modernist architecture. Architecture such as the Altare della Patria (Monumento di Vittorio Emanuele II) in Rome depicts what had been created prior to the Fascists, a nationalistic style that ostentatiously borrows elements from the past while completely rejecting modernity. This structure was built between 1885 and 1925 to commemorate the reign of King Vittorio Emanuele II. The lavish monument is built out of white marble and contains elements of classical architecture, such as columns, equestrian sculptures and relief sculptures.


Mussolini’s plan for Italy aimed to create both a modern state and a continuation of the legacy of Ancient Rome. His goal of transforming Italy into a world power required a vested interest in modernism. He promoted the expansion of Italian popular culture through the funding of many magazines and an Italian Hollywood, Cinecittà. He also erected new railways and train stations throughout Italy. Through these efforts, Mussolini appeased the people by ushering in modernity through building campaigns and an emphasis on aesthetic design. This emphasis on aesthetics allowed for Italy to compete on the international level with regards to culture and the arts. The arts are culturally important to the Italian people and this vested importance fed into the support that the people had for Mussolini. The Fascists aimed not only to gain imperial power, but also dominance on the world culture market.

Whereas Hitler was turning away from modernism to commission architecture that would exhibit the Nazi party and glorify his leadership, Mussolini welcomed modernist techniques. In a 1926 speech given to the students of the Academy of Fine Arts in Perugia, Mussolini charged, “We must not remain solely contemplatives. We must not simply exploit our cultural heritage. We must create a new heritage to place alongside that of antiquity. We must create a new art, an art of our times: a fascist
art.” During this period, the Italian government commissioned more modernist structures than Germany, the Soviet Union or the United States.

At the time of the March on Rome in 1922, the charge led by Mussolini to take control of the Italian government that resulted in the birth of Italian Fascism, there were a number of different architectural styles in Italy. Due to the infancy of the movement, there was a sense of imprecision in the party management that allowed for multiple styles. The Futurists were still creating and dismantling the artistic norms through an industrial-based movement. The Novecento artists, championed by Mussolini’s mistress and art historian Margherita Sarfatti, were attempting to form a national style under the newly formed fascist government with an importance given to classicism. The Rationalists tried to bridge the gap between the industrial Futurists and the classical Novecento artists.

Over the course of Mussolini’s reign, each of the artistic movements sent petitions to appeal for their style to be chosen as the official Fascist movement. Guido Bonsaver, in “Culture and Intellectuals,” writes, “Fascism produced its own culture, or, better, a number of different cultures cohabitated during the years of the fascist regime, many of which jockeyed for position, aspiring to become synonymous with fascism.” Although Mussolini never declared an official style, there were more

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26 Ibid., 468.
contenders during the first era of Fascism than after 1938, when the monumental classicism began to prevail.

Of the three aforementioned styles, the Rationalists garnered the most commissions under Mussolini prior to 1938. Rationalist architect Ernesto Rogers writes, “We based ourselves on a syllogism which went roughly thus: fascism is a revolution, modern architecture is revolutionary, therefore it must be the architecture of fascism.”

This blend of the past and the modern directly fit into Mussolini’s political agenda of melding the glory of ancient Rome with the industrialization of modernity.

The Rationalists were greatly inspired by Le Corbusier’s manifesto, *Towards A New Architecture*. They set out to return to architecture with a spirituality of tradition using modernized building techniques and materials.

Diane Ghirardo writes, “A central preoccupation for both was to achieve order—architectural order for Le Corbusier, political order for Mussolini, and social order for both.”

Just as Le Corbusier turned to ancient architecture for inspiration, the Rationalists, under Mussolini, incorporated their nation’s rich history into their structures.

Two examples of Rationalist architecture are Stazione di Santa Maria Novella in Florence (Figure 1) and the Casa del Fascio in Como (Figure 2). Both structures were created using modern building materials and appear to be modernist at first.

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29 See Le Corbusier, *Towards A New Architecture*, trans. Frederick Etchells, (New York: Dover Publications, 1986). In this seminal text, the famed architect establishes the reasoning for his architecture, citing ancient structures for inspiration such as the Collosseum and Santa Maria in Cosmedin as well as the socialist aspect of creating mass-produced, yet well designed homes.
glance. They also both encroach on significant religious sites, challenging the dominance of the Church. In Florence, the station is directly across the street from the Gothic church and station’s namesake, Santa Maria Novella. In Como, the Casa del Fascio is located near the Duomo del Como as well as the neoclassical theater, Il Teatro Sociale di Como.

Completed in 1934, the Florentine train station was designed by a Tuscan group of Rationalist architects, Il Gruppo Toscano. Sleek and modern, the horizontal-planed building contains hidden elements of classicism. The front staircase leading up to the station is reminiscent of an ancient temple. Once inside, monumental, squared columns support the flat roof. Alongside the perimeter of the main terminal, black and white photos of ancient Roman ruins line the walls. The connection to the past is inescapable. With the building serving as a train station, it is also a visual manifestation of modernity. The sleek design of the station exhibits the modern ideology of form follows function. The structure, although including allusions to classicism, showcases the accessible and efficient mode of transportation. As with many other Fascist buildings, the elements of classicism feed into the nationalistic myth of ushering in a new era utilizing familiar language.

Two years after the opening of the Florentine train station, Giuseppe Terragni’s masterpiece, the Casa del Fascio in Como, opened to the public. The building housed the city’s Fascist party headquarters and also as a stage for political demonstrations. The Casa del Fascio served as propaganda for the regime, an iconic

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31 Giovanni Michelucci, a leading member of the Gruppo Toscano, wrote an essay in architectural magazine *Domus* 5 (1932) including photos that linked modern architecture to that of the Renaissance.
backdrop for rallies and photography campaigns. The totalitarian airs of the regime were growing and the architecture was expressing this change.

Although built with a modernist façade and out of modern building materials, the floor plan of the building was modeled after a Renaissance palazzo. The sleek inclusion of a cultural and historical reference presented a visual link from the Renaissance rulers to Mussolini. Whereas the train station included both Mussolini’s obsession with the past and desire to propel forward, this building is directly linked to Fascist ideologies. In Quadrante magazine, Giuseppe Terragni writes:

Hence the Mussolinian concept of *fascism as a glass house into which everyone can peer* gives rise to this wholly faithful interpretation: no encumbrance, no barrier, no obstacle between the political hierarchies and the people. The *physical* reaching out to the people presupposes that the people may freely access the Casa that houses the administrators, the commanders of this social advance. The ability to see what is happening inside is the greatest distinction of a Casa built for the people, in comparison with a palace, a barrack or a bank.32

This structure was designed to be a building for the people, for the masses that have pledged themselves to the Fascist cause. Towards the twilight of the regime, the propaganda embedded in the buildings commissioned became less subtle. Rather than solely including portraits of Mussolini and modern architecture that is classically influenced, the architecture began to embody Fascist ideology. The structures are constant reminders of the regime’s presence as they austerely tower over the people. Through this architecture we see a transformation from a culture of the masses to a mass culture.

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**Culture of the Masses v. Mass Culture**

Hitler’s rejection of modernity prevented the spread of outside ideals. With the exile of the Bauhaus architects, Hitler’s regime ushered in a new phase in architectural history, the International Style. Architect Philip Johnson suggests that although this modernization of Germany provided a vested interest in the monumentality of the government, it did a disservice to the people by prohibiting the advancement of culture. Johnson writes:

> A good modern architecture would satisfy the new craving for monumentality, but above all it would prove to the German intellectuals and to foreign countries that the new Germany is not bent on destroying all the splendid modern arts which have been built up in recent years . . . Germany cannot deny her progress. If in the arts she sets the clock back now, it will run all the faster in the future.\(^3^3\)

Johnson calls for a style that blends both modernity and classicism, allowing for cultural progress. Unlike the Futurists, Johnson believes that there is a place for classical influences in modernist architecture. This architectural philosophy is manifested with the Seagram Building, designed by Mies van der Rohe and Philip Johnson in 1956. The structure is removed from the street, requiring visitors to walk up to it in a similar fashion to climbing steps ascending to an ancient temple. The emphasis on the support columns echo marble columns that have been stripped down of any excess decoration. Johnson writes that it would be foolish to abandon the classical elements, both for their importance, but also for the aspect of security that it grants the public.

Unlike their Nazi contemporaries, the PNF did not enforce an official cultural style. There was the importance of cultural heritage, but under the formative years of the regime, there was less censorship and more overall promotion of the arts. Diane Ghirardo writes, “Quite specifically, the PNF rejected aristocratic and bourgeois notions in which culture was seen as an ornament for the intellect, or as private contemplation or enrichment with the goal of selfish pleasure, in favor of an idea of culture as the full, informed manifestation of social, spiritual, and historical action within a nation.”

The PNF used an approachable culture model to gain support from the working classes. This is evident through governmental support of the film industry and modernized architectural campaigns.

Having escaped Nazi Germany, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno address the effects of a monopolized culture system. In “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception,” the authors discuss the control of the masses by means of an engineered culture. They write, “All mass culture under monopoly is identical, and the contours of its skeleton, the conceptual armature fabricated by monopoly, are beginning to stand out.” Through a manipulation of culture via the media, the arts, and architecture, the masses fall victim to a capitalist model. The people will continue to propagate this model, attempting to satisfy the formulated needs that were created by the operators of the culture machine.

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Clement Greenberg observed that as a forced national culture was being developed, the avant-garde output in Italy was diminished. He writes, “At any rate Mussolini seems to have realized lately that it would be more useful to him to please the cultural tastes of the Italian masses than those of their masters. The masses must be provided with objects of admiration and wonder; the latter can dispense with them.”

This retrogression, he explains, mirrors that of the Fascist state. There is a loss of artistic expression to please the masses and create a more accessible, less bourgeois-oriented style. Through this silencing of the avant-garde, Mussolini could appease the masses and gain support.

While Il Duce cultivated the masses, the class divide in Italy was growing. In “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” Walter Benjamin relates modernized artistic practices, such as photography and film, with the growing class divide. With the invention of modernized techniques, works of art are readily available for social classes other than the bourgeoisie. The modernized techniques readily lend themselves to be used for propaganda purposes. Benjamin writes, “The growing proletarianization of modern man and the increasing formation of masses are two aspects of the same process.” This technological advancement allows for the transformation of the proletariat as a cultured body, but also establishes a mass culture that is easily manipulated.

Building upon the strong connection to the arts, the Fascists and the Futurists shared similar ideals that leant themselves to propaganda. In the epilogue of his essay,

Benjamin cites the leader of the Futurist movement, Filippo Marinetti, who glorifies war as a form of expression. Benjamin concludes, “Fiat ars—pereat mundus, says Fascism, and as Marinetti admits, expects war to supply the artistic gratification of a sense perception that has been changed by technology.”

The Futurist belief of destruction leading to creation is evident in Mussolini’s political campaign, especially with his invasion of Ethiopia. This imperialist campaign, exhibited the power of Mussolini’s growing empire. Lives were lost, but the destruction was necessary for moving forward as an imperial power.

Benjamin explains that art under fascism is a descendent of the aesthete “l’art pour l’art” for “fascist politics mobilize the masses and silence them at the same time, for the state claims for itself an untouchable self-containment that permits the public only the same powerless acceptance and submission with which it had previously encountered the autonomous work of art.” The aesthetic motto allows for a silencing of criticism, which suits the fascist state. With the creation of a top-down cultural policy, the avant-garde movement came to a halt in Italy.

### Italy Under Mass Culture

Over time the PNF began to sponsor exhibitions that promoted fascist ideologies and thus served as propaganda for the regime. Jeffrey Schnapp writes, “They put themselves forward as impermanent sites of volatile memory; as agitatory

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38 Ibid., 243.
instantiations of counter memory, as museums in motion cast in a populist mould in which the life-sapping effects of historicism could be shaken off in the service of calls to collective mobilization and myths of redemption or resurrection.”

Marketed towards the masses, the exhibitions were not designed like a traditional museum for individuals who had a personal interest in the subject matter. These exhibitions were housed in party-designed architecture and contained carefully curated materials that triggered an emotional call to arms.

The exhibitions adapted with the regime. The first exhibition, the Mostra della Rivoluzione Fascista (1932-1934) brought forth a visual representation of the party’s ideologies. The building that housed the exhibition, the nineteenth-century Palazzo delle Esposizioni, was covered in a façade designed by Rationalist architects. Diane Ghirardo writes, “Although the historical and architectural details of the neoclassical palazzo were suppressed by the sleek, modern façade, the organizing principles—classical spatial organization and monumentality—remained intact in the new façade.” Although it was not readily visible to the viewer, the classicism remained intact through the design of the exhibition.

The second exhibition was the Mostra Augustea. This spectacle glorified the Roman emperor and Mussolini’s idol, Augustus, on the bimillenial anniversary of his birth. This exhibition highlighted Mussolini’s obsession with Ancient Rome and romanità. The architecture was inspired by Ancient Rome and presented a direct connection between the two eras.

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40 Jeffrey T. Schnapp, Modernitalia, (Bern: Peter Lang, 2012), 146.
41 Diane Ghirardo, “Architects, Exhibitions, and the Politics of Culture in Fascist Italy,” 68.
42 Ibid., 70.
By the twilight of the regime, the official style of architecture was *stile littorio*. Championed by Marcello Piacentini, this style “combined current materials, technologies, and monumentality with direct references to the lintels and arches of classical orders, becoming the most visible imprint of the regime’s building projects in its final years.”

The Esposizione Universale di Roma (EUR) district, along with the University of Rome, provides a prominent example of this style.

**“The Olympics of Civilization”**

Created for a world’s fair that was scheduled to open in 1942, the EUR’42 was set to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of the March on Rome. The location of the site was chosen because of its close proximity to the ancient Roman port city, Ostia. One of Mussolini’s goals as a ruler was to restore Rome to its former size and glory, prompting in his *Roma al mare* campaign. Whereas Baron von Haussmann’s renovation of Paris, discussed earlier, exhibited both power and modernity, the EUR district foregrounds Mussolini’s imperialistic agenda. Among other elements, the fair was intended to celebrate the success in Ethiopia.

Vittorio Cini, General Commissioner of the project, reflects, “This great display will enable us to reveal the fascist style fully. The buildings’ style should constitute the basis for the ornamentation of the future city: it should reveal the tendencies of the era.”

The layout of the site resembles Michelangelo’s Campidoglio in Rome and Daniel Burnham’s design for the National Mall in Washington D.C. The

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theatricality of the districts design is the most important aspect of site, as this district was designed to serve as a backdrop for Mussolini’s new empire.

Architects from various schools including the Rationalists and the Traditionalists designed the buildings. Covered in travertine marble, the buildings contain classical stylistic elements. Columns, arches, frescos and mosaics recall the ancient times. Due to the United Nations sanctions on building materials, the final plan included more marble as opposed to modern building materials. Tucked away into the portico of the Palazzo degli Uffici, there is a large marble relief sculpture, *The History of Rome through its Built Works* by Publio Morbiducci (Figure 3). This example of art as propaganda depicts scenes from Roman history, beginning with Romulus and Remus and culminating with Mussolini on horseback on the bottom. Years later, this relief sculpture stands as a testament to the fallen dictator.
Figure 1: Firenze Santa Maria Novella in Florence, Italy. Photo by author.

Figure 2: Casa del Fascio in Como, Italy. Photo by author.
Figure 4: Giorgio de Chirico, *The Enigma of a Day*. 1914. Oil on canvas. Museum of Modern Art. ARTstor.
Figure 6: Inscription along the top of the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana. Photo by author.

Figure 7: Horse tamer sculpture guarding the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana. Photo by author.
Figure 8: Publio Morbiducci, *Horse Tamer*. 1940-1956. Travertine. Photo by author.
Chapter Two

“This double movement is a profound one: architecture is always dream and function, expression of a utopia and instrument of a convenience.”
—Roland Barthes

Arches of Memory

Meditating on The Enigma of a Day (1914) by Giorgio de Chirico (Figure 4) leaves the viewer with a sense of loss. Painting in the metaphysical style, de Chirico depicts the new age of modernity through a juxtaposition with the past. The painting portrays a barren city with empty architecture in the classical tradition. As in other paintings by the Greek painter, the city resembles a theatrical set. A marble statue in the Hellenistic style faces away from the viewer, emphasizing its anonymity. Turning away from the classical arches of the abandoned train station, he angles towards modernity via the steam of the oncoming train. The architecture of the station represents the past. Although time has elapsed, the structure remains as a testament to a previous era.

Architecture holds a fundamental place with regards to constructing a collective memory. The buildings are charged with power which stems from their past usages, their architects, and their patrons. Margaret Kohn, in her discussion of the relation of architecture to power, states:

Epoch-making events are often remembered by spatial markers: the fall of the Berlin Wall, Tiananmen Square, the taking of the Bastille. Perhaps this is because humans have a tendency to think in images, and memory is most effectively triggered by material traces rather than abstract notions. But this
also reflects a strategy employed by groups struggling for social change, which attempt to reappropriate the spaces that most embody power.\textsuperscript{45} 

There is a vested attempt led by both national governments and groups of people to reclaim architecture as means of a memorialization effort that would provide closure for a group in a post-conflict area. This reclamation is evident, for example, the Conciergerie in Paris. A palace turned prison, this structure most famously housed anti-revolutionaries during the Reign of Terror before their execution by guillotine. The prison has been preserved as a testament to the harsh conditions of the prisoners during the tumultuous period.

The Fascist-era building the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana represents a different relationship to the past. Though the building has not been aesthetically altered, the ideology surrounding the site has shifted in the past seventy years from glorifying Mussolini to serving as a historical testament of the Fascist period. Although the usage of the building has changed, the original ideologies associated with the site have not been completely erased, but rather, lay silent.

**Il Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana**

Located at the highest point of the EUR district, the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana has become the most recognizable structure in this suburban area. Upon winning the commission, Rationalist architects Ernesto Bruno La Padula, Giovanni Guerrini, and Mario Romano created one of the only buildings that was completed prior to the war (Figure 6). The structure was built for a world’s fair, the Esposizione

Universale di Roma (EUR’42), which never came to fruition. The Palazzo was scheduled to house the *Mostra della Civiltà Italiana*, or the Museum of Italian Civilization. The museum was intended to host a permanent exhibition tracing the legacy of Mussolini back to the first emperor of the Roman Empire, Augustus.

The building, colloquially known as the *Colosseo Quadrato* (Square Colosseum), is composed of a steel frame that is masked by marble arches. The six rows containing nine arches across represent the letters of Mussolini’s name, six for Benito and nine for Mussolini. The arches link Mussolini to his Roman predecessors. The decision to include the arches is a form of architectural propaganda, which links the Fascists to the Roman Empire. The building was dynamically reproduced in black and white photographs, emphasizing the theatricality of the design. Just as the Romans spread their arches across their empire, Mussolini wished to return to that era of Roman conquest. Architectural historian Richard Etlin states, “Not only did the arches stand for the heritage of Roman architecture, but their repetition was intended as a metaphor for the endurance of Roman civilization.”

The implications of conquest and expansion embedded into the Roman arch were then appropriated by the Fascists. The memorable arches recall the expansion campaigns under the Roman Empire, resulting in aqueducts and amphitheatres spanning the Mediterranean.

Across the top of each side of the building is inscribed, “*Un popolo di poeti di artisti di eroi / di santi di pensatori di scienziati / di navigatori di trasmigratori.*” [“A nation of poets, of artists, of heroes/Of saints, of thinkers, of scientists/Of navigators, of emigrants.”] This inscription preserves Fascist ideology through architecture

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(Figure 6). This ideology is permanently visible as it is ever-present, presiding over the district. Two Dioscuri, the mythic horse-tamer sons of Jupiter, flank the building and twenty-eight statues representing various industries and trades are located within the arches on the ground floor (Figures 7 and 8). The presence of the neoclassical sculptures link the building to the past in a similar fashion to the arches.

Contemporary critics were not unanimous on their understanding and appreciation for the structure. Other Rationalist architects were less supportive of the masking of modernity by the classically influenced marble as opposed to embracing modernity through updated building materials. Critic Emilio Cecchi expresses, “It resembled the campanile of Pisa, the Colosseum, the Parthenon and the apse of St. Peter!” This comparison builds upon “the usual Fascist appropriation of religions terminology, the palace is also compared to a temple which contains the deities of a new civic cult.” The founder of architectural magazine Domus, Gio Ponti writes, “The Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana by La Padula is only a symbol. The naked arch repeated more than two hundred times is in itself an abstraction and not a construction. The enchantment that it will evoke is lyrical, ecstatic, derived from the incantation.”

This interpretation of the building in relation to its spiritual attributes reflects upon the cultish aspects of Fascism. The building was created to draw into the nationalistic myth that Fascist Rome is a direct descendent of Imperial Rome and that the city will once again rise to the glory of the past.

48 Notaro, 19.
49 Etlin, 497.
Due to the outbreak of World War II, many of the structures in the district were not completed. Building materials, such as steel, were rationed. The government’s emphasis shifted from inter-Italian propaganda to war-based involvement on the international level. The Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana presided over the unfinished area throughout the war and into the postwar period. Eventually, the other buildings were completed as the EUR district was transformed, post-war, into a business district for the city of Rome. Not long after the war, Architectural Digest published an article on the abandoned district. In the first review of the site after the war, Bernard Rudofsky writes, “Ghost towns in the desert sometimes produce in the intruder a similar feeling of uneasiness . . . But ghost towns and ancient ruins are architectural fetuses; sensitive persons may be able to perceive their faint emanations of an ideological miasma.” The district remained unused until the late 1950s. As opposed to abandoned structures that had a previous life, “these gleaming ruins are architectural fœtuses; sensitive persons may be able to perceive their faint emanations of an ideological miasma.” For decades the building remained in between permanent tenants, but found a number of uses as temporary space.

In the process of rebuilding after the war, the Italian government realized that Rome did not have a business district similar to La Defense in Paris. With the metro in place and the building materials on hand, completing the EUR district was the most viable option.

51 Ibid, 37.
52 See John Agnew’s Rome (Chichester: Wiley, 1995) for a further discussion on the urban renewal of the EUR district, including a list of corporations that are currently housed there.
Over the past seventy years, the building has been used to house various art and fashion exhibitions, including Giorgio Armani’s “One Night Only” runway show in June 2013, as well as providing a striking backdrop for many films, such as Federico Fellini’s *The Temptation of Doctor Antonio* from *Boccaccio '70* (1962) and Julie Taymor’s *Titus* (1999). Currently the district houses a branch of National Archives and the head of the post office. There is a current rebirth in the district, with new building campaigns including a convention hall being built by Massimiliano Fuksas. A high-end department store, White Gallery, and a couple of nightclubs have opened in the past few years. In Chapter Three, I will examine Fendi’s usage of the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana and how the company conveys their heritage through the site.

**Alois Riegl and The Modern Cult of Monuments**

The Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana was created as a testament to the legacy of Roman history culminating with Mussolini’s reign. Over the past seventy years, however, the building has morphed into a monument with a different focus: an ever-present reminder of Italy’s Fascist past. In nineteenth century art historian Alois Riegl’s essay, “The Modern Cult of Monuments,” he identifies and establishes a classification of monuments and explains that over time, monuments can be altered which results in them moving from one category to another.

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Riegl begins his essay with a definition of a monument, or “a human creation, erected for the specific purpose of keeping single human deeds or events (or a combination thereof) alive in the minds of future generations.” Therefore the importance of a monument is to provide a cultural or historical attachment to an object with the purpose of evoking emotion through memory. The determining factor with regards to the establishment of monuments rests with the group that erected the monument, based on their role in society.

The essay presents three categories of monuments: age-value monuments, intentional monuments, and unintentional (historical) monuments. Age-value monuments do not refer to a specific moment or period, but rather a testament to the past. These monuments—period homes are a good example—are detached from their original usage and have been preserved due to the fact that they are from a foregone era. These objects/buildings do not reflect their original purpose but simply that time has passed.

The two categories more pertinent to this examination of the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana are intentional and unintentional monuments. Intentional monuments are structures erected with a specific message, either commemorating or glorifying a past event or ruler. An example would be the Altare della Patria (Monumento di Vittorio Emanuele II). This monument was created to honor King Victor Emanuele II, the first ruler under the Italian unification. Located in Rome between the Capitoline Hill and the Piazza Venezia, the monument is visibly positioned amongst the city’s

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most prominent sites and places of power. The structure also houses the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. It has a clear nationalistic message: to glorify a past monarch and to commemorate the lives lost in the name of Italy.

Unintentional monuments still “refer to a particular moment, but the choice of that moment is left to our subjective preference.” An example of an unintentional monument is the Pantheon. Originally the Pantheon was erected to serve as a temple that glorified numerous Roman gods. After the birth of Christianity, the house of worship was christened as a church but also a symbol of romanità, or Roman-ness. Today the Pantheon houses the tombs of artists, such as Raphael and Annibale Carracci, and of the first kings of Italy after the Risorgimento, Vittorio Emanuele II and Umberto I.

Whereas the message of an intentional monument is decided by its creators, the purpose of an unintentional monument is determined by society. Architectural historian Thordis Arrhenius further explains:

Where intentional monuments in some sense always suppress loss through the articulation of triumph or martyrdom, these unintentional monuments leave loss at the centre. Not purposely built as monuments, they are found in the inflated realm of heritage as ‘historical objects’ that reject a transparent presence in preference for an obscured and distant past.

These structures exist in their second life. They are reused and repurposed from their original function to serve as a placeholder for the past. Unintentional monuments find themselves frozen in the past, leaving those who interact with them to have to process and contemplate the structures.

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55 Riegl, 624.
A Repurposed Monument

The Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana was originally created to serve as a museum, which is fundamentally a space designed to preserve the memory of the past. The structure’s creation and original purpose expresses a specific function: to trace the legacy of Augustus to Mussolini. Designed as an intentional monument, the function of the building was never fully realized since the museum was not finished.

Within the past seventy years the building’s transformation from a propaganda-driven museum space into Fendi’s headquarters has led the building to become an unintentional monument. The totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century utilized architecture to add to their carefully formulated national myths. By reverting the ownership and usage of the sites, many structures built under the totalitarian regimes have transformed from sites glorifying the regimes to symbolizing and reminding future generations of their presence.

The switch from intentional monument to unintentional monument is possible through a change in the visual language surrounding the structure. Thordis Arrhenius writes, “After the initial overthrow and fragmentation of the monuments identified with power machines of totalitarian states, they quickly become collectible items and tokens for sentimental reverie over ‘bad’ old times.” The newly repurposed unintentional monument plays into the collective memory in a post-conflict era. The Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana has become a remnant of the past, a placeholder for past historic events. Its iconic design is an obvious reminder of the Fascist era.

57 Arrhenius, 105.
The purpose and function of such monuments inspired Walter Benjamin. Through his investigations on myth and the city, he expresses that monuments can change their meaning over time. In his magnum opus, *The Arcades Project*, Benjamin establishes that there is an element of rediscovery that must occur when establishing collective memory. The once spectacular shopping galleries lost their splendor through the ages, but provides for an in depth philosophical study using the changes in the city of Paris.

Just as Aldo Rossi describes buildings as urban artifacts, Benjamin explains that it is important that the structure, the arcades, survived, but had become passé. He finds that the visual depiction of the passage of time allows for a framework to discuss the collective history of the site. The arcades act as memorials, where individuals can interact with the past.

Whereas Benjamin writes on the changes found in the site over the visual passage in time, he differs from Le Corbusier’s belief of architecture as a living entity. Benjamin assumes the role of a *flâneur*, or a spectator of modern life, walking through the city and discovering its many secrets. Le Corbusier opts for a different technique. Influenced by technology, Le Corbusier views the city as a planner with an aerial approach. Less personal than Benjamin’s musings on the city, Le Corbusier expresses that architecture transcends time. The divorce of time between the architecture’s original usage and its current state allows for a current reading on the past, but also for

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a reinterpretation of the contemporary period. For the rediscovery to exist, “the collective history must first be excavated and retrieved so that another possible course of human development can become apparent.” This distance leads to a juxtaposition of the past and the present, which begins the conversation of memory and borrowed ideology.

Moving between periods, the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana maintains a presence rooted in the past. Its austerity has prohibited personal interaction and the lack of usage has left the initial visual language in tact. In recent years, the building’s ideology has been channeled to fit a new agenda, as discussed in the third chapter. The fragility of the monument can also be seen with the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana. No longer does the structure glorify the Fascist regime, but it cannot divorce itself from its founding ideology.

The City and Collective Memory

In the Palazzo della Civiltà’s current state as an unintentional monument, the building holds and reflects the collective memory of the Italian people. The original intent of the structure, as an intentional monument, was to praise the Fascists and their imperialistic efforts. Today the building serves as a testament to the Fascist period, but does not glorify the past. It simply acts as a place marker that establishes the existence of a tumultuous period of Italian history. Since this specific building has a visual language that provides a direct connection to its origin and creators, there cannot be a break from the structure’s past.

\(^{60}\) Ibid., 82.
Architectural historian Aldo Rossi describes surviving structures from past eras as urban artifacts. He explains that when analyzing architecture, the historical aspects should not be the only elements analyzed. Rossi writes, “In an urban artifact, certain original values and functions remain, others are totally altered; about some stylistic aspects of the form we are certain, others are less obvious.”61 Urban artifacts both preserve memory and maintain an element of mystery by not fully exposing their past.

Over the course of a building’s existence, it can take various usages by different tenants. Each transformation adds an additional layer, which in effect builds upon the collective memory of the space and establishes the aura of a city. Rossi writes on a Renaissance structure, the Palazzo della Ragione in Padua, “One is struck by the multiplicity of functions that a building of this type can contain over time and how these functions are entirely independent of the form. At the same time, it is precisely the form that impresses us; we live it and experience it, and in turn structures the city.”62 The Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana presides over the EUR district. As the both the most iconic structure in the district as well as the highest elevated building, the visual language for this building sets the tone for the district as a whole.

**Barthes and Semiology**

Through the preservation of the Fascist structure, the building has become a symbol of the past. Since the Fascist ideologies are engrained into the structure, one cannot encounter the space without acknowledging the past. From the entablature to

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62 Ibid., 29.
the repetitious arches that stand for Mussolini’s name, Fascism is still present. In Roland Barthes’ mythology on the Eiffel Tower, he analyzes the function and visual language of the iconic structure. Barthes writes, “Incorporated into daily life until you can no longer grant it any specific attribute, determined merely to persist, like a rock or the river, it is as literal as a phenomenon of nature whose meaning can be questioned to infinity buy whose existence is incontestable.” Like the Eiffel Tower, the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana is ever-present on the topology of Rome.

In an article discussing the Haus der Kunst in Munich, architects Rem Koolhaas, Jacques Herzog and Mark Wigley appropriate Barthes’ theories in relation to architecture. The structure was the first building created under Hitler’s rule to serve as a gallery of accepted artwork. The museum served as a backdrop for many political marches and demonstrations. Since the war there has been various attempts to reclaim the space as a contemporary art space. Koolhaas and Herzog investigate the acts of preservation and memorialization through the site. Like the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana, this structure was designed by a totalitarian regime to glorify and build upon their nationalistic mythology. Although the buildings have direct linkages to their past, “architecture is never guilty and rarely dangerous. Nonetheless, it can be appropriated by ideologies and remains branded by them for generations. It is then feared and revered, hated and admired at once.” The ideologies attached to the architecture takes cannot easily be removed. Over time the visual language is built up of many layers, which can alter the original meaning of the site.

63 Barthes, The Eiffel Tower and Other Mythologies, 3.
64 Koolhaas et al, 62.
The architects refer to the museum as a punctum, or Barthes’ photographic term meaning the “element which rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me.”65 This element of photography personally touching and not typically experienced comfortably. Herzog elaborates on Barthes with claiming that as a punctum, this building is “a place that not only a monumental reminder of a grim past, as here in the Haus der Kunst, but also a place that encourages introspection, making us more acutely and explicitly aware of how we think and act.”66

In a similar way, the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana acts as a punctum on the topology of Rome. The stigmas attached to the structure compile a visual language that provides emotion and politicization without a written explanation. Depicted in film, the building can be seen in various shots of Roberto Rossellini’s Roma Città Aperta (1945). Although no scenes take place in the building or directly surrounding it, the building’s presence greatly adds to the film. Through the inclusion of the building, there is an acknowledgement of the differentiation between the Fascists and the Resistance. Whereas the film depicts Rome in a realistic, gritty state, the inclusion of the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana presents a fabricated mythic alternative. The pristine nature of the building along with the barren surroundings creates a separation from the depiction of the rest of the city.

In an interview, director Federico Fellini expressed his love for the EUR district. His reasoning for his infatuation with the district include:

Firstly that it is a work of artistic expression, recalling the Metaphysical paintings of de Chirico, this place has the same lightness. Like living within

66 Koolhaas et al, 62.
the space of a painting. It’s a liberating feeling, because paintings have no laws, they are just purely aesthetic and there are no relationships, if not just with things or with loneliness. So this quarter urges you to go and nourish your intellect, to stimulate yourself, to free yourself from hardship. It suspends on a horizontal plain, an improbability, of empty uninhabited spaces, buildings created for ghosts or for statues.67

The once utopian district possesses an ethereal, elegant feeling. The streamlined buildings are glowingly white, appearing as if they were just erected. The classical inspiration is timeless, yet the modernist architectural style is aesthetically contemporary. Fendi’s decision to utilize the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana combines the powerful ideology embedded into the structure as well as the glamorous elements of the building’s portrayal on screen and in the media.

Figure 9. Email promoting Karl Lagerfeld’s fall-winter 2014 ad campaign. Photo by author.
Figure 10. A Fendi Fall/Winter 2014 ad as seen in the Fall/Winter *CR Fashion Book*. ©Karl Lagerfeld for Fendi.
Figure 11. An array of Fendi Peekaboo bags, available at Barneys.com. Photo by author.

Figure 12. The set of Karl Lagerfeld’s Spring-Summer 2015 runway show for Fendi. Photo by author.
Figure 13. Cara Delevingne opening the Fendi Spring-Summer 2015 runway show. Photo by author.

Figure 14. The Roman Arches motif in the background as the models exit the runway. Photo by author.
Figure 15. The captivating arches of the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana as seen on Madison Avenue. Photo by author.
Figure 16. An email announcing the opening of the Fendi boutique on Madison Avenue in New York City. Photo by author.
Figure 17. An Instagram post by Fendi. Photo by author.
Chapter Three

“The description of Fashion (and no longer its production) is therefore a social fact, so that even if the garment of Fashion remained purely imaginary (without affecting real clothing), it would constitute an incontestable element of mass culture, like pulp fiction, comics, and movies.”
—Roland Barthes

Couture Caretakers

Building upon their Roman heritage, in 2013 the Italian luxury goods company Fendi signed a fifteen-year lease for the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana to serve as its new headquarters.68 Although the fashion house is renovating the structure to fit their needs, there will be no significant alterations to the building’s visual appearance. As discussed in the earlier chapters, the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana was constructed to reflect Mussolini’s idea of Rome. The structure once propagated Mussolini’s national myth of the imperial power of Rome, but now carries a different connotation. Under Fendi, the Palazzo factors into an updated national myth, the superiority of Italian design. This nationalistic campaign is evident through Fendi’s print ads, runway shows, social media campaigns and store designs.

The past few years have seen dire financial circumstances for the Italian government. Balancing just above the brink of bankruptcy, the government no longer has the necessary funds to maintain and renovate the nation’s numerous historic sites, the most UNESCO world heritage sites in the world. As a response to the need for funds to maintain these sites, the Italian government has turned to third party

corporations, primarily fashion houses and luxury goods brands, to assist in preserving their national heritage.

In the past such government-private partnerships were less common, but now the Italian government is eager to obtain support from corporations for preservation purposes. Italian Cultural Minister Dario Franceschini told the New York Times, “Our doors are wide open for all the philanthropists and donors who want to tie their name to an Italian monument . . . We have a long list, as our heritage offers endless options . . . Just pick.” The assistance is not only coming from Italian corporations, but from the international market as well. Recently, the Saudi Arabian government has agreed to assist in financing the renovation of the Mausoleum of Augustus, which is nestled in the Fascist Piazza Augusteo Imperatore.

For corporations, the motivation for renovating historical sites is twofold; it allows for the companies to give back to both the government and the Italian people at large and it also provides for a stellar marketing and branding campaign. Renzo Rosso, president and founder of OTB Group, which includes brands such as Diesel and Mason Martin Margiela, has sponsored a renovation of Venice’s Rialto Bridge. In an interview with WWD, Rosso explains, “Companies that are profitable have an obligation to support the public administration, which is generally over-burdened with costs.” Rosso charges other designers to assist with the renovation efforts and give back to their national culture.

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69 Piangiani and Yardley.
70 Ibid.
At times, the corporations have utilized this opportunity for a mass marketing campaign. John Koblin reported for the New York Times, “this effort has been met with some skepticism among preservationists and historians. There is a fear of rampant commercialism, especially in a country where it has only recently become common for companies to contribute to public projects.”\(^{72}\) When Bulgari funded the renovation of the Palazzo Ducale in Venice, the building’s scaffolding was masked with large ads for the famed jewelry designer. The Venetians were outraged that the local government allowed for the canvassing to occur. When Rosso paid for the renovation of the Rialto Bridge, on the other hand, no ads for Diesel appeared on the site.

Other noteworthy renovation projects that are sponsored by fashion houses and luxury goods brands include the current renovation of the Colosseum, one of Italy’s most recognizable and visited sites. Diego Delle Valle, CEO of leather goods company Tod’s, has contributed $34 million to assist the cleaning. Referred to as the “Project Italia” by the CEO, Delle Valle did not have the scaffolding covered with an advertisement. He commented, “Contrary to what one might think, Tod’s did not sponsor the Colosseum’s restoration so as to be able to place a logo on it. Donating in order to support any form of art should be considered unsurprising, and without rewards of any kind.”\(^{73}\) Although there were no banners placed around the structure


with their logo, the tickets to the storied site will include the Tod’s logo for a contracted period of time.

The corporations involved with the renovations have not received any special treatment from the Italian government, other than tax deductions for their contributions. However, this policy could change. For example, in five years gladiator sandals could become *en vogue*, as seen with the cyclical nature of fashion trends. To complete the full experience, Tod’s may decide to stage their spring-summer prêt-a-porter collection in the Colosseum. Since they have provided the funds for the historic site’s renovation, it would be shocking for the government to forbid the presentation from occurring.

The Italian state benefits from such deals on different accounts. The primary benefit is that the historic sites are renovated, thus preserving Italy’s cultural heritage. In addition to the benefit of the renovations, the collaboration between the Italian government and the fashion brands results in a branding of the Italian heritage sites as luxury goods. There is a cosmopolitan and contemporary connotation now associated with the sites. The trendiness now associated with the newly renovated historical sites continues onto the runway, as seen with Fendi’s Spring-Summer 2015 runway collection.
**Fendi**

Founded in 1925 by Adele Casagrande and her husband Edoardo Fendi, the leather goods and fur atelier has always catered to the upper echelons of society. There is little written on Fendi during the Fascist period. After the war, the couple’s five daughters, Paola, Franca, Carla, Anna and Alda, became involved with the company. The label has been under the creative direction of Karl Lagerfeld since the mid-sixties, holding the record for the longest serving creative director in the industry. Along with the Fendi daughters, Lagerfeld made over the label from a family-run operation to an international brand. The brand famously transformed fur from a status symbol to fashion item. In recent films, their furs can be seen on Madonna in *Evita* (1996) and Gwyneth Paltrow in *The Royal Tenenbaums* (2001). In 1999, Fendi became a member of the Louis Vuitton Moet Henessey (LVMH) luxury brands group. Along with the lease of the Palazzo della Civilta Italiana, Fendi is involved with a campaign to restore Rome’s most historic fountains, including the Trevi Fountain and the Four Rivers Fountain (La Fontana dei Quattro Fiumi). In a campaign titled, “FENDI for Fountains,” the fashion house has committed to give back to their inspiration, the city of Rome. Pietro Beccari, the CEO of Fendi, expressed:

> I believe that at this moment in time it is essential for Italy, and Rome in particular, to promote a positive message of reconstruction, renewal, and restoration, capable of reaching far beyond its borders, as a strong sign of change. And I believe that it is significant that this message is coming from a historical Roman fashion brand such as FENDI. This project allows us to once

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again reinforce our geographical and cultural Roman roots, which we are very proud of. The company expresses that they are taking on the renovation project to assist in maintaining cultural heritage. The press coverage is more valuable than the cost of the project, although that is not how the companies that are paying for the restorations portray their motives. The companies are extolled as the champions of history and in addition, their brands are constantly mentioned in the media.

**Roman Arches**

Fendi has yet to move into the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana, but that has not stopped them from utilizing the space for promotional campaigns. Unlike Tod’s renovation of the Colosseum, Fendi is not just renovating the building—they are leasing it as their headquarters. The first usage of the building’s imagery was in the fall/winter 2014 advertisement campaign titled, “Roman Arches” (Figure 9). The campaign launched in July 2014. The photographs were taken by creative director Karl Lagerfeld, and used the building’s iconic marble arches as a backdrop. Models Nadja Bender and Ashleigh Good posed wearing luxurious furs and holding lavish handbags.

Lagerfeld plays on the historical imagery of the arch, recalling both ancient Rome and the metaphysical paintings by Giorgio de Chirico. Roland Barthes’ theories of semiotics, as analyzed on a Panzani food advertisement in “The Rhetoric of the

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Image”, can be applied to this series of photography. Like the Panzani ad, the series of advertisements by Lagerfeld contain many rich symbols that assist in building the brand’s myth of indulgent design and stresses the Italianicity of Fendi. In the series, the advertisements contain a solitary model surrounded by either the Palazzo’s repetitive arches or depict models standing up against the Travertine walls.

Barthes writes that there are three elements of an image: the linguistic message, the coded-iconic message, and the non-coded iconic message. The linguistic message is the most evident. It is comprised of the words that accompany the image. Barthes writes, “The text directs the reader through the signifieds of the image, causing him to avoid some and receive others; by means of an often subtle dispatching, it remote-controls him towards a meaning chosen in advance.”

Acting as a guide through the image, the power of the written word frames the other elements of the advertisement.

The advertisements contain a single word: FENDI. Written in a clean font and placed off to the side of the image, the viewers are presented with a framework for the image. The connotation of the word provides an elite and elegant lens for which to understand the image. This framework also focuses the viewer in the direction of thinking about the aesthetics of the site, as opposed to any historical connection to the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana.

Beyond the linguistic message provided by the written signifiers, there are the symbols provided through the visual image, or the symbolic message. This category

78 Ibid., 40.
can be divided into two subcategories: the coded iconic message and the non-coded iconic message. The difference between the two subcategories is the connotation and the denotation of the symbols. The coded iconic message contains the inferred meaning of the symbol, whereas the non-coded iconic message is the symbol’s face value.

The advertisement, appearing in ex-Vogue editor Carine Roitfeld’s CR Fashion Book, depicts the image of model Nadja Bender standing in front of the arcade of arches (Figure 10). Embedded within the image are many visual symbols, such as the arcade and the fabric of the clothing and accessories. Styled by Charlotte Stockdale, Nadja is seen wearing an opulent black coat with a fur hood. Her back is to the viewer, which allows the focus to be placed on her leather handbag. The arches provide a striking, cinematographic background as well as an intriguing element of mystery. The building was originally created to serve as a theatrical backdrop for the Italian Fascists. It was engineered to directly evoke emotion and interest.

Both the marble arches and her clothing and accessories choices are signifiers. The arches represent the legacy of Rome, Romanità, a motif borrowed from Mussolini. Il Duce’s intention for the building was to provide a powerful connection to the past, while projecting towards the future. Lagerfeld plays on the power of the structure, but reverts the image to exhibit the power of the label, the Italian label.

Through the lens of the linguistic message, FENDI, the connotation of luxury is evident. Building upon decades of handcrafted leather and fur goods, the items depicted signify high society and opulence. The Fendi website writes that the
Peekaboo handbag (Figure 11), which debuted in 2009, is “a chic and streamlined timeless icon where craftsmanship overrides showmanship to reveal an intimate soul that surprises with its veiled and unexpected interiors.” These bags retail at upwards of $3,000. Just as the arches symbolize imperial power, the handbags provide an updated symbol of power: social status through consumerism.

The symbolic message is furthered through the non-coded iconic message. The viewers are well aware that the woman is wearing a fur-hooded coat and that her handbag is made of leather. These denotations allow for a base understanding that is built up by the connotations associated with the individual signifiers, let alone the branding, Fendi.

Once these three messages are identified, the image as a whole can be comprehended. The readable message of the image presents an image of authority. Building upon the connotations associated, albeit their centuries of differences, with the arches and the handbag, the viewer and consumer are charged with a sense of desire. The consumer is drawn to the sleek design of both the building and the handbag, but more importantly, the power. Rather than feeling compelled to join the Fascist cause, the viewer of this image is drawn to the status associated with the luxury items. Although the beholder of the power has changed, the effect remains the same. The viewers wish to be a part of the organization that created the image.

See www.fendi.com for a history of their iconic handbags and furs.
Powerful Prêt-a-Porter

On September 18, 2014 the fashion world was presented with Karl Lagerfeld’s spring-summer ready-to-wear collection for Fendi. The runway show was a highlight of Milan Fashion Week. The show was opened by model Cara Delevingne and featured Nadja Bender, Joan Smalls, Georgia Mae Jagger and Kendall Jenner. The only aspect of the runway show that was more spectacular than the lineup of models was the set design, inspired by the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana.

Karl Lagerfeld and Silvia Venturini Fendi, head designer of the label’s accessories, children and menswear collections and granddaughter of the company’s founders, decided to evoke a sense of history with their runway set. The backdrop consisted of faux-Travertine marble arches (Figures 12, 13 and 14). Like the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana’s sculptures that inhabit the ground floor arches, the designers placed dress forms in each arch. This act re-imagines the building as a house of fashion, ushering in a new era of the building’s history. Placed on each seat were drawings of the collection, photography of the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana and a brief essay on the inspiration all by Lagerfeld.80

The brief essay on Lagerfeld’s inspiration for the runway show never specifically mentions the Fascist period, but it is greatly inferred. Anyone who is familiar with Italian history will make the connection to Fascism when they view the building, so Lagerfeld could not have completely ignored that aspect of the structure’s history. In the essay, Lagerfeld writes, “The past and history here are now beyond

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80 See Appendix A for Fendi’s Spring-Summer 2015 press release, published on Fendi’s website.
‘good and evil’ as Nietzsche would have said.”\textsuperscript{81} Nietzsche greatly influenced Europe’s totalitarian leaders of the early twentieth century. In his text, \textit{Beyond Good and Evil}, he establishes that the classifications of good and evil are non-existent since a universal moral for all humans does not exist. He calls for society to overcome morality by analyzing the unconscious motives that drive their individual actions. By referencing the philosopher in the essay, Lagerfeld establishes a connection to the past of the structure. There has also been an effort to reclaim Nietzsche and reinterpret his writings, as he would have explained them, than through the lens of his nationalistic-sympathizing sister’s edits. Just as the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana has been reclaimed through an interest in Modernist architecture, contemporary society have attempted to do the same to the German philosopher. In this specific example, Lagerfeld is flirting with the building’s original intention under the Fascists and now has moved beyond that usage to a new era of pure design.

Lagerfeld concludes his essay with, “If designers and architects conceive their work as a poet might conceive his poems there will be a sensuous and emotional factor. However, Italian fashion and Italian architecture have to be 100\% Italian to claim their universality.”\textsuperscript{82} This nationalistic statement of Italianicity is very similar to those statements made by the Fascists. It recalls the quote on the entablature of the structure, which is noticeably absent from the Fendi campaign. The imperial nature of the power of Italian design is definitely present in this essay.

\textsuperscript{81} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{82} Ibid.
The clothing was designed around a palette of blue tones, drawing inspiration from the contrast of the building against the clear, Roman sky. Silvia Venturini Fendi remarked on their inspiration, “The incredible Roman sky, there’s nothing more beautiful . . . The way it goes from blue to the reds and oranges of the sunset. That’s what informs the collection; lightness, air, the natural world—but projected into real life.” When standing on the platform at the base of the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana, there is a stark contrast between the open sky and the rest of the city of Rome. This powerful, yet ethereal experience is reverberated in the collection. Blending fabrics and textures, the collection is architectural, yet wearable.

**Interpreting the Inspiration for the Masses**

Although the advertisement campaign and ready-to-wear collection was met with great reviews, the language that the reporters used to discuss the inspiration of the collection varied. As seen with Karl Lagerfeld’s essay from the runway show, the building’s true past is discussed with selective language. On the choice of location for the advertisement campaign, Lagerfeld explained, “For this ad, I chose the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana, because it is one of the most famous buildings of Roman modernism . . . The shots express the mood of the new Fendi collection.” By focusing on the modernist aspect of the building, he purposefully omits mentioning one of Italy’s darkest periods of history.

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The reporters writing on the advertisement campaign and covering the runway show differed in their approach with respect to mentioning the building’s Fascist past. Some journalists elide the subject in a similar manner to Lagerfeld. Others directly mentioned the building’s past; some completely omitted the information altogether. Whereas the New York Times completely omits any discussion of the building and stylistic inspiration, WWD adds that the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana is “considered one of the finest representations of fascist architecture in Italy.” The majority of the reviews were less direct that WWD, mentioning the Fascist past in a more creative manner.

Some of the main journalistic outposts made reference to the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana, but stopped at the connection to metaphysical painting. New York Magazine simply refers to the building as “a 30s-era monument in the Eternal City.” Vogue also focuses on the metaphysical painting connection and referred to the building as “the 1953 Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana in Rome,” which dates the building to after the Fascist period. By omitting the Fascist period, the journalists present the building as just another example of modernist architecture and strip the building of its main identity.

By not fully confronting the past, the majority of the reviews omit the word fascism. The Guardian, Vogue UK, and Style.com mentions that the collection was

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86 In reviews by Elle UK and Vogue UK, the structure’s Fascist past was completely omitted.
88 Holgate.
based on “a Roman building commissioned by Benito Mussolini”\textsuperscript{89} or from “the Mussolini-era.”\textsuperscript{90} In a sense, they have created a brand of Mussolini that is different from fascism. The way in which the reporters wrote about Mussolini and his connection to the building, allows for his name to take the place of a brand or designer as opposed to a totalitarian dictator. The meaning attempts to create a degree of historical caché.

\textbf{153 Madison Avenue}

Just in time for the 2014 holiday shopping season, Fendi moved their New York flagship boutique from 677 Fifth Avenue, between 53\textsuperscript{rd} and 54\textsuperscript{th} Streets, to 153 Madison Avenue at 57\textsuperscript{th} Street. Prior to the grand opening, the store was enclosed in scaffolding that was masked by an image from Lagerfeld’s fall advertisement campaign (Figure 15). The powerful arches of the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana now convey their meaning across international borders. In this ad, Ashleigh Good is seen holding a By the Way handbag while wearing a fur hooded coat. Nadja Bender is seen off to the left side in the background, sporting an exotic fur scarf. The arches draw the viewer into the image in a similar fashion to the aforementioned advertisement.

This inclusion of the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana promotes the new branding internationally. The image of the austere and historically rich arches stand towering over the people passing by on the street through the advertisement. The design of the


fashion, accessories, and, most strikingly, the architecture resonates with the viewer and hopeful consumers. The mysterious arches draw the viewer in, leaving a sense of intrigue and the clean aesthetic design connotes luxury, as seen with the current minimalist fashion trends.

Not only did the advertisement serve as a memorable image in the minds of the viewers, it also contributed to the power of Italian design. Since World War II, Italy has been at the forefront of design. Italian designed products “blended perceived artistic genius with excess and rigorous design with traditional craftsmanship.”

Italian design has become a signifier of centuries of artistic brilliance and craftsmanship. Consumers associate quality and style with Italian designed products. This status has not been altered in recent years as seen with the growth of the luxury goods market. These handcrafted objects are made with the finest materials, which both increase their value and limit the quantity produced. The key to Italian design is that it is not solely made of the highest quality materials, but also is comprised of avant-garde designs.

Once the scaffolding was removed, a familiar façade emerged. The Madison Avenue boutique has taken the guise of the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana, albeit with only one row of Travertine marble arches (Figure 16). Architect Peter Marino is known for his high-end boutiques for Chanel and Louis Vuitton, which emulate opulence and luxury through clean design and modernist building materials. An email blast from the fashion house stated, “The ultimate window on the Fendi world, its

columned Travertine façade opens up into an airy ambiance of prized materials, iconic designs and high contrast textures.” The use of Travertine marble continues inside, which further develops the connection to Rome and the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana.

To announce the opening of the new boutique, Fendi reused images from the fall advertisement campaign, but added “New Boutique/598 Madison Avenue/New York/fendi.com.” The simplicity of the advertisement is both mysterious and enticing. The branding of the store opening coincides with the overall campaign. Fendi has created a resonating presence, blending the aesthetics of power with impeccable design. Just as the Fascist employed theatrical techniques with their design of the EUR district, such as their grandiose exhibitions and austere architecture, Fendi’s advertisement asserts a strong message of dominance.

**Creating a New Identity**

Every aspect of the aforementioned advertisement campaigns and runway show directly factor into the newly created myth in which Fendi has invested. Applying semiotic theory, the differences in the wordage used in the ready-to-wear reviews act as linguistic symbols. Karl Lagerfeld expressed that the inspiration for his collection contains, “an interpretation that we should not even attempt to explain.”

The brand has selectively composed a narrative, through their visual presence and their press releases that also attempts to rewrite the history of the Palazzo della Civiltà

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Italiana. Fendi is highlighting the progressively modern structure for its aesthetic design and discussing the bare minimum about its dark political past.

Through this selective process of constructing a new identity for the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana and, as a result, the EUR district at large, Fendi is fabricating a myth to feed into their branding. The EUR district appears as a ghost town. While people are working during the day, the streets are completely empty. In the recent past, this dystopian district has slowly taken on a new identity. Since the identity of the district had never fully developed after the war, the EUR can serve as a tabula rasa for artistic expression, as seen with the many film directors infatuation with the site. This usage of the site as a film set can be seen with Federico Fellini’s *Boccaccio ’70* (1962) and Michelangelo Antonioni’s *L’Eclisse* (1962).

Fendi’s reclaiming of the minimalist architecture pairs well with their overall image. They have rebranded the EUR district to fit their aesthetic agenda. Their refashioning of the district’s history, through selective language and imagery, simulates an visual world based on design and luxury. Jean Baudrillard categorizes simulation as a false representation that is created when a system fabricates something that does not exist.

To counter the act of simulation, Baudrillard explains dissimulation, a masking of the truth to create a different system. He writes, “Therefore, pretending, or dissimulating, leaves the principle of reality intact: the difference is always clear, it is simply masked, whereas simulation threatens the difference between the ‘true’ and the
'false,' the ‘real’ and the ‘imaginary.’” Through Fendi’s aesthetic revamp of the EUR, they have altered the meaning of the site. There has become a dissimulation with regards to the Fascist past of the structure and a simulacrum, or fashioned representation, of an imagined design-oriented utopia. This masking of the building’s Fascist past is an attempt to avoid discussing one of Italy’s darkest periods. Obviously, Fendi does not want to align themselves with the totalitarian regime, which results in an attempt to silence the tumultuous past. The building under Fendi no longer primarily represents Fascism or Italian bureaucracy, but simply aesthetic design.

Today’s society is propelled by images more so than in the past. Due to the over-usage of the Internet and social media, advertisements are readily available and in addition through these means, images are more easily malleable. Fendi’s manipulation of the imagery associated with the city of Rome recalls Baudrillard’s commentary on Disneyland. He investigates the role of the image in a consumer culture, noting how the refashioned images take on another role in society. He writes, “It is no longer a question of a false representation of reality (ideology) but of concealing the fact that the real is no longer real, and thus of saving the reality principle.” This fabricated world, the hyperreal, becomes a completely different place. The hyperrealization that occurs supersedes the real and, in effect, overwrites the historical aspects of the real.

In December 2014, Fendi began an Instagram campaign utilizing the hashtag, #FendiIsRome (Figure 17). This campaign appropriates Roman history and culture

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94 Baudrillard, 13.
towards establishing the simulacrum under Fendi. Images include the Pantheon, the Ganges River from the Four Rivers Fountain in Piazza Navona and an image of the sun setting over St. Peter’s Basilica. The second image in the campaign depicts the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana and one of the horse tamer sculptures that flank the building. The caption of the image reads, “Where heritage and future come together. The iconic Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana in #Rome is the next #Fendi headquarter. #FendiIsRome [sic].” Fendi is constructing an identity that transcends historical boundaries. The fashion house is concerned with creating a label synonymous with luxury, but also with history. Purchasing luxury goods items is an investment. Through this linkage to the ancient city of Rome, which has maintained a seat of power for centuries, there is a validation to the purchase of the items. The items now possess a connotation of timelessness.

Fendi has established a hyperrealization out of the EUR district. Their reinvigoration of the site, arguably the first long-term vibrant usage of the site, has also contributed to the mass culture of Italian design. The connotation of the luxurious and skilled sector of the design world has taken a totalitarian corner on the market. The power associated with the select Italian designers influences aesthetic choices worldwide. Through their branding campaign, Fendi has appropriated the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana and its powerful presence towards their goal of commanding the luxury goods market.
Conclusion

Since Fendi’s lease and appropriation of the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana, the international arts and architecture communities have responded to this blend of business and culture. In March 2015, Owen Hatherley, a British journalist who primarily writes on architecture, wrote an opinion piece for *Architectural Review* titled “Fendi Vidi Vici: When Fashion Flirts with Fascism.” In his piece, Hatherley comments on the ideological aspect of Fendi’s transformation of their new headquarters at a time of increased Fascist politics in Europe. The glorification of architecture from the Fascist period is not unique to Fendi, but Hatherley finds that the usage of the site by Fendi results in a normalization of the Italian Fascist period. He concludes, “However much the architecture of the era can be interesting and attractive, its values were deeply sick. It is right that its architecture remain tainted.” Although this architecture has taken on a new tenant, it should still carry some connection to its original usage, even if only just a plaque mentioning the building’s history.

Fendi’s campaign has attempted to strip the negative connotation from the site and focus on the streamlined aesthetic design. The company occasionally inserts references to the structure’s past, acknowledging, if indirectly, its history. In a recent interview, Karl Lagerfeld praises the building, saying, “It’s an amazing place, from the terrace you can see the whole city, to the sea!” This comment was a reference to the

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original plans for the EUR district. Part of Mussolini’s *Roma al mare* campaign, the district would connect the city of Rome to Ostia, the ancient seaport.

I agree with Hatherley’s claim that this normalization erases the markings of terrible regime from the topography of Rome. The buildings of the EUR were created to serve as monuments to the Fascist regime, but have since served as important reminder to one of Europe’s darkest periods. Although Fendi’s appropriation of the site has simulated a new era for the site, it is important not to forget the significance of the site’s past. The purpose of the monument has shifted, but the original purpose is not only vital to the structure’s role in history, but also in the present. Fendi emphasizes their connection to the geometric design of the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana, but rarely acknowledge the attractiveness of the structure’s powerful austerity possibly because they are focusing on the purely aesthetic value of the structure as opposed to engaging with the building’s political past.

It is not coincidental that fashion and totalitarianism are drawn to each other. Hitler and Mussolini placed great emphasis on aesthetics, including most famously the uniforms worn by their supporters. The theatricality of soldiers marching in perfect unison juxtaposed with stark architecture resulted in some of history’s most captivating propaganda campaigns. Decades later, the fashion industry recalls elements of totalitarianism. Only a handful of designers choose the sartorial decisions for the entire industry. They not only control the market, but also have the power to influence the masses. The power linked to the great fashion houses requires a complete branding message, especially with their headquarters and retail stores.
The architecture chosen by the fashion houses is then transformed to fit the ideology and aesthetic vision of the brand. The structures become important tools in the overall branding process, creating shopping environments that simulate their design philosophy. In “Function and Sign: Semiotics of Architecture,” postmodern theorist Umberto Eco examines how to properly examine architecture using semiotic theory. He writes that architecture is comprised of a series of pre-existing codes that are reexamined depending on their usage and context. His classifications express “codifications of already worked-out solutions, codifications yielding standardized messages—this instead of constituting, as would codes truly on the model of those verbal languages, a system of possible relationships from which countless significantly different messages could be generated.” These coded messages are borrowed from various periods and usages. This blend of signifiers allows for buildings, such as the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana to acquire multiple meanings over time.

Eco continues to explain that architecture is closely linked to mass culture and mass appeal. The given criterion that explains the connection between architecture and mass culture is applicable to our discussion of Fendi and the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana. First, Eco writes, “Architectural ‘discourse’ generally aims at mass appeal: it starts with accepted premises, builds upon them well-known or readily acceptable ‘arguments,’ and thereby elicits a certain type of consent.” The public has been acclimated to viewing this site as one connected to both modernity and glamour over

98 Ibid., 77.
the past decades. Between Federico Fellini’s films and various fashion events, such as Armani’s “One Night Only,” a fashionable and luxurious connotation has been added to the building. Serving as the backdrop for avant-garde events, the building has been transformed into a temple of culture. With this new constructed identity fresh in the media and in the minds of the people, Fendi has been able to further distance the structure, and themselves, from the Fascist past.

The Fendi advertisements utilize the building in their campaign of mass culture. Eco writes, “Architectural discourse is psychologically persuasive: with a gentle hand (even if one is not aware of this as a form of manipulation) one is prompted to follow the ‘instructions’ implicit in the architectural message . . .”99 In the advertisements shot by Karl Lagerfeld, the arches of the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana are omnisciently present in the background. Recalling centuries of conquests and dominance, the Roman arch lends itself to grant power and validity to Fendi. The mysterious nature of the images draws the viewer in, inciting them to further their inquiry of Fendi.

Through a manipulation of the media and a careful curation of their branding, Fendi has revised the image of the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana. Out of all of his commentary, the passage most applicable to Fendi reads:

Architectural messages can be interpreted in an aberrant way, and without the ‘addressee’ being aware of thereby perverting them. Most of us would have some sense of being engaged in a pervasion of an object if we were to use the Venus de Milo for erotic purposes or religious vestments as dustcloths, but we use the cover of an elevated roadway for getting out of the rain or hang laundry out to dry over a railing and see no pervasion in this.100

99 Ibid., 77.
100 Ibid., 77.
Fendi’s simulation of a glamorous structure has superseded the building’s connection to the Fascist regime. Emphasizing the influence of the metaphysical paintings by Giorgio de Chirico and setting for films by Federico Fellini, there is little room for questioning from the general public. To the majority of people, Fendi has leased a modernist structure that has taken on various usages over the past decades, especially events in connection to the arts. The public does not engage with the past of the structure, and instead glorifies it in its current state. As previously discussed, the ideologies of the past cannot be removed from the building, however they can be suppressed. Fendi’s appropriation of the building has resulted in a dormancy of the connection to the Fascist period.

In doing so, Fendi has successfully rebranded the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana. The building now carries a new symbolic meaning by appearing in miniature form in their boutique windows as display stands. The impeccable design, especially highlighting the linkage of Italian design to the handcraft nature of the products, is stressed in their branding presence. This newly created hyperreal, to borrow from Baudrillard, has been created to replace the past historical events in the minds of those who interact with either the building itself or a representation of it. This shift in ideology has occurred for purely branding purposes. It would not be in Fendi’s best interest to have any connection to the Fascist period, especially during a period in which fascism is on the rise in Europe. Contemporary Europe is undergoing a transformation, or rather a retrograde. The need for a reminder of the evils of the past is needed now more than before. Fendi’s usage of the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana
attempts to scrub the past, while promoting an innate Italianness that may never have existed.
Appendix A

FENDI AND THE PALAZZO DELLA CIVILTÀ ITALIANA

Fashion and architecture were one of the favoured forms of expressing avant-garde culture in the early decades of the twentieth century. The famous Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana (now Fendi's Roman headquarters) is a perfect example. The inspiration came directly from de Chirico's metaphysical paintings from the years just before World War I, now just 100 years ago.

The mystery of his arches inspired over twenty years later this Roman landmark building.

The past and history here are now beyond “good and evil” as Nietzsche would have said. For us the inspiration is like the desire of the Italian heart. But it has to be filtered and transcended. It’s an interpretation we should not try to explain.

If designers and architects conceive their work as a poet might conceive his poems there will be a sensuous and emotional factor. However, Italian fashion and Italian architecture have to be 100% Italian in their claim to universality.

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Bibliography


