CHAPTER 5

MAKING FASCISM HISTORY IN 'THE LAND OF THE DUCE'

Paolo Heywood

> It is said among the Greeks that Themistocles was endowed with a certain incredible greatness of thought and intellect. It is said that once a certain learned man, one of the most educated of his time, approached him and promised to teach him the art of memory, which was then first becoming popular. When Themistocles asked what that could do, the teacher responded that it could make one remember everything. Themistocles responded in turn that the teacher would be doing him a much greater favour if he taught him to forget rather than remember what he wanted.
>
> —Cicero, de Oratore

INTRODUCTION

On a cold December morning in 2017 a sparse crowd of journalists and TV cameras gathered in front of an aged but otherwise nondescript stone house in a very small town in the north of Italy. People rubbed their hands together and stamped their feet, while trying their best to avoid slipping on the ice and snow around them. After a little while, a short, stocky man in his fifties, with dark thinning hair on a round head and an elegant cashmere scarf, appeared climbing the gentle hill leading up to the house, trailing a small entourage. A few reporters turned to point, and cameras swung to focus on him. As he neared the house he donned a bright tricolour sash of green, white and red, the symbol of his office as mayor of this very small town, before climbing the stone staircase leading up to the house's entrance, and turning to face the assembly.

Ninety-four years earlier, in 1923, a different – and considerably larger – crowd was assembled in front of the same house to see a different man. This

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man too had thinning hair and a round head, and also dressed elegantly (a suit, cravat and overcoat). He too stood at the top of the house's stone staircase, but he did so surrounded by admirers, a crowd of people pressing to touch him or shake his hand, while others strained to see him from below and still more leaned out of the house's windows to catch a glimpse of him. In sepia photographs of the moment he is smiling somewhat haughtily, below banners that read 'W [viva] l'Italia'.

In 2017, by contrast, the man in the tricolour sash looked solemn as he told the crowd of reporters that this place – the house, but also his town – had given birth to a man who had dishonoured his country. 'So perhaps', he said sadly, '*Damnatio memoriae* is all we deserve'.

This very small town is Predappio, birthplace and burial site of Benito Mussolini. He was born in the house that formed the background to both the events described above. His visit to his home in 1923 was his first as Prime Minister of Italy, and the occasion of great celebration, for it inaugurated the massive urban engineering project that transformed Predappio from a hamlet of a few hundred people to a bustling town of ten thousand, a jewel in the crown of Fascist planning and a sort of open-air museum to the Duce's early life. In honour of its native son's newfound glory, the town donated his birth house to him on the occasion of that visit.

The 2017 press conference was also one of inauguration. It marked the opening of a public exhibition in Mussolini's birth house (now owned by the municipality), one that would display the plans for the museum, or 'documentation centre', focused on Fascism that was projected to be installed in the ruins of the town's enormous *Casa del Fascio* (Fascist Party Headquarters).

Predappio's mayor in this period, Giorgio Frassineti, was one of the leading figures in this project. So, while he began his remarks to the press that day with the suggestion that perhaps all Predappio deserved was *damnatio memoriae*, it soon became clear that he believed that in fact it deserved much better. Referring to recent episodes of neo-Fascist violence in the wider region, he declared them symptoms of a failure to confront the past, of 'letting things go their own way'. 'I refuse to accept that we are contaminated, that we are the Chernobyl of history', he went on, employing one of his favourite metaphors. 'That would mean they have won.'

I had been doing fieldwork in Predappio for a year or so by 2017 (see Heywood 2019, 2020, 2022, 2023, 2024) and had got to know Giorgio and others involved in the plans for the museum. I was part of the group that followed him up the hill to the house that day, alongside the project's technical and academic directors, and a few associates. Before we set out for the birth house and the press conference, Giorgio had arranged an early lunch at one of Predappio's other landmarks: Ristorante del Moro, the only restaurant in Predappio to have been in existence since before Mussolini's reconstruction

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project. It would have fed and watered nineteenth-century travellers on the road from the Romagna across the border and Apennines into Tuscany. It is a small and traditional eatery serving mostly local produce. Yet we ate our lunch beneath wooden cabinets filled with bottles of Sangiovese, the local red, on which were printed propaganda-style photographs of Mussolini, labelled 'Duce d'Italia'; and three of the restaurant's neighbours on Predappio's main street are euphemistically known as 'souvenir shops', selling Fascist and Nazi-themed memorabilia, T-shirts with Donald Trump's face printed on them and even replica *manganelli*, the clubs with which Fascist goons used to beat their political opponents.

They sell such merchandise to the roughly one hundred thousand neo-Fascist visitors Predappio receives every year, who come mainly to visit Mussolini's tomb. After a series of post-mortem misadventures (documented in Luzzatto 2014), Mussolini's body was returned to his family and buried in the crypt he had had built as part of the reconstruction of Predappio. Today he lies in a stone sarcophagus beneath a bust of himself and the Italian flag, gazing out over a visitors' book in which are inscribed messages like 'come back to us Duce!'

Given this context, it is not altogether surprising that the proposal for the museum in Predappio (its planners actually referred to it as a 'documentation centre', *centro di documentazione*) acquired controversial status very swiftly. Polemics erupted in the national press between proponents and opponents, with well-known intellectuals like Luzzatto and Carlo Ginzburg participating (Luzzatto and Ginzburg 2016), and petitions and counter-petitions circulating around international academic institutions (see Carrattieri 2018 for a short summary). Much of the discussion over lunch that morning in 2017 on the part of the museum's planners had indeed been about how to respond to the recent announcement on the part of ANPI, Italy's powerful ex-partisan association, that it was coming out against the project, so Giorgio's speech that day – as on many other such occasions – was delivered with these debates in mind.

Predappio – especially in those days of furore over the museum project – has often been in many ways ground zero for ongoing Italian debates over how the country should relate to its Fascist past. While monumentalist architecture, Fascist sites of memory and revolting souvenirs can all be found throughout Italy, nowhere are the leftovers of Italian Fascism so concentrated and condensed, and nowhere else does the contemporary Italian far-right gather so regularly and in such large numbers. Giorgio, a former geology teacher, called it the 'epicentre' of Fascist 'earthquakes' in Italy in his speech that day.

Later, at another press conference in the local cinema on the same day, he invoked another of his favourite analogies: Walter Benjamin's 'Angel of

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History', looking back at the rubble of the past as he is blown irresistibly into the future on the storm of progress. 'We mustn't just look backwards', argued Giorgio, 'we must look forwards'. Later, when we were alone, Giorgio was more scathing: 'if I read that Benjamin quote in one more book I'm going to throw it in the bin immediately. . . why is he looking backwards anyway? Is he a shrimp?'

Giorgio's position is of course the reverse of the standard reading of Benjamin's interpretation of Klee's *Angelus Novus*. To Benjamin, the storm of 'progress' and an inability to attend to the rubble of the past were partly responsible for the rise of Fascism at the time he was writing, in 1940. Benjamin in some ways echoes a point made ten years before him by Italian philosopher Benedetto Croce, who suggested that 'anti-historicism' and an obsession with an abstract, vitalist future with no past were an important dimension of the philosophy that animated Fascism (see Peters 2021).

So, ironically, arguments about the relationship between Fascism and history are not new. Indeed, as Giorgio's appearance at the birth house in some ways echoed Mussolini's visit nearly a century before, some of the arguments taking place over Predappio's museum project echoed arguments from the very time that was to be museified.

If the opening conceit of this chapter is that some aspects of the debates around Predappio's museum project on Fascism constituted a repetition or reiteration of debates from the time of Fascism about time and Fascism, its ethnographic focus is on three positions within those debates about the museum, each of which took a different view on the relationship between Fascism and history.

The first such position was that of proponents of the museum, exemplified by Giorgio, who was in almost all respects its public figurehead and most vocal advocate. To Giorgio and his colleagues Fascism was already, as it were, history: that is, it was over, it had happened, occurred, been and gone, ended. Those who failed to recognize this were mistaken, whether because – like the neo-Fascist visitors who flocked to his town – they clung to some ghostly and clownish remnant of Fascism that still lingered, or because – like opponents of the museum project on the left – they feared the same ghostly and clownish remnant and could not or would not see that ghosts were all they were afraid of. Hence his annoyance at Benjamin's angel, and its inability to look forward.

To opponents of the museum, on the other hand, such as ANPI, Fascism is not history. Pointing to the failure of the Italian state to 'defascistize' itself after the war, such opponents argued that Fascism never really died. They would cite, for example, the ample evidence that exists for collaboration between the post-war Italian state and various neo-Fascist organizations, or, more obviously, they would simply point to Predappio itself, to the hundred

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thousand visitors Mussolini's tomb receives every year, and to the black-shirted marchers who come to perform the Roman salute there, in defiance of its prohibition in the Italian constitution (Heywood 2019). To construct a museum of Fascism in a place that lives and breathes Fascism would be an absurdity, even setting aside the deeply problematic political possibilities.

Neither of these two positions are particularly surprising. They correspond in some ways to an age-old distinction in literature (present in the work of Benjamin, among others) between history and memory, between on the one hand an understanding of the past as essentially distinct from the present, separated from it by the brute force of time's passage, and on the other hand an understanding of the past as somehow still alive in the present, simultaneous with it. This latter position is not so much about repetition or iteration, as in the ways in which Giorgio's press conference repeats aspects of Mussolini's visit a century earlier, about the return of something gone, but about understanding the continuous and animating presence of the past in everyday life (often through the prism of the human faculty of memory).

Most of my focus in this chapter is on a third position taken in relation to the museum project, a position that also relates to memory. This position is that taken by the majority of the inhabitants of Predappio, who regarded the museum project – as they regard most things related to their uncomfortable heritage – with a striking sort of cultivated indifference. If the first two positions might be seen as roughly corresponding to the scholarly distinction between history and memory, this third conjures up what is sometimes called the 'underside' of memory, namely forgetting. The first two positions are essentially descriptive, in the sense that for the first position Fascism is dead and therefore a possible object for the historian's gaze; for the second it is still alive in some form or another, and therefore not really the proper object of history but of politics. This third position is more obviously aspirational: for the majority of Predappiesi, their home would be a happier place not only if Fascism really were dead but if it were also condemned to *damnatio memoriae* and forgotten. Such a position of course carries with it the risk that in trying to forget Fascism one ends up repeating it – as perhaps in the elements of repetition visible in the vignette above – but trying to forget Fascism in Predappio provides at least some modicum of relief from its overwhelming presence, and from the memories of it pursued by those who visit in black shirts.

Despite the uncountable number of anthropological works devoted to memory published over the preceding three decades or so, and though it is a truism in that work and in the broader 'memory studies' literature to note that forgetting is a necessary corollary of remembering ('Seeing one thing is not seeing another. Recounting one drama is forgetting another' – Ricoeur 2004: 452), anthropological interest in forgetting has been largely sporadic

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and unsystematized, a fact often noted by those who have taken interest in it (e.g. Battaglia 1993: 430; Carsten 1995: 317; Vitebsky 2008: 244). In the 1990s, during the initial 'memory boom' (Berliner 2005), Debbora Battaglia, Anne Christine Taylor, Janet Carsten, Marc Augé and Jennifer Cole all produced brilliant but more or less isolated interventions on the subject (Augé 1998; Battaglia 1992, 1993; Carsten 1995; Cole 1998; Taylor 1993; cf. also Forty and Küchler 1999), and remarkably little has been said on the topic since then (though see Harrison 2004 and Vitebsky 2008), despite the fact that some recent work outside the discipline has returned to questions of forgetting in critique of the wider 'memory studies' paradigm (e.g. Rieff 2016; Symons 2019).

What literature does exist on forgetting is more or less united in insisting that it is erroneous to understand forgetting as a 'culture-free process' (Harrison 2004: 150), and as always and simply the negative obverse of remembering that occurs merely in the latter's absence. Rather, we should look to examine instances of what Nietzsche termed 'active forgetting', the human capacity to 'feel unhistorically', to knowingly abandon links with the past.

Much of this small literature is also concerned to point out the socially productive effects that can come with forgetting, in line in some ways with some recent polemics against our memory-saturated age (e.g. Rieff 2016). While Euro-Americans are habituated to think of forgetting as a moral failure of sorts (Connerton 2008: 59), Battaglia, Carsten, Cole and Taylor all describe non-Western contexts in which more or less ritualized versions of forgetting lead not to disintegration and social anomie but to what Connerton (ibid.: 63) calls 'the formation of a new identity', or in Battaglia's (1993: 430) case, in an echo of Renan's famous characterization of a nation as united by forgetting, even to 'society' itself; and as the Ciceronian epigraph to this chapter suggests, there is an undercurrent to Western thought on memory too in which forgetting has a constructive role to play.

A key strand in work on memory in general is the relationship between memory and place (as in the neologism 'memoryscape'), a strand that also emerges specifically in literature on memory in Italy around Fascism and the Second World War (e.g. Diemberger 2016). Just as correspondingly less attention has been paid to forgetting than it has to memory, however, so has less attention been paid to the relationship between place and forgetting. Simon Harrison (2004) makes this point in a fascinating discussion of the role that the landscape around the middle Sepik River of Papua New Guinea plays in local understandings of memory, which is understood as a distinctly human faculty, in contrast to natural surroundings prone to constant shifting, erosion and forgetfulness.

In this chapter I describe Predappiesi attitudes to an urban landscape utterly saturated with difficult memories and dissonant heritage, and their

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efforts to transform it into a space of forgetting. These broader attitudes to their home, I suggest, inform the specific stance that people in Predappio tended to take in relation to the museum project that their mayor hoped would rescue them from '*damnatio memoriae*'. I show this through three examples of spaces in and around Predappio. I argue that to characterize Italian attitudes to Fascist heritage as forgetful in the sense of being failures of memory – as they often are characterized – is, at least in Predappio, to misread the nature of forgetting as a passive rather than an active process.

A 'HOUSE OF MEMORIES'

The Villa Carpena is a little way outside of Predappio, on the road to Forli. Its association with Predappio stems from the fact that it was the post-war home of Mussolini's wife, Donna Rachele (as she is often called). It is rarely spoken of by people in Predappio though, and is mainly associated with the town by tourists who combine a visit to both in the same trip.

The Mussolinis first bought the house in 1914 when Benito Mussolini was made editor of *Avanti!*, the socialist daily. It was one of the regular family residences during his time in power, and in 1957, after a period of time in confinement and with the return of her husband's body to the area, Rachele Mussolini moved there permanently. It remained in family hands after her death until 2000, when it was bought and transformed into a 'museum' by an outside entrepreneur who already owned one of the neo-Fascist 'souvenir' shops in Predappio.

The word 'museum' is written in inverted commas on the sign on the front gate of the Villa Carpena, as if to warn the visitor of what is to come. Below, without the inverted commas, are the words 'house of memories'. It is advertised by large signs on a number of main roads around the area, all of which have been defaced by anti-fascist graffiti.

The villa is a vast and almost entirely uncurated collection of objects related to Fascism and to the Mussolinis. It seems to have no guiding thread. Its grounds are filled with stone plaques commemorating Fascists fallen for their country, busts of Mussolini of various sizes, some extremely unhappy sounding peacocks, a haphazard and seemingly random array of agricultural machinery that Rachele Mussolini is said to have collected, a replica of the glider used by German troops to rescue Mussolini from imprisonment after the coup of 1943 and a life-size model of Father Christmas wearing Fascist black.

To get in you have to pay an entrance fee, and to see the interior of the house you have to go on one of the regular tours, run, when I visited, by a skeletal man in his eighties with a shaven head.

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The interior of the house, he claimed, has been preserved as a shrine to the domestic life of the Mussolinis. If this is true, then Rachele must have found it difficult to throw things away, because almost every wall and surface in the house is occupied by an object or a photograph with some tangential relationship to Fascism or the Mussolinis. During our visit the guide picked up a perfectly ordinary men's shoe from a shelf and told us simply, 'this was Romano [Mussolini]'s shoe', as if that was all we would need to know to understand its importance.

The trope of the museum (especially the biographical museum) as a space the subject has only just left, as it were, a preserved reminder of the ordinary traces of an individual life, is not in itself uncommon (see e.g. Reed 2002). Fictionalized or literary versions of it can also be found, as in the Sherlock Holmes museum in London, for example. Yet the Villa Carpena is not quite the same sort of phenomenon. While it contains elements of this genre (for example, one of Mussolini's uniforms laid out on his bed, as if he were just about to get dressed), its enormous range of hodgepodge objects is too excessive for one to imagine the house as an actual dwelling. Some of the walls are covered almost floor to ceiling in pictures, plaques and framed Fascist slogans; kitchen surfaces are nearly invisible beneath a plethora of cups, plates and crockery of all forms. Yet the aesthetic of ordinary memories is very much the target.

On my visit our guide claimed to have known Rachele Mussolini and spent a great deal of time extolling her merits as an 'ordinary' Italian housewife, pointing out her inexpensive clothes and kitchenware. The whole point of this 'museum', he noted repeatedly, was to show visitors the 'real', private lives of the Mussolinis, as normal, 'ordinary' people, away from politics. This did not stop him from also engaging in spirited debate with some on my tour group over broader political and historical questions regarding the merits of Fascism: he repeatedly claimed that the Holocaust was a myth, and that more people were killed by partisans after the war than by Fascism in twenty years. He lamented the erasure of Fascism from Italian history, at one point holding up a street sign from 1930s Predappio, decorated with the fasces: 'Why would you throw this away?' he asked rhetorically, 'Look at how well-made it is!' and he knocked it with his fist to demonstrate its durability. Unknowingly echoing some of De Certeau's remarks on the affordances of street names as tools of power, he added, 'Just so that everybody had to learn new street names!'

He was also very keen to suggest that the house was haunted by those whose memories it contains: one of his proudest exhibits is a mirror in which he claimed you could see the outline of Mussolini's face. I could see only smudges, but an Italian TV programme called 'Ghost Hunters' has filmed an episode at the villa based on this mirror.

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In the attic of the house is what the guide called a 'documentation centre', full of pro-fascist pamphlets and newspapers (most of them still in plastic wrapping) and decorated by amateurish murals of Fascist soldiers. Our guide argued that schoolchildren should be brought here to learn about their 'real' history.

After the tour, one is gently guided towards a shop selling souvenirs of the sort one can find in Predappio, alongside fascist-leaning history books, and even some of Romano Mussolini's paintings (though many in Predappio insist that these are forgeries). On the tour I attended, a special guest was wheeled out to meet us at its conclusion: a 94-year-old woman with one of the most strikingly blue pairs of eyes I have ever seen. I had read about her in the local press before my visit: she had been a volunteer for the Italian Social Republic (the German-controlled puppet state based in Salò) in the last days of the war, and her continued devotion to the cause was so strong that she had decided to live her final days at the Villa Carpena. The owner and his wife were evidently proud of this living addition to their collection of memories, and encouraged me to talk to her in English. To my surprise, she spoke the language perfectly and with a cut-glass accent. This, she told me, was a result of having lived in England for a few years in the 1950s ('in exile', she called it). She said she'd decided to die at Villa Carpena because her happiest memories were of the RSI, and it brought them all back to her.

The Villa Carpena is not in any genuine sense a museum, as its owners themselves seem to acknowledge when they put the word in quotation marks. It is far more like De Certeau's 'anti-museum', or, in the language of the owners, a 'house of memories'. It is an uncurated assemblage of objects related not by any kind of master narrative but by fragmented associations ('this is Romano's shoe') and the ghosts of Rachele Mussolini the ordinary housewife and Mussolini's outline in his mirror. This 'ordinariness' is created and constructed, and obviously so (cf. Heywood 2021, 2023, 2024): if indeed Rachele was a master of household management, she would certainly have disapproved of her kitchenware being strewn around as it is. The haphazardness and disorganization, whether deliberate or not, sit strangely beside the clearly reverential attitude of its staff, evoking an impression of bathos: Fascist slogans about Mussolini always being right sit oddly amid the chaos of what we are supposed to see as his ordinary life.

The 'memories' in the Villa Carpena are not ones that Predappiesi themselves welcome. When they speak of Villa Carpena they will often snort or raise their eyebrows at what they perceive to be a cynical, money-spinning enterprise of the same genre as the souvenir shops. Furthermore, the content of Villa Carpena's 'everyday' memorialization is geared towards tourists and outsiders because it is exactly what many Predappiesi go to considerable lengths to avoid. Where the Villa Carpena self-consciously positions itself as

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a 'house of memories', clearly constructed to appear as if its erstwhile owners have only just departed, other parts of Predappio's urban landscape over which the Predappiesi themselves have control have undergone the opposite process: stripped of almost anything that could conjure up memories, they have been emptied out into places of forgetting.

THE HOUSE OF THE FASCES

Unlike the Villa Carpena, only a couple of signs point the way to the house in which Mussolini was born in Predappio, the one on whose steps Giorgio stood to announce the museum project, and they are small and coloured brown for 'heritage', again unlike the large advertisements for the Villa Carpena that dot the roads around the town, which are banded by the Italian tricolour.

The house itself is completely unmarked on the outside, unless there is an exhibition inside (I am aware of three since it opened for this purpose, in 1999), in which case a small A-frame sign may be placed by the door, or a poster on the wall. To get inside, one climbs a stone staircase and enters through a door, in front of which is a reception desk manned by a municipal worker (it is owned by the municipality). The house gets few visitors, largely because there is nothing to see inside of it. It is completely empty. Before my fieldwork in Predappio it had once hosted an exhibition about Mussolini's early life, and while I was there it was briefly used to display the plans for the *Casa del Fascio*.

Similarly empty is the *Casa del Fascio* itself. This is the most emblematic building in Predappio. It dominates the main square of Sant'Antonio, and its tower is one of the clearest sights from the surrounding landscape. Built not only to host the local party headquarters, the *Casa del Fascio e dell'Ospitalità* also originally held a theatre, a library and a bar, and was used to provide facilities for the many visitors who flocked to Predappio under the regime (Storchi 2019; Tramonti 2014). With the fall of Fascism it became state property along with all party-owned buildings (cf. Maulsby 2014 on the national legacy of *Case del Fascio*), and, as Simona Storchi (2019) has documented, the subsequent seventy years saw a constant tug-of-war between the municipal authorities and the state over who should be responsible for the building's upkeep. In the 1960s and 1970s parts of it played host to a manufacturing company and a socialist working men's club (*circolo*), but already by 1968 the *Casa del Fascio* was beginning to fall to pieces (Storchi 2019: 144), and that decline has steadily continued.

To enter the *Casa del Fascio* today you have to be accompanied by someone from the municipal authorities, and you have to wear a hard hat. That

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is because the interior of the building is a wreck. There are piles of rubble everywhere, and holes in the walls and ceilings where water comes in and forms pools on the floor. Bits of corrugated iron block access to various corridors, and in one of its main rooms the huge iron flagpole that used to fly the tricolour lies abandoned on the floor. Pigeons have made their home inside, and the hard hat protects one from more than just collapsing ceilings.

Storchi (2019) has demonstrated that various municipal authorities have, over the years, sought to intervene in this process of decay, restore the *Casa del Fascio* and put it to some kind of public use. The museum project is only the most recent such attempt. None of those attempted interventions, however – including, as of the time of writing, the museum project itself – have met with any success, and the building remains in a sort of spectral state: despite its ruined interior, apart from some graffiti and broken windows it appears more or less undamaged on the outside, allowing it to blend relatively unremarkably into its surroundings.

Storchi's extensive archival research has shown that the problem of what to do with the *Casa del Fascio* preoccupied a number of successive municipal administrations over the decades. Yet part of the reason that Storchi's account is so valuable is that it flies in the face of everyday wisdom in Predappio, which holds that nobody has ever really cared for the fate of the building. Some people remember the manufacturing company, or the socialist bar, but nobody that I knew spoke of the *Casa del Fascio* as a great missed opportunity, with the exception of those involved in the planning of the present museum project. Most Predappiesi will pass the building on a day-to-day basis or sit at one of the two bars directly opposite it on Piazza Sant'Antonio, but they will do so without paying it the least attention. It has long become part of the fabric of ordinary life in the town, but what has become ordinary and taken for granted about it is that it exists in a kind of liminal state: not nearly ruined enough in its exterior to be noticeably different from its surroundings, but utterly desolate inside, the whole building exists as a façade. Without any explicit trappings of Fascism on the outside, or any marks of history bar a tiny plaque (only erected in the past few years), and with the inside safely empty and thus attracting even fewer visitors than Mussolini's birth house, it can pass as unremarkable.

Hannah Malone (2017) has shown in comprehensive detail how confused and inconsistent strategies for dealing with Fascist urban heritage have been at a national level in post-war Italy. While some aspects of this heritage, like Predappio's street names and signs (and see Storchi 2013), were marked for destruction in the immediate aftermath of the regime's fall, much of it has since been simply neglected or recycled without attention to its past (see also Arthurs 2010; and Mitterhofer 2013; Hökerberg 2017 for a

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counter-example) in what Nick Carter and Simon Martin (2017: 355) call 'uncritical preservation', 'which allows Fascist sites to blend into the urban landscape' (Malone 2017: 452).

This is in contrast to post-war Germany, where Sharon Macdonald (2006, 2009) has described the fate that befell the Nazi party rally grounds in Nuremberg. Macdonald notes the ways in which the Nuremberg grounds were designed by Albert Speer with their own ruination in mind, intended to look to a thousand-year posterity like the classical ruins of ancient Greece and Rome (see e.g. Arthurs 2012 and Kallis 2014 on the importance of Rome to Fascist architecture). This led to an impasse in post-war debates over what to do with this material heritage of the Nazi regime: repair it and you risk returning it to its former glory and resurrecting it as a site of pilgrimage for the far right; but abandon it altogether and you accomplish exactly what its Nazi planners intended, and risk imbuing it instead with the allure of ruins. Macdonald (2006: 19) explains the solution arrived at by then state culture minister Hermann Glaser:

> What should be done, he suggested, was to let the buildings fall into a state of semi-disrepair but not total ruin. They should be allowed to look ugly and uncared-for. And they should be used for banal uses, such as storage, and leisure activities like tennis and motor-racing. Such uses were already underway, but they had been put in place unreflectively and for pragmatic reasons. In Glaser's new vision, however, they became something more significant and subtle: they became forms of material resistance to the Nazi meanings and potential agency of the architecture. That is, their very form made them into modes of neutralising Nazi agency. Calculated neglect was understood as blocking the two dangerous potential triggers. Glaser called this strategy *Trivialisierung* – trivialisation.

The parallels with the fate of the *Casa del Fascio* are clear: 'semi-disrepair' nicely characterizes its condition. Like the Nuremberg rally grounds, the more or less healthy condition of the *Casa del Fascio*'s exterior leaves it without the 'allure of the ruin', and indeed allows it to blend in perfectly well with the rest of Predappio's urban fabric; when it has been put to use, it has been to utterly banal purposes – a small manufacturing company and a bar; and its present emptiness makes it even less worthy of notice.

There are interesting contrasts between the two cases, however. The most significant of these contrasts is one that Macdonald points to in differentiating Glaser's strategy from previously 'unreflective' and 'pragmatic' usage. By making 'trivialization' into an explicit strategy, Glaser transformed 'pragmatism' into 'resistance'.

Predappiesi have not taken this step. If 'trivialization' in Nuremberg was a means to an end ('resistance'); the attitudes I am describing in Predappio are both means and ends. The point is not to disarm a specifically Fascist

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historicization, one that ends in the splendour of classical ruins, but to disarm any form of historicization whatsoever. The point is forgetting.

CONCLUSION

Writing of the afterlives of *Case del Fascio* throughout Italy, Lucy Maulsby (2014) highlights the way in which, while these buildings have often been only partially cleansed of their architectural associations with Fascism, many Italians are ignorant of their history and original purpose. Comparing the country with those who drank from the River Lethe in Greek mythology, she notes that such forgetfulness 'can be . . . understood as a collective inability to completely engage with the moral and ethical problems posed by Fascism' (ibid.: 32).

The comparison is interesting insofar as it foregrounds an ambiguity in this oft-made point about the ways in which Italy has come to terms (or rather failed to come to terms) with its Fascist past: those who drank from the River Lethe did so knowingly and deliberately, in search of the forgetfulness that preceded rebirth (death constituting an inability to forget). Whereas the remark that follows the comparison, quoted above, renders forgetfulness back into its more common, passive mode of 'inability', incapacity and absence.

In Predappio, I suggest, forgetfulness is very much of the active form. It has to be, in fact, for in truth such forgetfulness can only ever be aspirational; it is impossible to forget Fascism in Predappio, stamped as the town is by the legacy of its most famous son, and flooded by visitors to his tomb.

Yet the ways in which key urban spaces like the *Casa del Fascio* and the birth house have been treated should be read as efforts towards forgetting, particularly when seen in contrast to the appropriation of 'memory' by the town's neo-Fascist visitors ('those who cannot remember the past cannot govern the present' read one banner at a Fascist anniversary march I witnessed) and by the proprietors of the Villa Carpena.

This, I suggest, helps to explain the rather curious attitude most Predappiesi I knew held towards the museum project, which put their home at the centre of national and international controversy, and their mayor on the front page of the *Washington Post*, and promised them, as the former put it, relief from the *damnatio memoriae* into which they had been long cast: neither for it, nor against, most people I knew did not appear terribly interested in it at all. While politicians, journalists and celebrity academics debated the fate of their town on the basis of its past, Predappiesi were far more concerned by the prospect of changes to municipal recycling regulations. Finally, when a new, right-wing mayor was elected, and cancelled the project on the basis of

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(somewhat spurious) architectural concerns, there was neither great outcry, nor great applause. It simply faded away.

Amid the debates about the museum project in Predappio, Ruth Ben-Ghiat (who had served on the advisory board of the project) wrote a short piece in the *New Yorker* that sought to explain the continued existence of so many Fascist monuments in Italy, citing Predappio as an exemplar (Ben-Ghiat 2017). Like Maulsby, the conclusion she seemed to gesture at was a kind of collective failure of memory: 'One doubts that Fendi's employees fret about the Fascist origins of the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana as they arrive at work each morning, their stilettos tapping on floors made of travertine and marble, the regime's favoured materials. As Rosalia Vittorini, the head of Italy's chapter of the preservationist organisation DOCOMOMO, once said when asked about how Italians feel about living among relics of dictatorship: "why do you think they think anything at all about it?"' (ibid.).

Though I cannot speak to the thoughts (or footwear) of Fendi employees in Rome, I think that people in Predappio think a lot about the Fascist heritage of their built environment, because it is impossible to live there without doing so, confronted as one is by reminders of it at every turn. So while most will share Ben-Ghiat's concerns about the reanimation of the politics of Fascism through its material heritage if the links between heritage and politics are forgotten, it is perhaps a mistake to see this risk as always the result of a failure of memory, of incapacity. In Predappio, memory is predominantly for those who come wearing black shirts, and active forgetting is the work of distinguishing oneself from them.

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