

Neoclassical Form and the Construction of Power in Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany

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The *Führer* Visits the Eternal City

On the evening of 3 May 1938, three darkened railcars glided into Rome's freshly constructed Ostiense Station. As the train slowed to a halt, some 500 Germans waited onboard for the guest of honor to disembark. The station hummed with the din of several hundred cheering Italians, their cries of excitement growing louder with every official handshake and camera flash. The guest was led through the pro-Fascist crowd, and finally took his place alongside Italian King Victor Emanuel III in the monarch's horse-drawn carriage.¹ From the platform, the imperial glories of the Palatine Hill could be glimpsed in the distance, beyond the expansive ruins of the Baths of Caracalla. Completed mere months before, Ostiense Station was built with this particular reception in mind, its travertine stone façade an attempt to make this specific visitor feel at home.² Within its pillared portico were sheltered elaborate mosaics, comprised mainly of black and white tesserae, each working to promote the Fascist construction of a glorious Roman past. The eastern wall of the station boasted a relief of Pegasus and Bellerophon, a mythological duo linked by their powerful alliance and heroic fate. As members of Mussolini's *Partito Nazionale Fascista* (National Fascist Party) led their guests out of the station towards the center of Rome, the visitors were paraded past a carefully assembled juxtaposition of ancient and modern urban design. Flames and floodlights illuminated Hitler's procession through the Imperial Fora, under the Arch of Constantine, and around the candle-lit Flavian Amphitheater. Street lamps were draped with swastika banners, and the roads were lined with crowds of enthusiastic Italians jockeying for a glimpse of the parade.³

¹ "Hitler will Get a Ride behind Horses in Rome," *New York Times*, 3 May 1938.

² See Figure 13.9 in ch. 13 above.

³ Istituto Nazionale Luce (1938).

A Diplomatic Mission—or Architectural Research?

The true purpose of this visit continues to vex historians.⁴ Little bureaucratic progress was made from the perspective of either camp, as meaningful political dialogue was kept to a minimum (perhaps indicative of Mussolini's desire to avoid extensive political commitment). It is reasonable to suppose that Hitler's trip south would have been expected to produce a binding pre-war pact between the powers, especially given von Ribbentrop's complaints over the Italians' elusive conversational tone throughout the week.⁵ In any case, the trip stands out not only for its decidedly touristic itinerary, but for its sheer length. For a man who would later prove intent on world dominion, Adolf Hitler rarely ventured beyond the security of his own Reich. Aside from several diplomatic trips around Europe that never lasted more than seventy-two hours at a time, this "official" trip to Rome was to be the highlight of the dictator's experience of international travel.⁶ For an entire week, Nazi officials delighted in the hospitality of their Italian counterparts, touring hand-picked monuments and neighborhoods, many of which had only recently been "beautified" and "restored" to reflect their "true splendor."⁷ While Mussolini could hardly wait to show off his highly-choreographed military displays, the *Führer* was most impressed by Rome's eternal grandeur, and seized every opportunity to take in its revived imperial trappings. When an unexpected rainstorm led to the cancellation of a military demonstration, Hitler jumped at the opportunity to return to the museums and exhibitions which *Il Duce* had long since abandoned in favor of a relaxing night in.⁸ The inclement weather also afforded Hitler the chance to re-visit the Pantheon, this time in private, asking his official guides and histori-

4 Mallett (2000), 161.

5 Schmidt (1951), 79. N.B. The Tripartite Pact, signed in Berlin by Hitler, Ciano of Italy, and Kuruu of Japan, was not authored until 1940; cf. Presseisen (2013), 250–281.

6 Spotts (2009), 322. Spotts notes the *Führer's* "brief visit to Venice in 1934, a cruise along the Norwegian coast, a night in Prague and a quick tour of Warsaw in 1939, a few hours in Paris and Strasbourg as well as a meeting with Franco on the French-Spanish border in June 1940, a short visit to Finland to see Field Marshal Mannheim in 1942 and several hours in Florence to see Mussolini in 1940."

7 Mussolini (1998), 295. Mussolini explains in his autobiography that "Rome is first of all a city with the aura of destiny and history. It is the capital of the New Italy ... I could not refuse the resources necessary to make this magnificent capital city aesthetically beautiful ... By isolating the monuments of ancient Rome, the relation between the ancient Romans and the Italians is made more beautiful and suggestive."

8 Spotts (2009), 324. For more on the Fascist exhibitions of *romanità* and imperial classical heritage, see Joshua Arthurs' chapter in this volume.

ans to wait outside so that he could view “one of the most perfect buildings of all time” in solitude.⁹ The Pantheon would later prove to be the inspiration for the Große Halle, the dome of which would dominate the skyline of Hitler’s *Germania* project, and serve as the focal point of the North-South Axis in Berlin.¹⁰ It seems rather plausible, then, especially considering the projects that Hitler was currently orchestrating at home with Todt and Speer, that this trip might have been intended as more of a research trip than a diplomatic visit. If so, the immediate impact of the journey is unmistakably clear. Fritz Wiedemann, Hitler’s personal adjutant, described the influence of one of the *Führer*’s several visits to the Colosseum that week: “One Sunday afternoon in Rome I had to accompany him there. He studied all the architectural details and the way they affected the overall impression; after our return from Rome he made changes in the design of his Congress Hall (in Nuremberg).”¹¹ Party architect Hermann Giesler (who would later be tasked with redesigning Munich) also recounted his chief patron’s reflections on his time spent in Rome, in particular his return to the Pantheon in private. According to Giesler, Hitler had gushed that “From the time I experienced this building—no description or photograph did it justice—I became interested in its history ... For a short while I stood in this space (the rotunda)—what majesty! I gazed at the large open oculus and saw the universe and sensed what had given this space the name Pantheon—God and the world are one.”¹²

Though the *Führer*’s packed itinerary betrays a genuine interest in many of Mussolini’s freshly fascistized ancient Roman architectural and archaeological sites, it might also foreshadow an important difference in the ways that these men intended to utilize the classical language of architecture, and of antiquity in general, to achieve specific ideological aims. Certainly, within the context of this visit, sites like the Pantheon, the Imperial Fora, and the Colosseum were some of the *Duce*’s most prized showpieces—but to Hitler, they appear to have been objects of genuine reverence and undeniable aesthetic influence. As Whyte has noted, “although he paid lip service to the Doric-Germanic bloodline, Hitler’s architectural preferences tended strongly towards Imperial Roman models.”¹³ This tension, made more severe by the ubiquitous influence of post-Weimar modernist rationale and trends in design, stood to have a direct impact

9 Schram (1986), 62.

10 See Figure 15.11 in ch. 15 above.

11 Wiedemann (1964), 87–88.

12 Giesler (1977), 30.

13 Whyte, this volume.

on the National Socialist brand of (purportedly) functional neoclassicism that would come to redefine the German urban landscape. Fascist Italy, meanwhile, having quite confidently begun to recognize itself as the rightful heir to the Rome of Augustus, grappled with its own aesthetic orientation while erecting some surprisingly inventive, yet at times rather incongruous, structures across its new empire. Despite the overt displays of unity that would superficially define this diplomatic visit, in this single point of intersection, we can see how the architectural production of each regime may have come to echo this different disposition towards the classical past. Through comparative analysis, this chapter will work to make sense of the key differences between the classically-inflected architectural productions and built environments of each regime, while also considering their role within the totalitarian mission of cultural renewal.

Iconography and the “Religion” of Fascism

The ceremonial pomp and circumstance of the *Führer*’s first trip to Rome was, by some accounts, an affair that felt decidedly religious in its tone and solemn orchestration. Pope Pius XI regarded the visit as the “apotheosis” of the Rome-Berlin Axis.¹⁴ The trip surely bolstered Hitler’s cultic status, as the world and its media representatives looked upon the “German Invasion of Italy” with fascination.¹⁵ As at least two generations of scholars have noted, the religiosity of fascism was key to its success. As a revolutionary ideology, fascism was predicated upon what Roger Griffin calls “palinogenesis,” or rebirth, and, in order to achieve the “populist ultranationalism” upon which it thrived, fascism had to be molded around a “mythic core” of rebirth and renewal.¹⁶ In both regimes, the mythic core so central to Griffin’s widely-accepted understanding of fascism took the form of a mythic past. For their respective populations, Italian Fascism and German National Socialism were to serve as the Phoenix to the smoldering ashes of the First World War, and offered a largely despondent populace the opportunity for a fresh start.¹⁷ To galvanize the population and

14 Pius XI (1959). See also Baxa (2007), 238. Baxa claims that the Pontiff was so offended by the National Socialists’ lack of interest in the opinion of the Holy See that he left town, “literally turning off the lights” at the Vatican until the German contingent had returned home.

15 Schmidt (1951), 80–81.

16 Griffin (1993), 26.

17 For a brief overview of the mythic transformation of each nation, see Knox (2000), 122–

harness its potential to yield supporters, laborers, and eventually soldiers, the citizens of each nation were reminded of their proud cultural heritage, a tactic unique only in the unabashed embellishment and perpetual selectivity of its promotion of a unifying national-historical narrative. What makes this tactic particularly interesting is the way in which it relied upon the ever-persuasive language of classical architecture to supplement its ideological calls to action. These regimes found a certain authority in their invocation of classical patrimony, and sought to express this authority through monumental building projects that were supposed to reinforce their weighty and eternal place in history. Although their goals may have been similar, each government, under the direct influence of its respective dictator, came to establish a unique dialect of the modernist neoclassical language that would prove central to their resurgent nation's self-image.

The Convenience of Context

Early in his forty-year reign as Rome's first emperor, Augustus (somewhat misleadingly) promoted, not a new government, but the restoration of an old one, a type of government plucked from the context of what might have been regarded as a better time, a period of grandeur and prosperity.¹⁸ Like the Romans, Hitler and Mussolini shared a nostalgic view of a past Germany, a past Italy, past empire and influence. This romanticism manifests itself in each regime's propagation of various folk movements, their reliance on ultra-rightwing rhetoric, and the most tangible aspect of their legacy: grandiose monuments, intended both to commemorate the past and to celebrate the present and future power of the revived nation. This nationalistic ethos, then, clearly transcends the innumerable brick and mortar construction projects and civic works projects that remain scattered across Europe. Meanwhile, complementary to this explosion of material development, there existed a powerful propaganda machine, and the execution of image-crafting on a scale possibly unseen since the age of Augustus. However, the image created was as focused on a refashioned national-historical narrative as it was upon the leadership cult itself.

126. For an engaging study of urban culture in the service of Italian Fascism, see Pooley (2013).

18. For more on the Augustan "Restoration of the Republic", see Zanker (1990), 101.

In Italy, we see Mussolini impress upon the nation his concept of *romanità*, or “roman-ness”. With a dependent nod toward the purported glories of ancient Rome, Mussolini sought to rebuild his “New Rome” in the image of the ancient empire he thought he understood.¹⁹ In Germany, a nation still reeling from the burdens heaped upon its population following the Treaty of Versailles, we see the new leadership maintaining a slightly different relationship with an equally illusory past. The massive, seemingly endless building projects commissioned by the National Socialist government harnessed the authority vested in classical form and ethos in an effort to aggressively promote its New World Order. Hitler’s *Germania* project intended to return to his followers the glory and distinction he felt they deserved. Like his Italian counterpart, the *Führer* invoked the authority of the ancients in his efforts to prompt such a national revolution.

In the 1970s, Albert Speer claimed that the architecture produced by his organization was “not unique.”²⁰ The former Chief Architect and Minister of Armaments of National Socialist Germany turns to the classical stylization of projects in cities such as Washington, Moscow, and London in an attempt to illustrate his point. The implication here is that Speer’s architecture was merely the product of its time, and that it was no more nor less remarkable than the architectural production of his American, Russian, or English peers. However, any assertion of similarity between the projects of any of these cities can only be treated as superficial, at best. Aside from the very basic structural differences between the most academically classical twentieth-century forms found in each city,²¹ none of these structures were designed with an ideological impulsion that even remotely resembled the ideological thrust behind Speer’s Hitlerian projects, which had once been tactically distributed across Germany. This example is crucial to our understanding of the power and relevance of context. Context unequivocally offers up the root of difference in meaning, and is therefore what distinguishes the true significance of one building from another. Nowhere is this more true than in the case of Speer’s unfounded comparison. There were, as Larsson points out, fundamental differences in

19 Fascist propaganda went to great lengths to distinguish between the “First, Second, and Third Rome.” The first Rome was the “Rome of the Caesars,” the second, Christian Rome, the third, Fascist Rome (on the intersections between the latter two Romes, see Jan Nelis’ chapter in this volume). For Flavia Marcello’s full-text translation of Mussolini’s “La Nuova Roma” speech, see chapter 14 above. For more on Mussolini’s “superficial knowledge of the classical world,” see Nelis (2007).

20 Speer (1969), 81.

21 Some of the most identifiable elements of National Socialist architecture, its generous use of the pilaster, for instance, are noticeably absent from each of these examples.

the circumstances surrounding the conception and production of American (as well as Soviet and British) architecture, not least its readily acknowledged “widespread eclecticism.”²² It seems, however, that the totalitarian imprint on neoclassicism would leave the style forever changed. After the traditional mode comes into contact with such divisive ideology, its form is taken captive by new versions of “traditional” motifs and patterns. To some, classical forms would be forever linked with tyranny and megalomania, a reactionary style that quite naturally fitted the image of the fascist New World Order. As Léon Krier has noted, “classical architecture was implicitly condemned to a heavier sentence than Speer the Reichsminister” during the postwar Nuremberg trials.²³

Staging the Rebirth of Empire

In 1922, as Mussolini’s grasp on power strengthened, the bombastic rhetorician began to act upon his desires to resurrect the image of Italy’s capital city. For the urban planners and designers within the newly formed *Governatorato* (the municipal government established by Mussolini), such a task would draw almost exclusively upon the historicized representation of a disgraced Rome.²⁴ Smothered by centuries of medieval clutter and grime, the contemporary consensus appeared to have been that Rome and her majesty had been dishonored; instead, the veritable motherland of western culture and civic structure had been forced to don the unsightly rags of a neglected peasant—looking on while her northern sisters in Florence, Bologna, Turin, and Milan flourished as artistic and intellectual strongholds. It seems that Rome’s unenviable status was never lost on Mussolini, who, until relatively late into his political career, remained committed to living and working from cosmopolitan and prosperous Milan.²⁵ Mussolini’s disdain for Rome was so severe, in fact, that, as a young man, the opinionated journalist once described Rome as “a parasitic city of landladies, shoeshine boys, prostitutes, priests and bureaucrats, Rome—a city without a genuine proletariat—is not the center of the nation’s political life, but rather the source of its infection.”²⁶ What the expert propagandist came to see in

22 Larsson (2013), 243.

23 Krier (2013), xi.

24 Cf. Marcello, chapter 14 above.

25 Arthurs (2012), 9.

26 Mussolini (1978), vol. 3, 190–191. Quoted in Arthurs (2012), 9.

Rome, however, was its endless potential to provide a material backdrop to his Party's cause. The "myth of Rome," as he called it, was soon to become Italian Fascism's "point of departure and point of reference; it is our symbol or, if you prefer, our myth. We dream of a Roman Italy, wise and strong, disciplined and imperial. Much of what was once the immortal spirit of Rome has risen again in Fascism: our *Littorio* is Roman, our military organization is Roman, our pride and our courage are Roman. *Civis Romanus Sum*."²⁷ *Il Duce* made this declaration on 21 April 1922, the 2,675th anniversary of the city's legendary founding. While this occasion is often remembered for its ceremonious fanfare, it also marks the true beginnings of the implementation of the Fascist cultural program that would soon ingratiate itself with a still somewhat skeptical Italian populace.

Mussolini's eagerness to map his epic narrative of cultural superiority onto Rome's architectural endowment has led some experts to regard both the newly constructed Fascist sites and the fascistized ancient structures as physical forces of consent-inspiring legitimation. As Flavia Marcello indicates, the harnessing of these sites' rhetorical potential, along with the calculated destruction of urban areas that stood in contrast with the regime's self-image, "created spaces for the ritual and spectacle" that would so effectively reinforce the concept of *romanità*.²⁸ By ceremoniously carving away any neighborhood that stood in the way of the Fascist plan to physically resurrect tangible testaments to a unifying national past (a process known as *sventramento*, or "disemboweling"),²⁹ Mussolini's archaeologists and draftsmen would be given ample opportunity to further articulate the Party's message. Through the construction of modern buildings, monuments, and complexes, Italy's contrived classical heritage was transmitted through the large-scale transformation of the Eternal City's topography.

However, Marcello's concept of a totalitarian "theater of consent" in architectural terms need not be confined to the Fascist city of Rome, or even to the Italian interwar experience. Of course, as Marcello explains, the systematic modification of large urban areas and the creation of "channels of representational space" formed a critical element of the Fascist regime's ability to transmit ideological messages.³⁰ It was this public space, designed and built with very

27 Mussolini (1951), vol. 27, 269, also quoted in Arthurs (2012), 1.

28 Marcello, chapter 14 in the present volume.

29 Cecchi (1937).

30 For more on "the theater of consent", see Flavia Marcello's chapter on "Vision and Rhetoric in the Designs for Fascist Rome" in the present volume.

specific functions in mind, that would provide the Party with a setting from which it would be able to further advance its ideological and rhetorical mission. These camera-friendly structures would ultimately transform place and space into a political ideology, constituting the *mise en scène* of the ritualistic Fascist performance and spectacle that was always intended to complement the pride-soaked propaganda disseminated via cinemas and newsreel footage across Mussolini's "new empire".³¹ Quite obviously, though, save for the Fascists' policy of *sventramento*,³² this process is all but mirrored in the National Socialists' construction and subsequent showcasing of their interpretation of classical form and ritual. In many ways, Leni Riefenstahl's internationally-acclaimed films, and their monumental articulation of a destiny-bound, united Germany, actually suggest that the National Socialists were even more successful than the Italian Fascists in their ability to establish, populate, and even sell out the "theater of consent" which was so crucial to the domestic totalitarian mission.

Italian Fascist Cultural Renewal and the Built Environment

The Fascist program of cultural renewal was by no means confined to the Italian peninsula. Popular press outlets, tourist agencies, and global news organizations became saturated with reports on the honor and prestige reintroduced by Mussolini's still nascent government. As magazines hurried to print the eye-catching, ruin-filled travel ads of the state-subsidized *Ente Nazionale Industrie Turistiche*, Fascist Italy continued to rebrand itself while plotting its course toward total reclamation of imperial glory. *National Geographic* correspondent John Patric recounted the powerful scene he encountered while on assignment in *Il Duce's* Rome: "I stood under Benito Mussolini's office window after Addis Ababa fell ... The Roman Empire was reborn that night. Later it was named, *"L'Impero Italiano"*, yet Romans rule it as surely as their fathers from the near-by

31 For more on the transformation of place into coherent political ideology see Jerram (2011). On the Fascist "political communication strategy that favored gesture and performance over text," see Berezin (2007), 46; also Marcello, chapter 14 in the present volume. For an image of Speer's Zeppelinfeld in Nuremberg, the setting for many of the major *Reichsparteitage* (Party Rallies) made famous by the propaganda efforts of Riefenstahl and Goebbels, see Figure 15.9 in ch. 15 above.

32 Although, as Whyte mentions in his chapter in the present volume, there are certainly parallels with the process of *sventramento* in the Nazi disregard for the domestic space of Jewish families in areas of Berlin during the early phases of Speer's *Germania* project; for more on this, see e.g. Jaskot (2000).

forum ruled most of the world they knew. Empires have fallen. This one—and this one alone—has risen again.”³³ The success of the Italian Pavilion at the 1939 New York World’s Fair, designed by architect Michele Busiri Vici, also drew international attention, and indeed, critical acclaim, thanks to its “ingenuous [*sic*] synthesis of the architecture of Classical Rome and Modern Italy.”³⁴

The international scholarly community also recognized, and in certain cases commended, the highly publicized government-led efforts to unearth Italy’s classical heritage. One American classicist went so far as to publish an article attempting to identify an ancient Roman precedent for the behavior, discourse, and new policies of the Fascist leadership. A 1928 article published in *The Classical Journal* promotes the understanding of “Italian character” as an innate disposition—one determined as much by geography as genealogy: “Can such an inheritance of history and romance fail to be ingrained in the nature and thinking of the Italian people? Even though the present Roman possesses none of the old Roman blood, yet he still lives on the same hills, by the same Tiber, beneath the same sky, surrounded by the same mountains. Above the ground and beneath it are the tangible remains of ancient Roman civilization, symbols of power once almost fabulous. These things, which do not change, have molded the Roman, the Italian character.”³⁵ It seems that, to the author, there was no question but that the people of twentieth-century Italy would welcome a new mode of existence modeled on the prosperous leadership of ancient Imperial Rome. Under Fascism, they were finally given an opportunity, and the outcome was hardly cause for distress. Wagener goes on to praise the excavations that “laid bare” the ancient fora, the *Umbilicus Urbis Romae* (“the navel of the city of Rome”), and celebrates the fact that certain sites are “now rid of encumbering dirt and buildings.”³⁶ The state’s commitment to reorganizing its urban space so as to create “a vast zone in the heart of the city where one can relive the glorious events of the past on the very ground and amid the very surroundings with which they were enacted,”³⁷ was also treated positively by the author, and afforded the Italian people direct access to the most important

33 Patric (1937), 269.

34 Anon. (1939), 105. See Barisione (2013), 30. See Figure 13.12 in ch. 13 above for a rendering of Busiri Vici’s 1939 Italian Pavilion.

35 Wagener (1928), 670.

36 Wagener (1928), 671. This sentiment is shared by *National Geographic*’s John Patric who, in reference to the *Governatorato*’s excavation projects, wrote in 1937 that “This isolation program is remarkable. Old ruins are more imposing if surrounded by parks and squares instead of slums.” (1937, 279).

37 Wagener (1928), 671.

“tangible evidences of imperial grandeur”³⁸ which would come to define the only favorable elements of the Fascist legacy in Italy.

Wagener was not alone in his belief that the Italian people were somehow genetically predisposed to yearn for an imperialistic social structure and international dominance. Two years earlier, the *Literary Digest* quoted a piece by Cecil Roberts that had been published in the *London Westminster Gazette*. Roberts claims to see a similar “inborn instinct for empire” in the Italian people, and suggests that “every time Mussolini rattles a sword or sounds the bugle-call, the blood of ancient Romans, founders of a vast empire, leaps in their veins.”³⁹ In accounting for these examples, we can score a clear victory for the wing of the Italian Fascist Party dedicated to the promulgation of a new, carefully-crafted national-historical narrative. This narrative, along with its material consequences (Rome’s “new spatiotemporal and symbolic order”),⁴⁰ might best be interpreted as Mussolini’s shrewd attempt to bridge the gap between *imperium* and *auctoritas*.⁴¹

National Socialist Cultural Renewal and the Built Environment

For no less than twelve years, from Hitler’s seizure of absolute power to his demise beneath the rubble-laden streets of Berlin, the German landscape was dramatically transformed. The changes in Germany were not entirely superficial, as the emphasis on urban redesign and widespread commission of monumental building projects reinforced the major, ostensibly popular, swing in political ideology. This change had afforded the new government with an opportunity to present its constituency with an updated, heroic national narrative. Each project which represented this broader national-historic narrative was to play a role in the transmission of a rejuvenated sense of Germanic pride. Each project, conceived and designed in the unique language of National Socialist neoclassicism, provided a vehicle for the communication of the Hitlerian notion of nationalism and supremacy. These messages, scripted by Hitler, and transmitted through the material output of Speer, Giesler, Troost, Wiedemann, or any number of his trusted architects, were received and consumed by

38 Wagener (1928), 672.

39 “The Mussolini Empire,” *Literary Digest*, 6 March 1926, 18–19.

40 What Kallis refers to as Rome’s “new urban syntax”; see Kallis (2012), 46.

41 For a concise explanation of Hannah Arendt’s understanding of *auctoritas*, as well as its legacy and relationship to a “modern loss of memory,” see Hammer (2015).

a German populace that was being primed and prepared for a large-scale war. It is easy to consider the nationalistic ethos and hubris communicated by these building projects as an ingredient of the fatefully intoxicating cocktail which prompted the same pan-Germanic fervor that enabled the Nazi government to spend almost an entire year publicly looking for an excuse for war. But these buildings, distinctive in style and tone, aggressively gripped the international community as well, albeit for different reasons.

By the close of the 1937 Paris Exposition, the world had found ample opportunity to recognize Germany's commitment to self-reinvention. Speer's German Pavilion not only earned the Germans a gold medal, but made an enormous statement with regard to the Third Reich's newly exalted opinion of itself.⁴² Its imposing structural dominance was to be understood as an expression of power and superiority that mirrored the primacy of Germanic culture and tradition. For many, this display was evidence of a disturbing psychological inclination on behalf of the Reich leadership—one that should be recognized as the precursor to the type of nationalistic posturing that was to draw the continent into destructive war less than three years later. Consequently, for some of those who confronted these designs from a distance, the specific form came to be seen as synonymous with totalitarianism.⁴³ By evaluating the building projects of Germany's five "*Führer* Cities,"⁴⁴ we will present the opportunity to understand more fully the relationship between form and function as it pertains to the representation of a classically-rooted Germanic cultural heritage. To what extent can we discern a coherent, statewide neoclassical style from the extant buildings, the photographs of the since-destroyed projects, or the relatively well-preserved future plans for the German urban landscape? Based on how few of Giesler's plans for Munich were actually realized, it appears that this city, for example, may have fallen short of its potential to be remade and reinvented as the Party's mythical holy land and the "architectural representation of the movement."⁴⁵ Nevertheless, like most Hitlerian civic utopias, the urban planning of the Reich's most sacred city included a unique brand of classicism—and therefore a spiritually eternal—aesthetic touch. Addressing the NSDAP in July 1931, Hitler expressed

42 Fiss (2009), 102–103.

43 Krier (2013), iiix–ix. This condemnation of classical style is unjustified, according to Krier.

44 Each *Führerstadt*, or *Führer* City, was designated by Hitler himself, and all five were slated to be transformed into centers of renewed political and cultural significance by 1950. They were: Munich, Nuremberg, Berlin, Hamburg, and Linz. For more on this, see Spotts (2009).

45 Nerdinger (2008), 48.

his desire to see Munich blossom into a city of global significance, complete with the “enchanting magic of a Mecca or Rome.”⁴⁶

Because the extant sketches and plans for the five *Führer* cities suggest that the Party’s aesthetic preferences had been rather eclectic, Iain Boyd Whyte’s assertion that the “ultimate meaning” of National Socialist architecture can be found in its “celebration of death and sacrifice” should prompt fresh discussion regarding our ability to make sense of Nazi architecture’s ostensibly broad and flexible role within interwar German society.⁴⁷ Certainly, this novel perspective could stand to reinforce the fact that National Socialist architecture, in perpetual search for a codified language of state-sponsored urban design, was far from having achieved its goal. If the architectural output of the Nazi regime can only be evaluated through its ability to effectively advance its cultic worship of fallen Party members and heroic Germans, then we may only be able to consider its architecture monumental. Though this “morbid fixation”⁴⁸ would aid the Party in its aggressive attempts to achieve the type of ideological reform deemed so crucial to Griffin’s understanding of the fascist “mythic core” discussed above, it is difficult to identify a specific structural or aesthetic detail that make the National Socialist plans for the new central station in Munich or Berlin more “death-obsessed” than any of the railway stations built across Italy after Mussolini’s rise to power in 1922. As Marcello has suggested, many Fascist-sponsored railway stations were known for their almost transgressive stylistic plurality; the afore-mentioned Ostiense in Rome and Santa Maria Novella in Florence in particular; each generated considerable contemporary discussion, not only for their variety in ornamentation and *romanità*-infused classical form, but for the ways in which this inventiveness may have interacted with their unambiguously modern function.⁴⁹ It is important to note, then, that the concept of martyrdom and self-sacrifice, also an important sub-theme of *romanità*, was not explicitly (or exclusively) mapped onto every totalitarian, or even National Socialist building project. With this understanding, despite National Socialist architecture’s severe and morose tone, its ultimate meaning must extend beyond its associations with the widely-acknowledged National Socialist death cult. Since the ability to document and showcase technologi-

46 Hitler to the NSDAP committee, 14 July 1921, quoted in Jäckel and Kuhn (1980), 381. Again, we see here the type of fascist religiosity so well understood by Roger Griffin and Ian Kershaw, who has called this type of intoxicating cultic veneration the “drug” of the *Führer* myth; cf. Kershaw (2001), 396; also Paxton (1998).

47 Whyte, chapter 15 above.

48 Whyte, chapter 15 above.

49 See Figure 13.1 in chapter 13 above.

cal innovation, especially through a dynamically modernist dialect of classicism, proved as critical to the Fascist *stile littorio* as to National Socialism's own architectural brand, the distinctions between civic and monumental architecture have proven difficult to detect.⁵⁰ Thus, Whyte's efforts to identify National Socialist architecture's "morbid fixation" may actually signal an important division between two different strains of totalitarian design. While the solemn monumentality of Troost's Ehrentempel or Kreis' Soldatenhalle seems to be more concerned with transmitting messages of nationalistic sacrifice and reinforcing the death-cult to a domestic audience, the civic architecture of Speer's superficially neoclassical⁵¹ Olympiastadion or Giesler's new railway station in Munich stress the otherwise reactionary Party's embrace of modernity for a much broader, international audience. This subtle split between monumental and civic design, compounded by the inherent intertextual prejudices of Party draftsmen, might help to explain the variety of National Socialist architecture.

Conclusion

More than sixty years after the downfall of these two brutal regimes, a certain totalitarian legacy lives on in their respective countries. Although the politics of this dark period have long since disappeared, elements of each regime's material production have yet to be erased from the national consciousness—and, in some cases, from the national landscape. Present-day Germany and Italy each maintain very different relationships with their dictatorial pasts. These differences are made abundantly clear upon even the most casual visit to either country—in Rome, sports fans still pass by *Il Duce's* name etched into *Il Monolito* (Figure 16.1) each time they attend a soccer match in the Olympic Stadium of the former Foro Mussolini. In Munich, by contrast, years of vegetation grow over the fractured remains of the Ehrentempel (Figure 16.2), the limestone never having been cleared following the shrine's destruction in 1946. Gener-

50 For more on the ways in which *stile littorio* "interrupted the triumphant procession of fascist modernism," see Fogu (2003), 178–184.

51 Whyte notes that, according to Speer, Hitler himself apparently influenced the final appearance of the stadium by demanding that the steel and glass were removed in favor of a more truly "Olympian" design. As a result, the already-built steel skeleton of the structure was covered in natural stone (Whyte, chapter 15 above; see Figures 15.6 and 15.7 in the same chapter for varying perspectives of the stadium). Ladd (1997, 142) indicates that there continues to be some scholarly disagreement regarding the "genesis and identity" of the stadium.



FIGURE 16.1 Il Monolito, 2015. *The sixty-foot tall obelisk was erected in 1932 and fashioned from a 300-ton cut of Carrara marble*
PHOTO BY THE AUTHOR

ations of Germans have remained committed to reclaiming their history—or at least reclaiming their public spaces. Most of the buildings discussed above were deemed salvageable, serviceable structures in need of relatively



FIGURE 16.2 *The remains of Troost's Ehrentempel and a north-facing view of the former Führerbau, which presently houses the Hochschule für Musik und Theater München, 2015*

PHOTO BY THE AUTHOR

simple cosmetic refinement. The emphasis then, was placed on the removal of ideologically-driven imagery and iconography—the converted Führerbau and Verwaltungsbau der NSDAP were put to immediate use following the dismantling of the swastika-bearing eagles which once adorned each building's stately façade. These observations are an important part of this analysis, as this chapter seeks to weigh the messages encoded in the years of interwar architecture against the context of a specific regime within a specific period of time.

As noted above, the language of National Socialist architecture purported to present itself as a clearly articulated and easily identifiable reinforcement of Germanic ideals. Since public opinion shifted irretrievably away from the regime as the war progressed, it remains difficult to measure the success Hitler's

architects might have enjoyed in this regard during the interwar period. What is clear, however, is that the Nazi leadership was guided by its own interpretation of the Doric order in its development of this language. The emphasis placed upon the development of a homogeneous Reich not only transcended architectural design, but was also almost certainly reinforced by it. This would not have been possible without the wilful manipulation of the almost mystical authority of ancient civilization. In more generalizing terms than his Italian counterpart, Hitler publicly drew on his own fantastical interpretation of classical history in order to historicize his own time. The National Socialist desire to establish a uniform style of state architecture could stem from a set of foundational struggles that their Italian peers were never forced to overcome. Because the Fascists were more successful in their early attempts to “seize the streets” in order to communicate their socio-political message of revolution, they were able to harness the forces of public attention and spectacle early on in the process of urban and cultural transformation which defined the interwar years of both nations.⁵² This offered the Fascists a base of power from which to amplify the *Duce*’s message of cultural regeneration, even before he set out to physically reconfigure large swathes of Italian land and historical memory. The Nazis’ initial struggles to control and use public urban spaces in a similar way might explain the Party’s insinuating attempts at cultural regeneration as a projection of its latent anxieties. If this was indeed the case, the Party’s appetite for order and ideological coherence takes on an additional layer of meaning.

In the case of Mussolini, attempts to reassemble the Augustan-era oligarchical structure followed a great purge—the Rome of *Il Duce*’s desire could only be realized through calculated destruction. The considerable demolition projects, which predated the more reputable Fascist construction projects, force us to reconsider our understanding of cultural production. The structures, sculptures, mosaics and fountains which fill the Foro Mussolini and EUR (Figures 16.3 and 16.4), for instance, are very obvious examples of interwar cultural production, yet we should also consider the leveling of the residential areas near the Theater of Marcellus or the Mausoleum of Augustus as a distorted form of cultural production, as well.⁵³ As mentioned above, throughout Mussolini’s reign, the regime justified its “gutting” of central Rome in the name of destiny, hygiene, fate, or honor. The creation of the Via dei Fori Imperiali, Via del Mare, and Via della Conciliazione between 1922 and 1945 did much more to change

52 See Jerram (2011), 51.

53 See Kostof (1994), 1–10.



FIGURE 16.3 *Romulus and Remus surrounded by the fasces-bearing personification of Rome and six of the nine muses along Foro Mussolini's Piazzale dell'Impero, 2015*
PHOTO BY THE AUTHOR

the face of Rome than the erection of monuments and buildings. Each new project was, in some way, tied into the concept of *romanità*, and was intended to stand as a testament to the enduring greatness of the Roman spirit. The ability to redesign a city according to the will of *Il Duce* was a testament not only to his power and ambition, but to Fascism's idea of a modernity fueled by reverence for the classical past.

As fascist orators aestheticized politics, so too, did fascist constructors. In both nations, it seems clear that the process of building was as important as the final product, as symbolic as the buildings themselves. The subordination of specific materials, though perhaps more common in Speer's later, larger projects of Nuremberg and Berlin than in Troost's Munich, was cause for celebration, and a testament to Italian or German prosperity and aptitude for technical engineering.⁵⁴ The publicity generated by the construction projects in both cities suggests as much, while the completed buildings were quickly regarded as significant accomplishments. The conscious choice of aesthetic

54 See Jaskot (2000); Homze (1967), 89–97.



FIGURE 16.4 Genius of Fascism statue, Italo Griselli, 1939. In front of the EUR's Palazzo degli Uffici, 2015

PHOTO BY THE AUTHOR

style in each of these buildings remains a source of debate amongst scholars dedicated to determining just how classical these structures can actually claim to be.

Though in direct conversation with one another, the German and Italian governments appear to have projected very different understandings of the relationship between history, aesthetics, and power. Some historians have chosen to label Hitler's buildings as the ultimate examples of functionalist neoclassicism, and quickly point to their own suggestions that many of the structures were large out of necessity—in their ability to accommodate the gathering of thousands of individuals under one state-funded roof, these massive spaces would enable the Party to “prove” popular support for the totalitarian regime.⁵⁵ It is with this understanding that I begin to question the assertion that the architecture produced by these two regimes was a form of functionalist neoclassicism. Even if Mussolini's architects had found room for a newfangled type of Vitruvian rationalism in some of their projects, Troost's symbolic honor tem-

55 Larsson (2013), 240.

ples and Giesler's megalomaniacal designs for a future Munich were hardly guided by principles of functionality and reason. With a total disregard for the Weimar-era principles of the *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Sobriety), fascist architecture set out, as Larsson rightly notes, to "make a bold display of its rejection of functionalism" in favor of its own interpretation of classicism.⁵⁶ It would be difficult to argue that even one marble foot of the sixty which make up *Il Monolito* in Rome serves some functional purpose. Few completed totalitarian projects so boldly celebrate the fascist rejection of functionalist design as the grand entrance to the Foro Mussolini, or Giesler's plans for the obelisk on the east-west axis of Munich.

Fascist design, then, just like fascist rhetoric, plundered the classical past to weave together its own image of the present. Despite their stylistic differences, this obsession with antiquity and classical heritage is what unites the architectural production of these two totalitarian regimes. Sustained through a hideous combination of romanticism, militarization, slave labor, and fear, the misappropriation of the classical world and its associated aesthetic was central to the totalitarian ability to leave the urban landscapes of Germany and Italy forever changed.

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56 Larsson (2013), 233. Larsson explains that this public break is exactly what makes National Socialist architecture "reactionary" in principle.

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